

VEDIC LITERATURE OF INDIA

Sanghamitra Kar
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VEDIC LITERATURE

Vedic Literature Search

Several ancient texts, including that of yoga and Ayurveda, the two ancient medical sciences of India, have given detailed descriptions of the anatomical, physiological and spiritual aspects of pregnancy and fetal development. According to their views, the prescriptions for healthy progression of pregnancy and fetal development are based on the introspective understanding of the sages during deep meditation. This chapter on Vedic literature search has three sections: the first section covers the description of embryology found in *bhāgavata purāṇa*, a Vedic text. The second section, will describe the pregnancy related traditional rituals called *samskāra* that were practiced in the ancient Indian society as described in different Vedic texts. The third section, will give a basic overview on the conceptual basis for the integrated yoga therapy for high risk pregnancy as portrayed in the *vedās* and used in this study.

Ancient Literature on Fetal Development

Yoga believes that every aspect of life is sacred. That is why each significant stage, from conception to cremation, is celebrated as a reminder that life is a gift from God, which should be duly respected and lived with full awareness as a grace from the divine and offerings to the divine. The marriage is particularly sacred in the Indian tradition and is highly revered by the Vedic literature. From the social point of view, a baby is the product of that sacred union; and therefore, considered a divine gift. It is not then surprising that there are numerous rituals centered around marriage and pregnancy in the Indian traditions. Yet from the Vedic vantage point, a baby in the womb symbolizes the human bondage in the material world and birth is the beginning of a life long suffering unless self-realization has been achieved. In this chapter, we will study the different aspects of pregnancy stated in the Vedic literature.

Also known as *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* or *Bhāgavata*, it is one of the major *Purāṇika* texts covering mainly the life of *Lord Kṛṣṇa*.⁵⁹ Its actual date of origin is unclear but many experts speculate that it was written around the ninth or tenth century CE.⁶⁰ The text contains about twelve cantos (books),⁶¹ out of which the first few chapters of the third book are relevant to this study, which are reviewed in details. This book could be considered as a great Vedic source for embryology.

The translation for each chapter has been borrowed from vedabase.net (<http://vedabase.net/sb/en3>). The transliteration has been used to generate the Sanskrit text using webdunia transliteration software (<http://utilities.webdunia.com/hindi/transliteration.html>). The discussion is the interpretations and personal opinions of the author from the translation. When appropriate, graphs have been borrowed giving credit to the source at the footnote of each graph. Each chapter is identified by the abbreviation SB (for *śrīmad bhāgavatam*) followed by the canto number, the chapter number and the verse number. The verses discussed here are instructions on the movements of living entities by sage *kapila*, son of *deevahuti*, who is widely credited as being one of the founders of the *sāṅkhya* school of philosophy.

ŚRĪMAD BHĀGAVATAM

CANTO 3 CHAPTER 31 VERSE 1

श्रीभगवानुवाच
कर्मणा दैवनेत्रेण जन्तुर्देहोपपत्तये ।
स्त्रियाः प्रविष्ट उदरं पुंसो रेतःकणाश्रयः ॥

Śrībhagavānuvāca
Karmaṇā daivanetreṇa janturdehopapattaye ।
Striyāḥ praviṣṭa udaram puṁso retaḥkaṇāśrayaḥ ॥

Sri-bhagavān uvāca {the Supreme Personality of Godhead said;} karmaṇā {by the result of work;} deva-netreṇa {under the supervision of the Lord;} jantuḥ {the living entity} dehaḥ {a body;} upapattaye {for obtaining} striyāḥ {of a woman;} praviṣṭaḥ {enters} udaram {the womb;} puṁsaḥ {of a man;} retaḥ {of semen;} kaṇa {a particle;} āśrayaḥ {dwelling in}.

TRANSLATION: The Personality of Godhead said: Under the supervision of the Supreme Lord and according to the result of his work, the living entity, the soul is made to enter into the womb of a woman through the particle of male semen to assume a particular type of body.

DISCUSSION: The concept of fertilization in Vedas is elaborated here. Similar to the science's view, the spermatozoon joins the oocyte in the uterine tube to form a zygote.

However, the passage also suggest that the soul is transferred to the fetus 1) at the time of conception and 2) through the male semen. So, it appears that this tradition believed that the father is the medium in giving the soul to the child. Yet it is the karmic forces of the individual (the result of his actions), that compels the soul to take a particular body form.

CANTO 3 CHAPTER 31 VERSE 2

कललं त्वेकरात्रेण पञ्चरात्रेण बुद्बुदम् ।
दशाहेन तु कर्कन्धूः पेश्यण्डं वा ततः परम् ॥

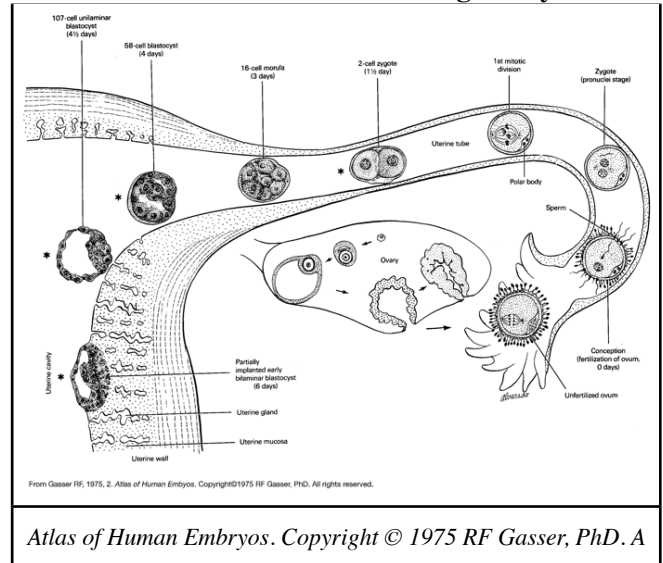
*Kalalam tvekarātreṇa pañcarātreṇa budbudam |
Daśāhena tu karkandhūḥ peśyaṇḍam vā tataḥ param ||*

Kalalam {mixing of the sperm and ovum;} tu {then;} eka-rātreṇa {on the first night;} pañcarātreṇa {by the fifth night;} budbudam {bubble;} daśāhena {ten days;} tu {then;} karkandhūḥ {like a plum;} peśy {lump of flesh;} aṇḍam {egg;} vā {or;} tataḥ {thence;} param {afterwards}.

TRANSLATION: On the first night, the sperm and ovum mix, and on the fifth night the mixture ferments into a bubble. On the tenth night, it develops into a form like a plum, and after that, it gradually turns into a lump of flesh or an egg, as the case may be.

DISCUSSION: Now an unprecedented description of mitosis is followed. The zygote becomes a morula (of 12 to 16 cells) after five nights, and then develops into a blastocyst with a fluid-filled center (just like a bubble) in ten days.⁶² The accuracy of this development is uncanny and clearly shows the ability of the seers to visualize the process through meditation since there were no other means at that time. A graphic illustration of the human embryo development in the first week points out this accuracy even better (see figure 1).

Figure1: The Human Embryo Development in the First Week of Pregnancy



मासेन तु शिरो द्वाभ्यां बाह्वङ्घ्रयाद्यङ्गविग्रहः ।
नखलोमास्थिचर्माणि लिङ्गच्छिद्रोद्भवस्त्रिभिः ॥

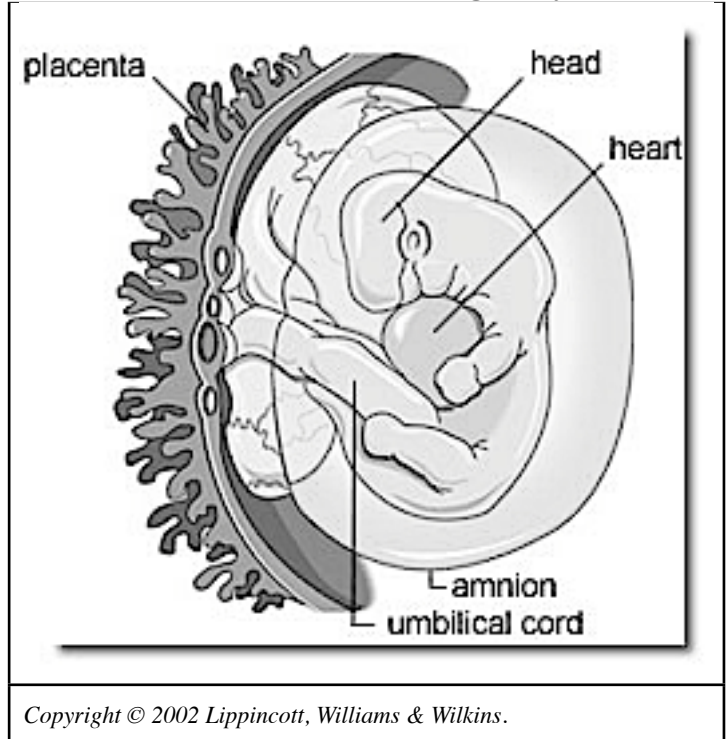
*Māsenā tu śiro dvābhyāṁ bāhvaṅghryādyāṅgavigrahaḥ |
Nakhalomāsthicarmāṇi liṅgacchidrodभवस्त्रिभिः |*

Māsenā {within a month;} tu {then;} śiro {head;} dvābhyāṁ {two months;} bāhu {arms;} aṅghri {feet;} ādi {and so on;} aṅga {limbs;} vigrahaḥ {form;} nakha {nails;} loma {body hair;} asthi {bones;} carmaṇi {and skin;} liṅga {organ of generation;} chidra {apertures;} udbhavaḥ {appearance;} tribhiḥ {within three months}.

TRANSLATION: In the course of a month, a head is formed; at the end of two months the hands, feet and other organs take shape. By the end of three months, the nails, fingers, toes, body hair, bones and skin appear, as do the organ of generation and the other apertures in the body, namely the eyes, nostrils, ears, mouth and anus.

DISCUSSION: The process of organ development is depicted in this passage, again with an amazing accuracy. Indeed, the formation of brain starts at the very early stages of embryo development. Between the 4th and 5th weeks of pregnancy, the head has developed to a much larger size compared to the rest of the body (see figure .2), giving the embryo the look of a tadpole.⁶² Notice that in the fifth week, the limbs are also formed.

Figure2: The Human Embryo Development in the Fifth Week of Pregnancy



चतुर्भिर्घातवः सप्त पञ्चभिः क्षुत्तृडुद्भवः ।
षड्भिर्जरायुणा वीतः कुक्षौ भ्राम्यति दक्षिणे ॥

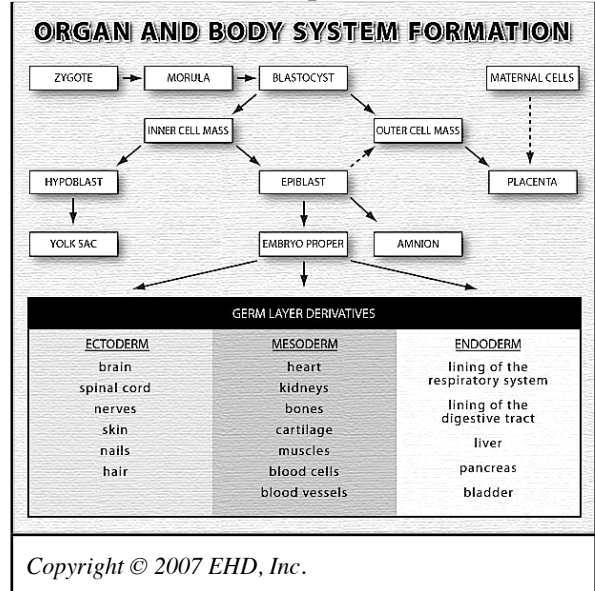
*Caturbhir dhātavaḥ sapta pañcabhiḥ kṣuttr̥ḍubhavaḥ |
Ṣaḍbhir jarāyuṇā vītaḥ kukṣau bhrāmyati dakṣiṇe ||*

Caturbhiḥ {within four months;} dhātavaḥ {ingredients;} sapta {seven;} pañcabhiḥ {within five months;} kshut-trit {of hunger and thirst;} udbhavaḥ {appearance;} ṣaḍbhi {within six months;} jarāyuṇā {by the amnion;} vītaḥ {enclosed;} kukṣau {in the abdomen;} bhrāmyati {moves;} dakṣiṇe {on the right side}.

TRANSLATION: Within four months from the date of conception, the seven essential ingredients of the body, namely chyle, blood, flesh, fat, bone, marrow and semen, come into existence. At the end of five months, hunger and thirst make themselves felt, and at the end of six months, the fetus, enclosed by the amnion, begins to move on the right side of the abdomen.

DISCUSSION: By the end of the first trimester, most body organs are partially developed through three layers of ectoderm, mesoderm, and endoderm (see figure 2.3). The circulation system is the first to function by the end of the third week.⁶² By the end of five month, the structure of the fetal gastrointestinal tract has developed to approximate that of the newborn and excessive fetal swallowing may lead to loss of amniotic fluid. By the end of six months, the fetus performs somersaults through a series of step-like leg motions similar to walking.⁶³

Figure- The Early Human Embryo Development



मातुर्जग्धान्नपानाद्यैरेधद्धातुरसम्मते ।
शेते विण्मूत्रयोगर्ते स जन्तुर्जन्तुसम्भवे ॥

*Māturjagdhānnapānādyairedhaddhāturasammate |
Śete viṇamutrāyorgarte sa janturjantusambhave ||*

Mātuḥ {of the mother;} jagdha {taken;} anna-pāna {by the food and drink;} ādyaiḥ {and so on;} edhat {increasing;} dhātuḥ {the ingredients of his body;} asammate {abominable;} śete {remains;} vit-mūtrayorḥ {of stools and urine;} garte {in a hollow;} saḥ {that;} jantuḥ {fetus;} jantu {of worms;} sambhave {the breeding place}.

TRANSLATION: Deriving its nutrition from the food and drink taken by the mother, the fetus grows and remains in that abominable residence of stools and urine, which is the breeding place of all kinds of germs.

DISCUSSION: Here comes the first mention of placenta corridor and exchange of blood and nutrients between the mother and the fetus. After the second trimester, most organs are fully developed and the fetus uses the majority of the nutrients it gets from her mother to gain weight. Referring to the amniotic fluid as stools and urine and breeding place for germs may sound shocking at first. However, the seers could describe what they visioned in meditation. It is indeed a fact that the fetus frequently urinates and sometimes defecates in the amniotic fluid. Also, viewing the womb as a place of bondage, resembling the sufferings of the physical world may have contributed to exaggeration of this condition, as the description becomes more horrific in the next canto: “Bitten repeatedly all over the body by the hungry germs in the abdomen itself, the child suffers terrible agony because of his tenderness. He thus becomes unconscious moment after moment because of the terrible pain” Some experts have suggested that this is a graphic analogy of the disturbance that is inflicted on the fetus due to improper diet of the mother; described in the next cantos.

कटुतीक्ष्णोष्णलवणरूक्षाम्लादिभिरुल्बणैः ।
मातृभुक्तैरुपस्पृष्टः सर्वाङ्गोत्थितवेदनः ॥

*Kaṭutīkṣṇoṣṇalavaṇarūkṣāmlādibhirulbaṇaiḥ |
Mātr̥bhuktairupaspr̥ṣṭaḥ sarvāṅgotthitavedanaḥ ||*

*Kaṭu {bitter;} tīkṣṇa {pungent;} uṣṇa {hot;} lavaṇa {salty;} rūkṣa {dry;} āmla {sour;}
āḍibhiḥ {and so on;} ulbaṇaiḥ {excessive;} mātr̥bhuktaiḥ {by foods eaten by the
mother;} upaspr̥ṣṭaḥ {affected;} sarvāṅga {all over the body;} utthita {arisen;}
vedanaḥ {pain}.*

TRANSLATION: Owing to the mother's eating bitter, pungent foodstuffs, or food which is too salty or too sour, the body of the child incessantly suffers pains which are almost intolerable.

DISCUSSION: Indeed, the food consumed by the mother can reach the fetus very quickly. For instance, amniotic fluid takes the odor of garlic within 45 minutes of ingestion by the mother.⁶⁴ The fetus reacts to these tastes and odors by making facial expressions accordingly.^{65, 66} Studies have shown that the fetus does not like bitter, pungent, salty, or very sour foods, while it reacts pleasantly to sweet foods.⁶⁷ Interestingly, The Bhagavad Gita classify the bitter, pungent, salty, or sour foods as rajasic, or those that promote motion and activity.⁶⁸

उल्बेन संवृतस्तस्मिन्नन्त्रैश्च बहिरावृतः ॥
आस्ते कृत्वा शिरः कुक्षौ भुग्नपृष्ठशिरोधरः ।

*Ulbena saṁvṛtastasminnantraīśca bahirāvṛtaḥ ||
Āste kṛtvā śiraḥ kukṣau bhugnapṛṣṭhaśirodharaḥ ||*

*Ulbena {by the amnion;} saṁvṛtaḥ {enclosed;} tasmin {in that place;} antraiḥ {by the
intestines;} ca {and;} bahiḥ {outside;} āvṛtaḥ {covered;} āste {he lies;} kṛtvā {having*

put}; *śiraḥ* {the head}; *kukṣau* {towards the belly}; *bhugna* {bent}; *pr̥ṣṭha* {back}; *śiraḥ-dharaḥ* {neck}.

TRANSLATION: Placed within the amnion and covered outside by the intestines, the child remains lying on one side of the abdomen, his head turned towards his belly and his back and neck arched like a bow.

DISCUSSION: This and the next canto describe the increasingly limited space for movement of the fetus in the uterus at later stages of the pregnancy: “Placed within the amnion and covered outside by the intestines, the child remains lying on one side of the abdomen, his head turned towards his belly and his back and neck arched like a bow.” and “The child thus remains just like a bird in a cage, without freedom of movement. At that time, if the child is fortunate, he can remember all the troubles of his past one hundred births, and he grieves wretchedly. What is the possibility of peace of mind in that condition?”

From here onward, *Lord Kalpa* paints a grim picture of the material life starting from the womb and uses these agonizing illustrations to embed dispassion in the reader through a series of lessons of wisdom. It is interesting to point out that the 10th canto indicates that only the human embryo is able to develop consciousness after 7 months of gestation. Another canto that relates to this study is canto 3.17.18, which talks about multiple pregnancies and is discussed next.

CANTO 3 CHAPTER 17 VERSE 18

प्रजापतिर्नाम तयोरकार्षीद्यः प्राक्स्वदेहाद्यमयोरजायत ।
तं वै हिरण्यकशिपुं विदुः प्रजा यं तं हिरण्याक्षमसूत साग्रतः ॥

prajāpatirnāma tayorakāṛṣīdyaḥ prākṣvadehādyamayorajāyata |
taṁ vai hiraṇyakaśipuṁ viduḥ prajā yaṁ taṁ hiraṇyākṣamasūta sāgrataḥ ||

prajāpatiḥ {Kaśyapa;} *nāma* {names;} *tayoḥ* {of the two;} *akāṛṣīd* {gave;} *yaḥ* {who;} *prāk* {first;} *sva-dehāt* {from his body;} *yamayoh* {of the twins;} *ajāyata* {was delivered;} *taṁ* {him;} *vai* {indeed;} *hiraṇyakaśipuṁ* {Hiranyakaśipu;} *viduḥ* {know;}

prajāḥ {people;} *yam* {whom;} *tam* {him;} *hiraṇyakaśipuṃ* {Hiranyāksha;} *asūta* {gave birth to;} *sā* {she (Diti);} *agrataḥ* {first}.

TRANSLATION: Kaśyapa, Prajāpati, the creator of the living entities, gave his twin sons their names; the one who was born first he named Hiraṇyāksha, and the one who was first conceived by Diti he named Hiraṇyakaśipu.

DISCUSSION: This is a reiteration of the Vedic literature, Piṇḍa-siddhi, it is stated that when the male semen enters the uterus, the female may develop two embryos in her womb, and she brings forth twins in a reverse order to that in which they were first conceived. The child conceived first is born later, and the one conceived later is brought forth first. But that is not necessarily the case scientifically. However, it does illustrate here why Hiraṇyāksha, the second child conceived, was delivered first, whereas Hiraṇyakaśipu, the child who was behind him, having been conceived first, was born second.

Vedic Rituals in Pregnancy

Saṃskārā are ritual that are performed throughout the life of a Hindu. These rituals have both social and spiritual aspects to them. The purpose of *saṃskārā* can include: 1) physical, mental, spiritual, and karmic purification, 2) providing inner balance in this lifetime, 3) offering the rite of passage through different stages of life, 4) removing hostile influences, and 5) attracting favorable influences.

There are in total about 40 *saṃskārās*, out which 16 of them, listed in Table 2.1, are very important and must be observed by a Hindu through his/her lifetime.⁶⁹ Here, we shall describe the first four *saṃskārās* that are meant to be performed prior to conception, during pregnancy and at birth.

The life of a Hindu, from conception (*niśakrāmato*) to cremation (*smaśānam*) rotates around these series of milestones along his/her journey through life. The general meaning of the word ‘*saṃskārā*’ is impression, which in this context, refers to life impressions. The literal meaning of the word is ‘*saṃ*’ meaning betterment and ‘*karma*’ meaning actions - or ‘improving one’s actions’. The Vedas advise the Hindu that observance of these *saṃskārās* will cleanse the body and the mind and lead to the betterment of one’s life quality.⁶⁹

From a spiritual point of view, the practice of the *saṃskāras* will lead to development of the eight auspicious *guṇas*, also known as *ātma guṇas*, which are: 1) *dayā* or universal compassion and love for all living beings, 2) *kānti* or development of patience, 3) *anasuyā* or absence of jealousy or rancor, 4) *śauca* or purification, 5) *anāyāsa* or absence of anxiety, 6) *maṅgala* or development of inner happiness, 7) *akarpaṇyā* or generosity of spirit and time, and 8) *āśaphā* or dispassion.⁷⁰

Table 1- The 16 Saṃskāras

	SAMSKĀRĀ (संस्कार)	PREGNANCY STAGE	DESCRIPTION
1	<i>ḡarbhādhāna</i> (गर्भाधान)	Prior to conception	The ritual of conception
2	<i>purṃsāvana</i> (पुंसवन)	During pregnancy	The ritual of seeking a male child
3	<i>sīmantonṇayana</i> (सीमन्तोन्नयन)	During pregnancy	The ritual for safe delivery
4	<i>jaṭākarma</i> (जातकर्म)	At birth	The ritual to purify the newborn
5	<i>nāmakaraṇam</i> (नामकरणम्)	After birth	The naming ceremony
6	<i>niṣkramaṇam</i> (निष्क्रमणम्)	After birth	The first outing ceremony
7	<i>annaparasana</i> (अन्नप्राशनम्)	After birth	The first solid food feeding ceremony
8	<i>cūḍākaraṇam</i> (चूडाकरण)	After birth	The tonsure ceremony
9	<i>karnaḥedhaḥ</i> (कर्णभेद)	After birth	The ear piercing ceremony
10	<i>vidyārambhaḥ</i> (वद्वारम्भ)	Childhood	The education ceremony
11	<i>upanayanam</i> (उपनयनम्)	Childhood	The sacred Thread wearing ceremony
12	<i>vedārambhaḥ</i> (वेदारम्भ)	Youth	The initiation into the Vedic studies
13	<i>keśāntah</i> (केशान्त)	Youth	The first shaving ceremony
14	<i>samāvartanam</i> (समावर्तनम्)	Adult	The school graduation ceremony
15	<i>vivāhah</i> (वववाह)	Adult	The marriage ceremony
16	<i>antyēṣṭi</i> (अन्त्येष्टि)	Adult	The funeral rites

Ġarbhādhāna

This *saṁskārā*, literally meaning ‘the gifting of the womb’⁷¹, is not merely about religious rituals and prayers for a healthy offspring. There is a rather scientific rationale behind the procedure. Looking at the rituals scientifically, it becomes clear that the seers understood the concept of gene expression and prescribed practices that produced the most favorable mindset for procreation.

Furthermore, in contrast to the Western approach to conception, where most often sensual pleasures overweight the procreation objectives of copulation, a hindu couple continue chanting mantras all through the act of intercourse as it is delineated in details in the *bṛhadāraṇyaka upaniṣad*.⁶⁹ The process is as follows: On the fourth night after menstruation, the wife take a bath to cleanse herself and then wears clean and new clothing.⁷² Meanwhile, the husband is advised to continue with the thought that her wife looks like the *Goddess lakṣmi*.⁷²

He then approach her and feed her *sāttvik* food, while chanting various mantras; one of which invites her to have intercourse: “I am the sky, you are the earth. Come, let us unite. Let me deposit my seed to get a child.”⁷² During the actual intercourse, the husband chants this hymn from *ṛig veda*, chapter 10.184.1: “Let *viṣṇu* prepare the womb; let *tvaṣṭṛ* shape the forms. Let *prajāpati* shed the seed; let *dhātṛ* place the embryo in you. Place the embryo, *sinvali*, place the embryo, *sarasvatī*. Let the twin *aśvins*, the lotus-garlanded gods, place the embryo in you. With golden kindling woods the *aśvins* churn out fire. We invoke that embryo for you to bring forth in the tenth month.”⁷⁴ This hymn identifies the different deities, during the Vedic era, involved in the procreation and their various roles.

From these verses, one can conclude that the main objective of *ġarbhādhāna saṁskāra* is to invoke the divine entities to participate in the act of procreation and at the same time, to make the process a *yajña* (sacrifice) to the Gods.

Puṁśavana

Puṁśavana literally means ‘the engendering a male’. Traditionally, a male offspring has been preferred because: 1) a son will ensure the continuation of the family lineage, and 2) a son is needed to perform the necessary cremation rituals that guarantee a safe sojourn for the father and mother after they pass away.⁷¹ This *samskāra* is performed in the third month of pregnancy, before the fetus’s movements are felt by the mother (*yājñavalkya smṛti* 1.11). The mother wears new clothing after a fresh bath and is adorned by jewelries.⁷¹ *atharva Veda* offers many rituals and mantras for this occasion. But the highlight of the event is when at night, the husband pours the juice of a banyan tree sprout into the right nostril of his wife, while chanting: “May a male embryo enter your womb, as an arrow into a quiver. May a son be born after ten months.” (*atharva veda* 3.23.4)⁷⁵

It is interesting to note that according to the Vedas and the ancient *āyurvedic* texts, the gender of the fetus is determined after the first trimester. Again, it is important to remember that the seers knowledge of embryology was mostly based on what they observed through meditation. It is a fact that it is at this time that the gender of the fetus can be determined by external examinations. Moreover, according to *śusruta saṁhitā*, one of the principal texts of *āyurveda*, medicine can very effectively be administered through the nostrils and the banyan tree has properties that can help many pregnancy complications. An earlier hymn to that, which was quoted above, actually explains the intentions of the ritual more clearly: “That which has caused thee to miscarry, do we drive away from thee, that very thing do we deposit outside of thee, away in a far place.” (*atharva veda* 3.23.4)⁷⁵

Figure 4- The Administration of Banyan Juice



Image borrowed from www.sadagopan.org

Sīmantakaranam

Also known as *Sīmantakaranam* or *Sīmanta saṁskārā*, literally means ‘hair parting’.⁶⁹ The main objective of this saṁskāra is to prevent complications of pregnancy.⁷² The *āśvalayan a ḡrihya sutra* recommends this ritual to be performed in the 4th month of the gestation, although some conduct it in the 6th or even the 8th months.⁷² In this *saṁskārā*, the husband simply combs his wife’s hair, from front to back, while chanting mantras to the family deity.⁷⁵ The question would arise that how combing of hair could prevent pregnancy complications. Previous studies have shown that reduction in maternal stress and increased social support is directly correlated with reduction in unfavorable outcomes of pregnancy.⁷⁶⁻⁷⁹

The combing of the hair, could create an opportunity for the couple to bond,

provide social support to the mother, and reduce her psychological distress. Perhaps, such an interpretation is supported by *khaṇḍika* 13.7 of *ḡrihya sutra*, where the husband addresses his wife after the ceremony by saying: “What is hidden, O thou whose hair is well parted, in thy heart, in *prajāpati*, that I know; such is my belief. May you not fall into distress...”⁸⁰

There are a number of hymns in the *atharva veda* intended to protect the fetus from disturbances. In hymn 4.17, it says: “As this great earth conceives the germs of the beings, thus shalt thy embryo be—held fast, to produce a child after pregnancy! As this great earth holds the mountains and the peaks, thus shall thy embryo be held fast, to produce a child after pregnancy! As this great earth holds the animals scattered far, thus shall thy embryo be held fast, to produce a child after pregnancy!”⁸¹

Figure.5: Parting of the Hair by the Husband



Image borrowed from www.sadagopan.org

Jātakarma

Jātakarma is performed to welcome the newborn child into the world reminding it of its divine nature on this journey of life.⁷⁵ The baby is first bathed and cleaned and then fed a small mixture of honey, ghee and gold by the father.⁶⁹ The father also whispers a mantra in the child's right ear reminding it of its divine nature.⁷⁵ This *samskāra* also seeks the blessings of intelligence, health and long life for the child.⁷⁵

Figure 6: Jatakarmam Ceremony



Vedic Basis for Yoga as a Mind-Body Therapy During Pregnancy

THE VEDIC VIEWS ON HEALTH

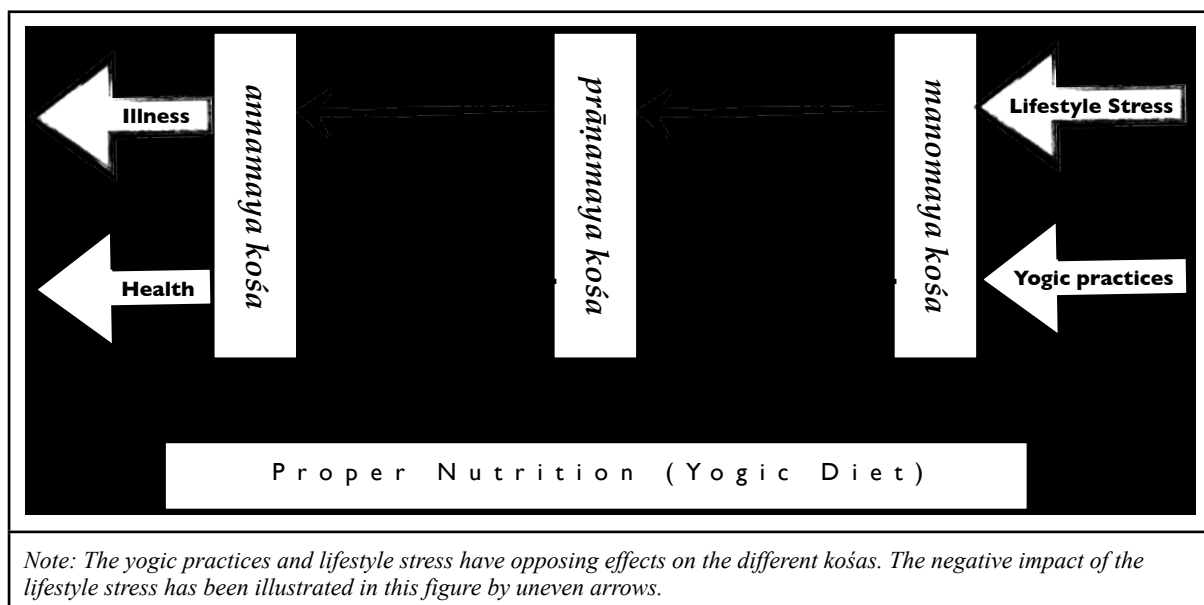
The concept of health according to Ayurveda can be summarized in this *śloka*: “*samadoṣa samāgniśca samadhātu malakriyāḥ | prasanna ātmendriya manāḥ svastha iti abhidhīyate,*” which means “health is defined as balanced functioning of all physiological functions of the body.” In Sanskrit, “*sama*” means “Balanced.” In the *śloka*, this balance is described as *sama-doṣa* (the proper balance of the three *doṣas*: *vāta pitta* and *kapha*), *sāma-agni* (balanced digestive capacity and balanced release of digestive hormones and enzymes), *sama-dhatva agni* (balanced metabolic activity), *sama-dhātu* (balanced functioning of the basic tissues), and *sama-malakriyā* (balanced process of excretion).

The concept of health according to yoga is also about balance. More specifically, yoga defines health as a state of complete harmony of five different aspects of our personality, also called *kośa* (कोश) or sheaths. The physical body is the grossest part of human existence. Other metaphorical bodies are more subtle than the physical body, and play important roles in our emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. In fact, yoga seeks the root cause of life style illnesses within these subtle bodies, believing that the diseases of the physical body are manifestation of disturbances in these subtle *kośas*.⁴⁸ Table .2 outlines the different bodies and their primary functions.

YOGIC VIEWS ON ILLNESS

The first three bodies are very much interrelated. Daily lifestyle stresses (including traumas) disturbs the balance in the *manomaya kośa* (due to long standing suppressed emotional reactions to demanding situations of life) and causes instability. This disturbs the flow of *prāṇa* in the *prāṇamaya kośa* and may even result in blockages in the *nādis* that carry the *prāṇa*. This shows up as functional abnormalities, such as disturbed breathing and/or digestion, without any cellular or structural abnormalities in the body. This in turn settles

Figure 7: Effects of Lifestyle Stress Versus Yoga on Health



down as excessive activity (e.g. inflammation) in one of the organs (possibly due to genetic predisposition), a component of *annamaya kośa*. Thus, an erratic lifestyle disturbs the

balanced functioning of the mind (*manomaya*), manifests initially as functional abnormalities in the vital energy (*prāṇamaya*) and then shows up as structural abnormalities in an organ (*annamaya*). In contrast, yogic practices calm the mind and stabilizes the *manomaya kośa*,

Table .2- Ko śas and Their Primary Characteristics	
KOŚA	DESCRIPTION
<i>annamaya kośa</i> (अन्नमाया कोश)	This refers to the grossest form of the human existence, the physical body, which is made of chemicals (elements, atoms, subatomic particles, energy). According to yoga texts, <i>annamaya kośa</i> is made of five elements: solid (<i>prithvi</i>), liquid (<i>apaḥ</i>), gaseous state (<i>vāyu</i>), heat (<i>agni</i>), and space (<i>ākāśa</i>). 'Anna' means food. This physical body needs food as its nourishment "annadhyeva khalvimani bhutāni jayante" (everything is born out of physical matter); "annena jatāni jivanti" (they live because of anna); "annam prayanti abhisamvīsanti" (they merge into anna); and "jātanyannena vardhante" (they grow because of anna) ² . If this <i>kośa</i> is neglected, improvement in other <i>kośa</i> become difficult if not impossible.
<i>prāṇamaya kośa</i> (प्राणमाया कोश)	'prāṇa' means vital energy that is responsible for life activities in all living cells (physiology). Five sections of the main <i>prāṇa</i> manage the functions in five zones (प्राणो व्यानोअपान उदानः समानः 1) ² <i>prāṇa</i> (respiration and special senses), <i>Apāna</i> (defecation, Micturition, menstruation etc), <i>samānā</i> (digestion), <i>vyānā</i> (touch sense, circulation of fluids all over etc), and <i>udāna</i> (thinking, belching, vomiting etc). <i>prāṇa</i> circulates through an intricate and invisible system of pathways called <i>nadis</i> . The main three <i>nadis</i> are <i>ida</i> , <i>piṅgalā</i> , and <i>śuśumanā</i> in the spine. They branch out to about 72,000 <i>nadis</i> , the pathways for <i>prāṇa</i> to flow throughout the body. The <i>ida</i> and <i>piṅgalā</i> channels correlate with left and right nostrils, making it possible to manipulate <i>prāṇa</i> through controlled breathing.
<i>manomaya kośa</i> (मनोमाया कोश)	'manah' means mind. This <i>kośa</i> is the seat of perception and emotions. Using the five senses, information is acquired to create a perception of the world outside and then used to prepare appropriate emotional responses to those perceptions.
<i>vijñānamaya kośa</i> (विज्ञानमाया कोश)	'vijñāna' means knowledge. This is the seat of wisdom that facilitates the thinking process of the mind. Utilizing this faculty, we are able to discriminate right from wrong and make appropriate judgments (<i>viveka</i>) for a healthy lifestyle. More significantly, this is the place of intuition that is used when analytical process fails to guide us.
<i>ānandamaya kośa</i> (आनन्दमाया कोश)	'ānanda' means bliss. This forms the unchanging template of (existence, consciousness, and bliss) of our being on which the other <i>kośas</i> carry on their activities. This is also the basic stuff of this entire creation. <i>ānandamaya kośa</i> is experienced as a blissful ecstatic state of pure awareness when all mental activity ceases. The main approach of yoga therapy as a mind-body medicine is to maintain the practitioner in this state that is regarded as a state of perfect health.
<p>1. The bodies are listed from the grossest, physical, to the subtlest, bliss. 2. Taittiriya upaniṣada 3.2.</p>	

which ensures the proper flow of *prāṇa* in the *prāṇamaya kośa* and leads to healthy functioning of the organs in the *annamaya kośa*.⁸²

Integrated Approach of Yoga Therapy (IAYT) includes several practices for *annamaya kośa* that correct the imbalances in the disturbed *kośas* and help the person to settle in the state of *vijñānamaya* and *ānandamaya kośas* which are free from diseases. These practices include a healthy diet, cleansing techniques, and various physical postures.

YOGIC DIET AND THE THREE GUṆAS

In *taittiriya upaniṣada* 3.2, it is said that “*And he knew that food is Brahman. From food all beings are born, by food they live, and into food they return.*” For a pregnant woman in particular, a healthy lifestyle (*dinacaryā*) in which diet is a major component is highly recommended. Therefore, yogic diet deserves a more detailed explanation, in general and as related to pregnancy. Generally speaking, the yogic science classifies food in three categories: 1) *sāttvika*: foods that are easy to digest, provide the essential nourishment to the body, and bring clarity of perception to mind (this effect on the mind is possible only when the food is freshly cooked and served with love within six hours after cooking), 2) *rājasika*: food that stimulates the mind and results in exiting emotionally charged behavior; , and 3) *tāmasika*: food that makes the mind become lethargic and dull leading to uncontrolled behavior and even violence.⁸³ Raw foods (such as many fruits and vegetables), grains, legumes, and dairy products are examples of *sāttvika* foods; whereas garlic, onion, and chili are all rajasic in nature; and some types of meats, stale food, processed or frozen foods, and fermented foods are all tamasic in nature.⁸⁴ Intake of tea, coffee, and tobacco have a *rājasik* effect on the body; whereas alcoholic beverages and recreational drugs have *tāmasik* effect.⁸⁴ In figure.7, we see that a yogic diet feeds the physical body, satisfying it through its high nutrient content, contributes to the energy body through its *prāṇik* nature, and also avoids excitement of the mind.⁸² It should now be easy to appreciate the age old adage that says: “a healthy mind resides in a healthy body.” The *sāttvika*, *rājasika*, and *tāmasika* qualities are often referred to as the three *guṇas* in the yogic text books and apply to everything in the material world-- not just the food.⁸³

AYURVEDIC DIET

The yogic and Ayurvedic diet recommendations are not always the same as the main purpose of yoga is transcending the body consciousness while the primary objective of Ayurveda is balancing the body's functions for promoting and preserving health.⁸⁴ Even so, there is a clear link between the two. The Vedic literature, as a whole, emphasizes on the effects of diet on the internal milieu of subtle energy systems and the three *guṇas*.⁸⁴ Ayurveda, the science of medicine, goes on to give detailed descriptions of how these *guṇas* are responsible for the functions at grosser levels of *prāṇamaya* and *annamaya kośas* by positing the concept of *tri-dosas*, the *vāta*, *pitta*, *kapha*.⁸⁴ Again a balanced functioning of these three *dosas* is health and imbalance is ill health. The longer the imbalance goes on, the more chronic will be the disease.⁸⁴ Rice, milk, and clarified butter (ghee) medicated with various herbs play a major role in the diet of a pregnant woman according to the yogic and Ayurvedic teachings as outlined in Table 3. ⁸⁵ Several medicinal herbs are also included as a part of this diet. Those belonging to the group of *madhura-auśadhi*, such as roscaea procera (*kakoli*), grapes (*draksha*), and liquorice (*yashti madhu* or *glycyrrhiza glabra*) are recommended during the second month.⁸⁵ No medicinal herbs are recommended during the third, fourth, and fifth months of pregnancy.⁸⁶ During the sixth month, ghee prepared with 'small caltrops' (*gokshura*) is given and in the seventh month ghee made with the *prthak parṇyā* group of herbs are used.⁸⁶ The pregnant woman is advised to consume rice cooked with milk and added ghee for the additional protein needed for proper development of the fetus.⁸⁵ Such a diet will provide proper nourishment for the *annamaya kośa*, enriches the *prāṇamaya kośa*, and provides calmness of the mind in the *manomaya kośa*.⁸²

CLEANSING TECHNIQUES

Kriyas are cleansing practices that form a part of *annamaya kośa* practices. *Kriyas* play an important role in the wellness of the expecting mother. Ayurvedic physicians recommend:

- 1) Daily bathing after the 36th week of gestation with water boiled with medicinal leaves, such as those of castor bean (*Eranda- Ricinus Communis*) and five-leaved chaste tree (*nīrguṇḍī - vitex negundo*), which reduce the *vāta doṣa*.⁸⁷
- 2) Daily full body massage with medicated oils to remove the toxins from the skin, which is considered a good excretory organ.⁸⁷

3) Application of enema (*sthāpana basti*) from 28th to 32nd weeks followed by unctuous enema (*anuvāsana basti*) of medicated oil with milk and decoction of drugs of sweet group, like *madhukā*.⁸⁸ During the eighth month, the expectant mother is recommended to take a medicated enema (*sthāpana basti*) of the decoction of jujube fruit (*bādarā*) mixed

Table 3: Yogic-Ayurvedic Diet During Pregnancy

Gestational Age		Diet Recommendations
First Trimester	0-4 weeks	Non-medicated milk repeatedly, generally sweet, cold and liquid diet.
	5-8 weeks	Milk medicated with herbs belonging to the group of <i>madhura-aushadhi</i> , such as <i>kakoli</i> (<i>Roscaea procera</i>), <i>draksha</i> (grapes), and <i>yashti madhu</i> (<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i>).
	9-12 weeks	Milk with honey and ghee
Second Trimester	13-16 weeks	Butter mixed with milk (Ch.Sh.8/32), cooked <i>śasti</i> rice (rice grown for 60 days) with curd.
	17-20 weeks	Ghee and milk
	21-24 weeks	Milk prepared with <i>madhura guṇa dravyās</i> with ghee. Ghee or rice gruel medicated with <i>gokshura</i> (Small caltrops)
Third Trimester	25-28 weeks	Ghee medicated with drugs of <i>prṛthak parnyādi</i> (<i>Uraria picta</i> etc) group.
	29-32 weeks	Medicated oil enemas: 1) Asthapana Basti using a decoction of <i>badara</i> (jujube fruit), <i>balā</i> (Country mallow), <i>atibalā</i> (Indian mallow), <i>śatapušpā</i> (fennel), <i>palālā</i> (pestled sesame seeds), milk, curd, <i>mastu</i> (whey/supernatant liquid of butter milk), oil, salt, <i>madanaphala</i> (emetic nut), honey and ghee, and 2) followed by <i>ānuvāsana basti</i> with ghee medicated with <i>madhura guṇa dravyas</i> mentioned above.
	33 weeks to delivery	Thick rice gruel, mixed with ghee (<i>Yavāgu</i>).

with country mallow (*balā*), Indian mallow (*atibalā*), fennel (*śatapušpā*), pestled sesame seeds (*palālā*), milk, curd, whey/buttermilk (*mastu*), oil, salt, emetic nut (*madanaphala*), honey and ghee.⁸⁶ This should be followed by medicated oil enema (*anuvāsana basti*) with oil prepared with milk and *madhura guṇa dravyās* described above.⁸⁶

4) Vaginal tampons soaked with oil can be used from 36th week onwards to lubricate the cervix, the vaginal canal and the perineum.⁸⁷

Other *kriyas* that are safe and useful for the healthy progression of pregnancy and prevention of complications include:

- 1) *Vamana dhauti* is recommended for prevention and treatment of pregnancy induced nausea and vomiting.⁸⁹
- 2) Mild *kapālabhāti* (done at a rate of 27 breaths /minute) helps in normalizing breathing patterns and promoting calmness of the mind during the first trimester of low-risk pregnancies.
- 3) *Jalaneti* is useful to cleanse the nasal passage and may be safely practiced throughout during high and low risk pregnancies.

ĀSANA AND BREATHING EXERCISES

Āsanas are yogic postures that involve stretching of specific parts of the trunk and limbs, and maintained with ease and effortlessness (*sthira sukham āsanam*). Yoga *āsana* are better defined as relaxation and expansion with internal awareness (प्रयत्नशैथिल्याननन्तसमापत्तिभ्याम् *prayatna śaithilyam tasama pattibhyam*) while maintaining in the final posture. According to the sage Patanjali, this is the trick to develop mastery over the modifications of the mind (योगश्चित्तवृत्ति निरोधः *yogaścittavrtti nirodhaḥ*).⁹⁰

From the physiological point of view, yogic postures help in providing deep rest to the organs. The following exercises and *āsanas* were used during pregnancy without any reported difficulties or safety issues^{55, 56, 91}: *pādasañcālanam* (cycling in supine pose), *gulphaghurṇam* (ankle rotation), *jānuphalakarśnam* (kneecap contraction), *ardhatitaliāsana* (half butterfly exercise), *puṇṇatitaliāsana* (full butterfly exercise), *jyoti trāṭaka* (eye exercises), and *matsyākṛīḍāsana* (*lateral shavāsana*). Other *āsanas* have been shown to be safe in low-risk pregnancies⁵⁴: *tādāsana* (mountain pose), *ardhakaṭi-cakrāsana* (lateral arc pose), *trikoṇāsana*

(triangle pose), *vajrāsana* (the ankle posture), *vakrāsana* (spine twist pose), *siddhāsana* (sage pose), *baddhakoṅāsana* (bound ankle pose), *upaviṣṭa koṅāsana* (sit with legs apart), *malāsana* (garland pose), *vīparita karaṇī* (half shoulder stand), and *ardha-pavanamuktāsana* (folded leg lumbar stretch).

Breathing practices aim at reducing the breathing rate, which in turn calm the mind (श्वास प्रश्वासयोर्गति विच्छेदः प्राणायामः *śvāsa praśvāsayorgati vicchedaḥ prāṇayāmā*).⁹⁰ The following breathing exercises were used in both high and low-risk pregnancies:^{54, 91} *hasta āyāma śvasanam* (Hands In and Out Breathing), *hastavistāra śvasanam* (hands stretch breathing), *gulphavistāra śvasanam* (ankles stretch breathing with wall support), *kaṭiparivartana śvasanam* (side twist breathing), *uttānapādāsana śvasanam* (leg raise breathing), *setubandhāsana śvasanam* (hip raise breathing), *supta udarakarana śvasanam* (supine abdominal stretch breathing), *vyaghrāsana śvasanam* (tiger stretch breathing).

The *āsanas* and the breathing exercises are intended to strengthen the musculoskeletal system, stretch ligaments, massage organs, and bring oxygen-rich circulation to the various parts of the body in the *annamaya kośa*. In the *prāṇamaya kośa*, they move the *prāṇa*, remove blockages in the *nādis*, and open the chakras. Finally, and most importantly, they gradually make the mind one pointed in the *manomaya kośa*.⁸²

MEDITATION, PRĀṆAYAMA, AND RELAXATION

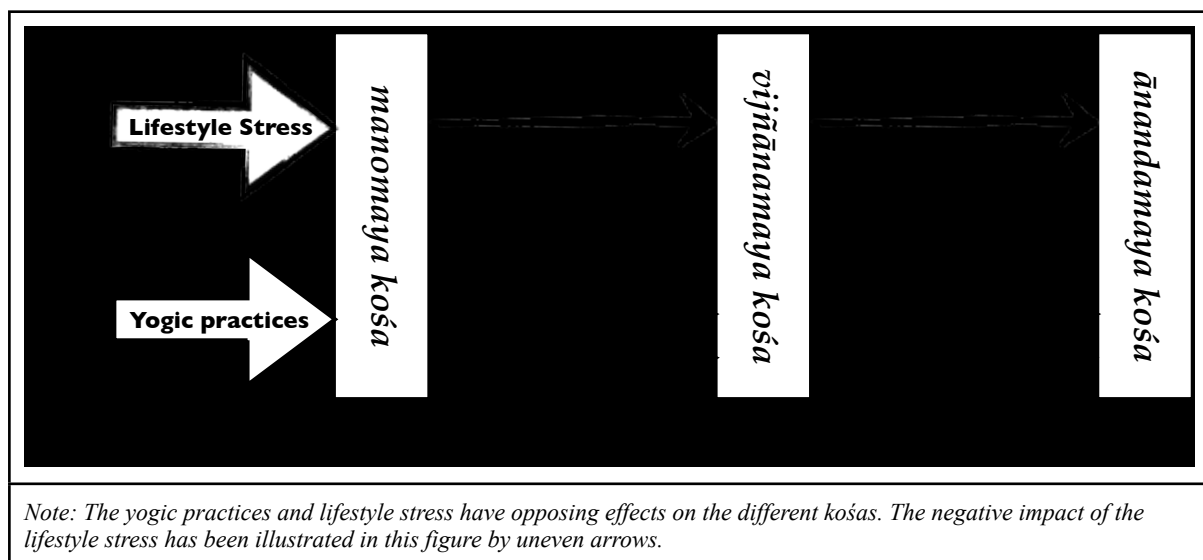
As mentioned before, from the Vedic point of view, stress begins in the mind as suppressed emotions. The scriptures provide the logical steps of arriving at an understanding of the nature of any emotion (suppressed or expressed) and define it as ‘uncontrolled fast rewinding of thoughts in the mind (कामक्रोधोद्भवम् वेगम् *kāmakrodhodbhavam vegam*)⁹². All recommended practices are meant to reduce stress by slowing down the mind (मनः प्रशमनोपायः *manaḥ praśamanōpāyaḥ*) These include meditation of various types, *prāṇayama* practices, and some relaxation techniques. Many of the recommended practices have been used successfully as interventions in past studies.^{54, 93} The following *prāṇayama* that have been used in several published studies are recommended for pregnancy: sectional breathing,

nāḍīśuddhi, śitalī, bhrāmari, nāḍīśodhana.⁹³ Om meditation, visualization, guided-imagery, and *trāṭaka* are all meditation and relaxation techniques that can be practiced by all pregnant women. Perhaps the most useful relaxation practice is guided *śavāsana* in the lateral pose (*matsyākṛīḍāsana*) during pregnancy.

QUALITY OF LIFE DURING PREGNANCY

The quality of life of a pregnant woman can have a direct impact on the health of both mother and the fetus, as well as influence the outcome of the pregnancy.⁵⁴ The yogic recommendation for improving the quality of life of the pregnant women is through the three most subtle *kośas*. The *manomaya kośa* influences the other two, more subtle *kośas*, *vijñānamaya* and *ānandamaya*. A disturbed mind in the *manomaya kośa* leads to lack of judgement (*viveka*) in the *vijñānamaya kośa* and ultimately loss of happiness, or quality of life. In contrast, a centered mind promotes increased intuition and wisdom and frequent contacts with the *ānandamaya kośa*, which according to the Vedic understanding, translates into higher quality of life (see figure .8).

Figure.8: Effects of Lifestyle Stress Versus Yoga on Quality of Life



Figures 7 and 8 show the impact of lifestyle stress as an aggressor and yogic practices as a pacifier on the mind from the Vedic point of view. But what is the impact of this stress on the body physiologically?

Stress is the built-in response of a living organism, evolved to handle demanding situations; often referred to as ‘fight or flight’ -- that is, either to prepare to fight or run away to safety.⁴⁸ In mammals, either choice triggers the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) into action, which will cause the pupils to dilate for better vision, move blood away from the intestine toward the big skeletal muscles that need fuel for action, and increases the heart rate as well as breathing rate to provide the necessary oxygen to the muscle cells. However, once the threat is over, the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) kicks in to bring the body back to its normal homeostatic state.⁴⁸

The human body has evolved very well to handle the stress caused by such occasional demanding situations. The problem is that the stress caused by the modern lifestyle or an illness is usually continuous and does not allow the PNS come into action and do its part.⁴⁸ As a result, the body forgets its normal homeostatic state and adapts a hyper sympathetic state, even in the absence of any danger. Such a hypersympathetic state usually compromises the health and the quality of life of the individual.⁴⁸ When administered properly, yoga practices generally involve a set of stimulations followed by deep relaxations to reverse this condition and reactivate the parasympathetic functions in the body.² Swami Sivananda, a physician and one of India’s greatest yogis, once said: “*Hatha yoga* is a course of psycho-physiological discipline for the attainment of complete mastery over the body, the nervous system and *prāṇa*.” But this mastery comes with other self development practices for a pregnant woman.

Responsibility (*prabhutvama*), tolerance (*titikṣā*), contentment (*santoṣa*), and self confidence (*ātma viśvāsa*) are some of the essential qualities necessary for moving towards a healthy motherhood. Yoga is also defined as ‘freedom’ or ‘personal autonomy’; that is to be able to shift from established patterns of psychological responses to a desired response at will. To do, not to do, or to do differently is the freedom we all possess (कर्तुमकर्तुमन्यथा वा कर्तुम् शक्यम् *kartuma kartumanyatha va kartum sakyama*).⁹⁴ This freedom evolves by dwelling in the inner silent state marked by blissful awareness during yoga practices.⁹⁴ There are numerous such practices that could be incorporated in the design of trials based on the teachings of the four paths of yoga, which are *jñāna yoga* (yoga of knowledge), *bhakti yoga* (yoga of devotion), *karma yoga* (yoga of service), and *rāja yoga* (yoga of controlling the mind): i)

dhāraṇā (concentration), ii) *bhāvanā* (contemplation on a deity), iii) *paḍhanā* (study of the scriptures), iv) *satsaṅga* (being in the company of wise people), v) *japaḥ* (chanting of the holy names), vi) *sevā* (selfless service), vii) *viveka* (developing discrimination between right and wrong), viii) *virāgia* (developing dispassion toward the objects of the senses), and ix) *bhakti* (transforming hard emotions into soft, divine emotions, as it is said in the *narada bhakti sutra*: the purest form of love is devotion परम प्रेम रूप भक्ति: *param parama prema rupa bhakti*).⁴⁸ Practices of bhakti yoga are deeply embedded in the Indian traditions starting from regular daily worship of the personal God (*iṣṭadevatā*) to special celebrations (*sanskārā*) with intense practices (*vratās*) for different phases of pregnancy. The abode of the mother should be well fumigated, worshiped, having sound of the Vedic hymns (or other spiritual songs from other faiths) being recited by brāhmanās (holy priests). The pregnant woman after getting up in the morning and performing her regular chores should be busy in worship of god and should do selfless service (*sevā*).⁹⁵ Table 2.4, outlines the different practices recommended for women in high-risk or low-risk pregnancies.

Table 4: Recommended Vedic Practices During Pregnancy

PRACTICES	LOW-RISK PREGNANCIES (LRP)	HIGH-RISK PREGNANCIES (HRP)
Diet	Sattvic diet plus folic acid, calcium, vitamin D supplements.	Same as LRP, but with reduced consumption of salt, sugar, and simple carbohydrates.
Kriyas	<i>vamanadhauti</i> and <i>kapālabhāti</i> (during the 1st trimester only) and <i>Jala neti</i>	<i>Jala neti</i>
Āsanās, and stretching practices	<i>tādāsana</i> , <i>ardhakāṭi-cakrāsana</i> , <i>trikoṅāsana</i> , <i>vajrāsana</i> , <i>vakrāsana</i> , <i>siddhāsana</i> , <i>baddha koṅāsana</i> , <i>ūpaviṣṭa koṅāsana</i> , <i>vīparita karaṇī ardha-pāvanamuktāsana</i>	<i>pādāsañcālanama</i> , <i>gulphaghurṇama</i> , <i>jānuphalakarṇama</i> , <i>ardhatitaliāsana</i> , <i>purṇ titaliāsana</i> , <i>matsyakriḍāsana</i>
Breathing exercises	<i>hasta āyāma śvasanam</i> , <i>hastavistāra śvāsanam</i> , <i>gulphavistāra śvasanam</i> , <i>setubandhāsana śvasanam</i>), <i>kaṭiparivartana śvasanam</i> , <i>uttānapādāsana śvasanam</i> , <i>supta udarakarāsana śvasanam</i> , <i>vyaghrāsana śvasanam</i>	
Prāṇayama	Sectional breathing, <i>nāḍīśuddhi</i> , <i>śitalī</i> , <i>bhrāmari</i> , <i>nāḍīśodhana</i>	
Kriyās	<i>Jala neti</i> throughout pregnancy.	
Meditation	Visualization, guided imagery, <i>trāṭaka</i> , Om meditation	
Samskāras during pregnancy	Garbhādhāna, <i>Purīśavana</i> , <i>Sīmanatonnayana</i> , and <i>Jātakarma</i>	
Spiritual	<i>jñāna yoga</i> , <i>bhakti yoga</i> , <i>karma yoga</i> , <i>rāja yoga</i> : <i>dhāraṇā</i> , <i>paḍhanā bhāvanā</i> , <i>bhakti</i> , <i>viveka</i> , <i>sevā</i> , <i>satsaṅga</i> , <i>vairāgya</i>	
Self Care	Daily bath, massage, enema, vaginal tampons, and/or lubrication	