



## Review Article

### SUKHPRASAVA (NORMAL LABOUR) IN ANCIENT LITERATURE: A REVIEW

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**KEYWORDS:** *Sukhprasava*, Normal Labour, Eugenics, *Turyanti*, *Vaghrimati*, *Viskali*, Wind ruffles.

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#### ABSTRACT

Ayurveda value lies in the fact that it is not a medical science dealing solely with treatment of disease. Instead, it offers practical guidelines that apply to every facet of daily existence. It also seeks to reconcile health and lifestyle with universal aspects of existence, and to enhance wellbeing. Earliest available evidence and concept of maternal and child care are present in *Rigveda*, *Yajurveda*, *Atharvaveda*, *Upnishada* and *Samhita*. Historical review focused on examining research throughout a period of time, often starting with the first time an issue, concept, theory, phenomena emerged in the literature. Details about mechanism and management of labor are described elaborately. To get relieved from difficulties of labor, certain oblations and enchanting of *Mantra* are advised. Vivid description of *Sukhprasava* chronologically presented in this article.

#### INTRODUCTION

In a woman's life, motherhood is a crowning act. Every woman tries to enter in this new world of mother with minimum pain, operative aids and complications. As child bearing and delivery are physiological phenomenon and any abnormality in courses of labour can affect women health not only for that time being but also through her life. That's why *Acharya* have given specific importance to the *Garbhini* and compared her with the pot filled with oil, as slightest oscillation of such pot causes spilling of oil, similarly slightest excitement to the pregnant women can initiate pathological state<sup>[1]</sup>. *Acharya Kashyapa* also stated that during *Prasava avastha*, "Her one foot is in the house of 'Yama' (the god of death) and other on this side<sup>[2]</sup> (i.e., she can die at any moment). Ensuring healthy and safe motherhood with foremost care to every pregnant woman is the outright responsibility of an obstetrician. So, to provide proper attention during pregnancy and delivery the concept of ante natal care as *Garbhini paricharya* is very explicitly described in ancient literatures which promote easy parturition and healthy progeny. That's why for good health of mother and baby, *Sukhprasava* is important. The word *Sukhprasava* means bringing (or having brought) forth easily or happily.

#### AIM AND OBJECTIVES

To study the *Sukhprasava* (normal labour) in ancient literature.

#### METHODOLOGY

Literary references collected from Ayurveda i.e. classics, commentaries, modern literatures, research journals available in institute library, online portals like PubMed central, Ayush Research Portal, and Google Scholar and analyzed to frame conceptual work.

#### *Sukhprasava* in Ancient Literature

Milestones of Ayurveda are:

1. *Vedic kala - Prarambhika kala.*
2. *Samhita kala - From 1500 B.C. to 600 A.D.*
3. *Madhya kala - From 600 A.D. to 1500 A.D.*
4. *Aadhunika kala - I - From 1500 A.D. to 1835 A.D.*  
II - From 1835 A.D. to till now.

#### Vedic Period

Among the four *Veda*, in *Rigveda* and *Yajurveda*, scattered reference are available. There are references about the anatomy, physiology of genital organs, conception and delivery. In *Atharvaveda*, concepts described about the conception, fetal development and mechanism of labor as well as management of parturition.

**Rigveda<sup>[3]</sup>****Antenatal Care**

Details about formation of *Garbha* in the maternal womb is described and said that, invoking of *Vishnu*, *Prajapati*, *Sinivali*, *Sarasvati* and *Ashvini* deities help in the formation and maintenance of *Garbha* (embryo). Gestational age is considered as ninth month and tenth month is considered as the month of delivery.

**Mechanism of Labor**

An invocation to induce contractions in uterus during the time of delivery is described to facilitate normal labor and similarity is given that, 'as wind ruffles in the pool of lotus on every side', in the similar fashion uterus also get stimulated and the fetus will come down during tenth month. Similar to the agitation in the wind, garden, ocean, uterus also get agitate to descend the ten months gestation covered by *Jarayu* (fetal membranes), to deliver the fetus. Explanation is given about the child's passage from womb to outside and said that, the child who has reposed for ten months in the bosom of his mother, come forth, alive unharmed as a living form of a living parent<sup>[4]</sup>. According to *Rigveda*, *Sukhprasava* of *Vaghrimati* has done by *Ashwini kumara*<sup>[5]</sup>.

**Yajur veda<sup>[6]</sup>****Concept of Fetal Development**

The seat of fetus is described as *Upastha* (uterus) in the mother. The layer which covers *Garbha* is named as *Jarayu*, it is said that goddess *Jala* should be prayed to nourish the fetus in best way. Nutrition for the achievement of high quality progeny is suggested. It is described that *Nabhi* is supplying nourishment to the fetus. *Nabhi* is considered as *Posaka* and *Pranadharaka* to the fetus. Fetal nourishment occurs through the *Nabhi* from mother to fetus.

**Atharvaveda<sup>[7]</sup>****Conception**

Female is considered as field for conception (in whom *Garbha* formation takes place). Fallopian tubes are named as *Gavini* and *Yoni* word is used to denote reproductive tract. During the mating of couple *Sukra* which is situated in the whole body gets activated and comes into the *Yoni* of female through male urinary organ. This act causes the formation of *Garbha*. *Yoni* is considered as the seat of *Garbha*.

**Maternal Medication**

*Garbha* protective drugs are advised to use by the pregnant woman.

**Embryology**

*Garbha* said as the result of copulation of female and male. *Garbha* is covered by *Jarayu* and *Ulba* inside the *Yoni*. Importance of eugenics also noted and said that maternal nutrition and health of woman is important to get a high quality offspring.

**Fetal Nutrition**

The forces of four regions of sky and earth are said as helpful in the development of the fetus. *Ulba* and *Jarayu* are two fetal layers described of which *Ulba* was considered as protective layer and *Jarayu* to give shiny appearance to the fetus. *Mantra* and oblations are also advised to enchant for the protection and maintenance of fetus. It is also said that *Mitra*, *Varuna*, *Brhaspati*, *Indra*, *Agni* etc will help in the development of the child fully.

**Delivery**

Ten months of time is said as period of gestation. Details about mechanism and management of labor are described elaborately. To get relieved from difficulties of labor, certain oblations and enchanting of *Mantra* are advised.

**Time of Onset of Labor**

Tenth month of gestation is said as the period for delivery.

**Cause of Onset of Labor**

*Vata* is identified as important factor in the process of labor. It is described that, the god *Vasat*, who is the creator of the universe, helps in the delivery of the child and who knows the laws of eugenics and keep loose the joints and organs of delivery in female. The forces of nature residing in four regions of sky and earth helps the child to get relieve from the bonds of the coverings of the womb. It is stated that the parturient woman suffer with pain abdomen during parturition.

**Counselling of the Mother**

It is advised to the experienced women who are attending the labor to give following instructions to the parturient woman; (1) To keep her organs loose and soft (organs participating in delivery) (2) To remain brave, happy and patient.

**Mechanism of Labor**

It is said that in the process of delivery. *Garbha* is being made *Avanmukha* by *Viskali* or *Prasuti Maruta*. In the process of expulsion and descent of fetus, relaxation of pelvic joints, propelling forces necessity is identified. To hasten the process of labor, artificial rupture of *Jarayu*, dilatation of *Yoni* etc. is advised. Experienced women who are attending the labor suggested dilating the *Yoni* (vaginal canal). Midwife woman, during parturition, is advised to do dilatation or expansion of *Yoni* and *Gavinike* in order to assist in the process of labor.

First separation of fetus from mother and separation of placenta is advised.

### Placental Attachment

It is described that placenta is attached superficially and not attached to *Mamsa* (flesh), *Pibasi* (fat), and *Majja* (marrow). Texture of the placenta is said as soft. Expulsion of *Jarayu*, after the delivery of fetus is said as desirable and normal.

### Upanishada

The *Upanishada* are continuation of vedic philosophy and dealt with many branches of science, which includes embryology also. These constitute the core teachings of *Vedanta*. In these scriptures, especially in *Garbhopanishada*, *Brhadopanishada*, *Chandogyopanishada* detailed description about the formation of embryo, development of fetus etc. has been mentioned.

### Garbhopanishada<sup>[8]</sup>

During eighth month all organs are formed completely, in conjunction with the *Pancha vata* the *Jiva* gets the capacity to know its past affairs (of past births), conceives the imperishable *Atma* as *Om*, through perfect knowledge and meditation. The body becomes complete and fatty in the ninth month and remembers the past birth.

### Grhyasutra

The *Grhyasutra* or domestic rules are a category of Sanskrit texts prescribing *Veda* rituals mainly in relation to the rites of passage, such as marriage, birth, name giving, etc., connected with simple offerings into the domestic fire<sup>[9]</sup>.

### Gobila Grhyasutra<sup>[10]</sup>

### Prasava Paricharya

In this *Grhyasutra*, sacrifices advised to perform for the woman who is in labor are described. When the child is appearing at the outlet of vagina it is advised to put *Darbha* grass round the fire and offer sacrifices with two *Agya* oblations.

### Apasthamba Grhyasutra<sup>[11]</sup>

### Management for Quick Delivery

To conduct a quick delivery, husband, with a shallow cup that has not been used before, draw the water in the direction of the river's current; and at his wife's feet he has to lay down a *Turyanti* plant; then touch his wife, who is soon to be delivered, and sprinkle her with the water, with the three verses prescribed for this procedure i.e., *Yadi jarayu na pated evamvihitabhir evadbhir uttaradbhyam avokset*.

### Purana Kala

In all the *Purana*, *Vayu* is regarded as *Bhagvana* and is glorified. In *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, *Vayu* was given the highest position of immense power and movement and because of this it

was called *Deva*, *Bhagvana*. In *Mahabharata*, *Vayu* has been dealt with more details. 5 types of *Vata* are mentioned. In *Vishnu Purana*, very beautiful lines of childbirth are described. Predominantly *Prasuti vata* is responsible for the expulsion of the fetus.

### Samhita Kala

Ayurveda, the extract of all the *Veda* dreams about *Shreyasi Praja*. It dreams about *Kala-prasava* (full term delivery) and *Sukhprasava* (easy delivery).

### Charaka samhita

*Acharya Charaka* mentioned *Sukhprasava* in *Shareera sthana* eighth *Adhyaaya*<sup>[12]</sup>. During the onset of normal labor due to *Prasuti maruta* the fetal head turns and comes forward before being expelled through *Apatya patha*, termed as *Prakrita prasava*.

### Medication

In *Navama masa garbhini paricharya*, *Acharya Charaka* advised the use of *Anuvasana basti* with oil prepared with the drugs of *Madhura* group and *Yoni Pichu* of the same oil should be given for lubrication of *Garbhasthana* and *Garbhamarga*.

### Sutikagara (Accouchment ward)

During the *Samhita* times for every expectant women new house use to be constructed according to their social status, for conduction of labour, pre-labour waiting and post-delivery management. In all the *Samhita* there is description of constructing a *Sutikagara* for *Prasava* (conducting labor) and it is quite probable that each house was built and dismantled later, thus building a new *Sutikagara* every time. *Acharya Charaka* mentions that before *Prasava kala* (i.e. before 9th month) a *Sutikagara* is built. *Acharya* mentioned the list of articles to be stored in the ward, among them *Taila* is also mentioned as *Sangrahaniya dravya*. *Taila* is excellent *Vatahara dravya*, used in various obstetric emergencies where *Vata* has obstructed/delayed the progress of labor.

### Samanya Prasava Kala

From the first day of ninth month up to tenth month is *Samanya Prasava Kala* (normal period of labor); intrauterine stay of fetus beyond this limit is abnormality.

### Instruments for Prasava

*Suchi*, *Teekshna shastra* and *Kshaumasutra* are also advised to be kept in *Sutikagara*. *Shastra* i.e., *Ardhadhara shastra* made up of gold, silver or other metals should be kept for cutting the umbilical cord. *Kshaumasutra* is used to ligate the umbilical cord. *Suchi* (needles) might be for the surgical intervention and suturing the skin.



**Sushruta Samhita**

Acharya Sushruta mentioned *Sukhprasava* in *Shareera sthana* tenth *Adhyaaya*, from the first day of ninth month up to twelfth month is *Samaya prasava Kala*, stay of fetus beyond this limit is an abnormality caused by vitiated *Vayu*.

**Medication**

In eighth month of *Garbhini paricharya*<sup>[13]</sup>, the use of *Anuvasana basti* of oil medicated with milk and decoction of *Madhura* group of drugs. These causes movement of *Vayu* in its right direction and the lady delivers without difficulty and remains free from complications.

**Prasava Paricharya**

For providing nutrition, Acharya Sushruta mentioned to drink hot *Yavagu*.

**Astanga sangraha**

Acharya Vagbhata I mentioned *Sukhprasava* in *Shareera sthana* second *Adhyaaya*. Acharya advised use of *Anuvasana basti* in *Shareera sthana* third *Adhyaaya* that in eighth and ninth month with oil prepared with the drugs of *Madhura* group. The *Anuvasana basti* should be given to the woman in bent/ hump-backed/knee-elbow position because in this position the passage becomes dilated and the medicine enters properly. *Yoni pichu* of same oil should be given for lubrication of *Garbha marga* and *Garbhashaya*<sup>[14]</sup>.

**Astanga Hridya**

Acharya Vagbhata II mentioned *Sukhprasava* in *Shareera sthana* first *Adhyaaya*. Acharya advised the use of liquid diet prepared with *Ghrta*, milk and *Anuvasana basti* prepared with *Ghrta* and drugs of *Madhura* group for cleaning the collected feces. In the ninth month, *Anuvasana basti* and *Yoni pichu* of same oil should be given. The women having absence of unctuousness in the body, *Anuvasana basti* should not be given for whole ninth month or in other words unctuous *Anuvasana basti* should be given only after use of fat<sup>[15]</sup>.

**Kashyapa Samhita**

Acharya Kashyapa mentioned in *Shareera sthana* first, second and fifth *Adhyaaya*, the *Prasava Kala*, its *Awastha*, *Lakshana* and description of *Aavi*<sup>[16]</sup>.

**Harita Samhita**

Acharya Harita mentioned *Garbhini Paricharya* and cause of onset of labour<sup>[17]</sup>.

**Bhela Samhita**

Acharya Bhela mentioned *Sukhprasava* in *Shareera sthana* eighth *Adhyaaya*. Acharya says that *Anuvasana Basti* with *Kadambamasa* oil should be given, by use of these the accumulated feces goes in

the lower passage, thus delivery of child becomes normal.

**Sangraha Kala/ Madhya Kala Chakradutta**

Acharya Chakrapani clarifies that ninth and tenth month is the best period for the normal labor, since eleventh and twelfth month onwards the abnormalities are less they can also be considered within normal limits for normal labor.

**Medication**

*Sukhprasavakara yoga* and *Aparapatanartha lepa*<sup>[18]</sup>.

**Vrinda Madhava**

In this text *Sukhaprasavartha chikitsa* given by *Vrinda*.

**Adhunika Kala****Bhavaprakash and Yogaratnakara**

In this text, many types of *Yoga* and *Mantra* are mentioned for *Sukhprasava*. Methods that bring easy delivery: Anointment of pestle root of *Potaki* with oil of *Tila* inside the vaginal canal brings easy delivery, Root of *Hiranyapushpi* should be tied over arms or legs or else *Suvarchala* or *Vishalya* should be used, Roots of *Ikshu* or *Tala* grown on northern side knotted in a thread measuring to the length of the women should be tied in waist, Root of *Pratayakpushpa*, *Paribhadra* or *Kakajangha* should be tied in waist, Anointment of *Krshna* and *Vacha* pestle with water and mixed with castor oil over umbilicus, Use of powdered roots of *Matulunga* and *Madhuyasti* (in equal quantity) mixed with *Ghrta* completes the delivery very comfortably.

**Bhaishajya Ratnavali**

In *Garbhini roga chikitsa prakarana*, description of *Vilambita prasava* and its treatment is mentioned.

**CONCLUSION**

Comprehensive description about the maternal nutrition and nourishment of fetus and formation of fetus and its development for about nine months, descent of *Atma* into fetus (*Garbhavakranti*) etc are also described in ancient scriptures. Care of intra-partum, time of onset of labour, mechanism of labour etc are also described. As the incidence of operative/invasive deliveries are increasing, due to high prevalence of labour abnormalities. Diet, behaviour and environment of the mother directly affect the health of mother and child. That's why for wellbeing of mother and child, *Sukhprasava* is the need of time in this present scenario. For *Sukhprasava*/normal labour, proper functioning of *Apana vayu* is highly essential. By adopting protocols that are mentioned in ancient literatures helps in normal functioning of *Vata* to ensure *Sukhprasava*.

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**Cite this article as:**

Priyanka Hajare, K. Bharathi. Sukhprasava (Normal Labour) In Ancient Literature: A Review. AYUSHDHARA, 2020;8(2):3204-3208.

**Source of support: Nil, Conflict of interest: None Declared**

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