

## An Exposition of the Concept of Abortion in Ancient India

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### Abstract-

*With the advancement of civilization, abortion rates increased. This technique has its origins in our long-standing Indian customs. Miscarriage was a morally unpleasant practice in ancient India. This behavior is heavily condemned in the Vedic and Upanishadic literature, particularly in the Atharva Veda, Satapatha Brahmana, Kausitiki, and Mahanarayan Upanishads. It's one of the ten Aparadises (crimes), according to Narada. Abortion is vehemently denounced by Manu, Vishnu, Apastamba, Yajnavalkya, Kautilya, Gautam, and Vaisnhala. Additionally, they stipulate that a bhrunahan (foetus killer) shall endure severe penance till their death. Even if the Susurata Samhita and the Mahabharata contain few instances of abortion methods that are approved by religion, he should be shunned by both society and his own family. That practice was endorsed by some dictums. However, the majority of evidence unequivocally demonstrates that, from man's age to middle age, the practice of abortion was morally and socially repugnant. With special reference to the contents of ancient Indian literature, the document aims to investigate the practice of abortion and its suppression.*

### Main Discussion

Abortion spread throughout India as civilization advanced. Despite all ethical and legal limitations, it is expanding quickly. Unmarried girls are more likely than married

women to have an abortion. Abortions are performed by married women in order to avoid the unbearable consequences of pregnancy. However, single girls get abortions in order to conceal their extramarital affairs and avoid social and familial shame and punishment.

The practice of miscarriage was morally and socially abhorrent to ancient Hindus. Hindu culture and scripture from antiquity denounced the practice of miscarriage. Only in situations where the mother's life is in jeopardy is it sensible. According to Hinduism, a fetus is a living being. It has to be treasured and safeguarded since it has a conscious mind. Because it obstructs the way to salvation, abortion is like pinching it in the bud. By inflicting premature death, it transgresses the religious and moral order of society. The embryo is an extension of the mother's autonomous spirit as much as her body. Mother is merely the conduit. According to the *Mahabharata*, a man is born as an embryo when he penetrates a woman.

Abortion is prohibited in Vedic literature. According to Vedic elders, individuals should live as long as possible and avoid the dangers of dying young. *Rig-Veda* begs for the fetus to be protected. *Vishnu* is portrayed in the *Rig Veda* as the unborn child's protector (*Veda*, VII-36.9 and X-184.1). The *Rig-Veda* mentions different stages of pregnancy, including *Garbhadana* (for blessing), *Garbhalambhana* (for direction from the gods), *Pumsavana* (for the end of the first trimester), and *Garbharakshana* (for delivery). It also specifies some rituals for the unborn. These customs all show how the embryo or fetus needs special attention and protection.<sup>1</sup>

Abortion is prohibited by the *Black Yajurveda*. That is mentioned there. “a slayer of an embryo is like the slayer of a priest.” (*Krishna Yajurveda*-6.5.10). According to the *Atharvaveda*, abortion is a horrible crime. On a pyramid of evil, abortion is at the summit. Two *Pushan* hymns are called upon to wipe off “the misdeed upon him that practiseth abortion.”<sup>2</sup> Abortion is fiercely condemned as a crime in the *Satapatha Brahmana*. The reputations of beef eaters and abortionists are contrasted in the text. “---- such as he has expelled an embryo from women, he has committed a sin; let him therefore not eat (the flesh) of the cow and the ox.”<sup>3</sup> It is also warned that “..... he who kills a human embryo, is despised how much more than who kills him (*Agni*), for he is a god: ‘let no one become an officiating priest for an (*Agni*) who has not been carried about for a year’, said *Vatsya*, lest he should be participator in the killing of this, a god’s seed.”<sup>4</sup>

Abortion is seen as a grave and dreadful evil in the Upanishads. According to the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, a person who kills an embryo or causes an abortion is considered a noble Brahmin (*Varthha-Brahma-Hanta*).<sup>5</sup> According to *Kausitaki's Upanishad*, abortion is equivalent to killing your parents. It asserts that understanding *Indra* is the greatest benefit to humanity. *Indra* says that, “he who understands me – by no need whatsoever of his is his world injured, not by stealing, not by killing an embryo, not by the murder of his mother, not by the murder of his father ; if he has done any evil, the dark colour departs from his face.”<sup>6</sup> The *Taittreya Upanishad* condemns the practice of abortion. The text states: “do not cut the thread of progeny.” (*Taittreya Upanishad* -1-XI-2). Another passage of the same text declares that “The mother is the first letter. The father is the last letter. The progeny is the focal point. Procreation is the link.” (*Taittreya Upanishad* -1-III-2-4). The *Garbha Upanishads* assert that a fetus is a sentient being with

conscious knowledge and memory, not merely a piece of meat. In utero, the fetus experiences *garbhadukha* (abnormality), is caught in the cycle of karma and rebirth, and remembers all past lives and reincarnations.<sup>7</sup> The *Mahabharata* also mentions fetus consciousness. While *Arjuna* shares his life's secret, his unborn son learns various martial arts secrets.

Abortion is likewise condemned by the *Dharmasastras*. Abortion is one of the ten *aparadises* (crimes) according to *Narada*. Because it was illegal, they referred to it as paradise. This technique has been denounced by *Vishnu* and *Manu*. The *Vishnu Dharmasastra* states that the greatest crime in Hinduism is the murder of a fetus or its mother (e.g. killing the *brahmana*).<sup>8</sup> *Manu* in his code prohibits abortion and condemns “as the most condemnable crime and sin.” (*Manu Samhita*- 11.88). He vehemently condemns those “weman who have joined a heretical sect, who through lust live (with many man), who have caused an abortion, have killed their husband or drink spirituous liquor.” (*Manu Samhita*- 5.89-90). It says that in his wife's womb, the husband gives birth as a fetus. *Jaya* is the woman's name as a result.<sup>9</sup> For women who have been shown to be sexually mature or who have destroyed their fetus, *Vridha-Harita* advises death by burning the womb (*kotagni*).<sup>10</sup> According to *Yajnavalkya*, a woman who has committed an abortion should not be permitted to get pregnant again in her lifetime.<sup>11</sup> *Yajnavalkya* claims that foeticide is equivalent to killing your spouse. Additionally, he is in favor of punishing those who destroy a servant's embryo. *Gautama Dharmasastra* also holds that having an abortion makes a woman non-caste (*Gautama Dharmasastra*, 21.9). Murder, abortion, and having sex with a woman one is married to or related to by birth. (*Pransa -1, Patala -7, Khanda -21.7-8, Apastamba Dharmasastra*)

The *Parasara Samhita* opposes abortion. According to others, "the sin committed by killing a *brahmana* is twice greater than the sin accrued by an abortion." This sin cannot be atoned for. (*Parasara Samhita* 4.20). *Bhrunahan*, the destroyer of fetuses, is ranked by *Vasistha* as the murderer of erudite *brahmins*.<sup>12</sup> Embryo individuality is the result of this contrast. *Atri Samhita*(1.319). According to *Dharmma-sindhu* (*Uttardha*, III,453-454), *Nirnay-Sindhu* (*Uttardha*, III,567-568), such a *bhrunahan* (abomination) must endure severe penance until death and be shunned by both his family and community. *Kautilya* is in favor of the death penalty for individuals who use violence or beat women to induce abortions. (*Arthasastra*, XI-277) According to *Kautilya*, the highest, lowest, and first forms of coercion are applied if someone induces an abortion while pregnant by striking, using a medication, or harassing.

According to the Hindu medical literature *Caraka Samhita*, killing an embryo would involve more than just removing its appendix because it has both *prakiti* (the body, the five *mahabhutas*) and *atman* (the spirit or consciousness) at conception. The text proves that “the combination of sperm, ovum and life-principle implanted in the womb is known as embryo. Embryo is the product of ether, air, fire, water, earth, and being the seat of consciousness. The union between spirit (i.e. the seat of consciousness) and biological body happens on the moment of conception and the embryo is from his very beginning moment an embodied soul.”<sup>13</sup> Therefore, from the time of conception, the principle of

consciousness is active in a fertilized egg, directing its development.<sup>14</sup> At no point should the development of an embryo be stopped.

Abortion is morally unacceptable in the *Puranic* age. Such behaviors are highly condemned by the *Garuda Purana*. According to the text, women who do not repent incur grave faults such as willful abortion and hatred of their husbands (*Garuda Purana*-1.105.48). According to the *Vishnu Purana*, a person will enter the *Rodha* (or the stalemate) if they cause an abortion, steal from the city, kill a cow, or strangle a human. (*Vishnu Purana*, 2.6). According to the *Bhagavata Purana*, abortion is a bad deed. According to the *Bhagavata Purana* (3.31.1), a living being (the soul) is produced to enter the female womb by a bit of male sperm and take on a specific shape under the control of the Supreme Lord and the result of his work. According to the *Padma Purana*, a mother who murders another person's child at birth would undoubtedly be infertile or childless in this life. (*Purana Padma*, 5.10). Once more, it was declared that any woman who had an abortion at birth or any male who had suggested an abortion because he had killed a kid would undoubtedly give birth to a dead child in this life. (*Purana Padma*, 5.18)

According to the Mahabharata, miscarriage is a grave offense. The *Mahabharata* claims that abortion is a serious evil, on par with killing an enemy envoy. He compares abortion to the assassination of a *brahmana*. In the Mahabharata, abortion is often used as an example of grave impropriety to emphasize the gravity of other transgressions.<sup>15</sup> *Anusasana Parva* highlights the issue of fetal homicide by saying that no man is more immoral than one whose children yearn for food but are unable to eat it. (*Anusasana Parva*, Ch-LXI ). According to *Santi Parva*, a person who murders a fetus would be purged if he passes away from injuries received while protecting the *Brahmin* and the kine. Throwing his own body into a raging fire is another way to get rid of him. (*Santi Parva*, CH-CLXV)

Ahimsa, or non-violence, teaches that harming living things—including embryos—is immoral. Because they believe that all life is valuable and deserving of respect and affection, Hindus prohibit abortion. The greatest nonviolent leader of India, Gandhi, said, “it seems to me clear day-light that abortion would be crime.” (*Harijan*-23.11.1932)

According to traditional Hinduism, terminating a pregnancy when the mother's life is in jeopardy is morally permissible. According to the Hindu medical literature *Sushruta Samhita*, abortion is recommended and deemed acceptable if the fetus is known to be deformed or irreversibly injured, if there is a possibility that the fetus will die, or if the mother has no hope of giving birth normally.<sup>16</sup> It appears that Hinduism only permits abortion when a mother's life is in danger. According to *Anusasana* and *Santi Parva* in the *Mahabharata*, washing in a *tirtha*, or sacred site, washes away the sin of causing abortion. (*Santi Parva*, Chapter 152, verse 12 and *Ananasana Parva*, Chapter 25, verse 60). It is not advised in nominal situations, though.

Abortion is considered a moral and social offense in Hinduism. Every Hindu worldview opposes abortion. It was stated that the fetus should be protected at all costs. The murdering of unborn children is forbidden in Hindu faith. Abortion is morally unacceptable since it is forbidden to destroy embryos. Additionally, Hindu culture is incompatible with

abortion. Hinduism holds that the unborn are sacred because they are divine beings. He is regarded as a spiritual entity. Therefore, the Hindu perspective upholds the notion that the fetus is a gift from God and should be respected and protected. A fetus is a biological organism. Hinduism holds that since life begins at conception, abortion is murder and a fetus has rights. The fetus is a bio-psycho-cosmic, socio-religious, moral, and spiritual being in Hinduism. Furthermore, a fetus cannot be claimed by a mother. Hindus view life as precious, hence abortion is forbidden. According to Hindu literature, abortion at any point during pregnancy is a morally repugnant and socio-religious behavior that compromises the unborn's personal integrity. Abortion rates will undoubtedly decline under this form of Hinduism. Since abortion is against Hinduism's moral code and divine law, it might be seen as *adharma*.

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