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Embryo-Transfer

Apropos my article on "The unique example of embryo transfer "performed practically about 2600yrs ago published in the journal of "The Asiatic Society" (Vol. XLII Nos. 3-4,2000), it was my pleasure researching the issues raised by learned readers and thinkers.

The most revered 12th Century's Jain Acharya Hem Chandra Suri is his well known treatise "Trishasti-Salaka-Purus-Carita" (त्रिषष्टि शलाकापुरुषचरित, पर्व-10, सं. 2 पद 16-19) has in narration of Lord Mahavir's life described the episode of the Embryo transfer almost in a similar manner mentioned in the Jain Agamic Scriptures 'Kalpa Sutra' (कल्पसूत्र), Bhagwati Sutra (भगवती सूत्र) and Acharanga Sutra (आचारंग सूत्र). It seems he followed the tradition of medieval saints.

It was astonishing to find a similar episode of Balram, Krishna's elder brother whose embryo-transfer as mentioned in Srimad Bhagwat-Purana (श्रीमद्भागवत पुराण, स्कंध-10, अध्याय-2, श्लोक-6-15) having surpassed all limits of time and imagination.

भगवानपि विश्वात्मा विदित्वाकंसजं भयम् ।
 यदूनां निजनाथानां योगमायां समादिशत् ॥6॥
 गच्छ देवि व्रजं भद्रे गोपगोभिरलङ्कृतम् ।
 रोहिणी वसुदेवस्य भार्याऽऽस्ते नन्दगोकुले ।

(At the prayer of Deva (देव), Vishnu decided to incarnate in part (अंश) on the Earth in Devaki's womb. Visualising the possibility of Kan's (कंस) misdeeds killing six of her sons. He called his Shakti (शक्ति) Yogmaya (योगमाया) and ordered her to transfer his incarnate-embryo from Devaki's womb to the womb of Rohini (रोहिणी), the second wife of Vasudev (वासुदेव), who was out of prison so, the Balram may be born out of Rohini's womb. He also ordered Yogmaya herself to incarnate on Earth taking birth as Yashoda's daughter. Vishnu at the same time decided to incarnate fully (अवतार) as Devaki's 8th child. The strategy being that the 7th child of Devaki, Balram would be saved by embryo-transfer and the 8th child Krishna would be replaced by Vasudev with Yashoda's daughter Yogmaya and when Kans tries to kill her she being an angelic-incarnation, would vanish. Yogmaya did exactly as instructed by Vishnu, she hypnotised Devaki and Rohini into deep sleep and then transferred Balram's embryo in the 7th month of pregnancy to Rohini's womb. Thus Kan's purpose was defeated.)

The noteworthy aspects of the above operation are-

- The operation takes place, when the embryo is 7 months old.
- The process of hypnotising the incumbents into deep sleep before the operation takes place.

Dr. Parameswar Solanki has without questioning the possibility of such an embryo-transfer remarked (see Jain Bharti, Vol. 39.3 March 1991, pages 147-148) that the Jain Acharyas may have been guided in mentioning such an episode by the Bhagwat-Purana's example perhaps on the assumption that Bhagwat-Purana is a prior treatise. But it could be vice-versa, the origin of Agamic literature is no less older than Bhagwat-Purana's. The height of imagination however in Bhagwat-Purana's episode of embryo-transfer in the 7th month of pregnancy is all the more amazing and less credible than the Agamic-transfer of embryo on its 83rd day of pregnancy. The process of operation of hypnotising the incumbents in deep sleep is also void of the minutest details which are the hallmark of Agamic literature.

I had in my previous article published in the Journal of Asiatic Society (Vol. XLII nos. 3-4, 2000) while highlighting the excellency of such an experiment 2600 years ago, also expressed my doubt about the factual trustworthiness of the whole episode. Giving it a sociological twist I was inclined to interpret the myth differently. Those were the days of feudal Kingship. The King Supreme owned many a Queens and in the palace there were concubines from every strata including Brahmins with whom the king frequently had sexual relations. The son born to a Brahmin-concubine could found favour with the king linking the son's parentage to the Royal household for the outside world or could be adopted by the king to save the embarrassment although he already had a son (नन्दिवर्धन) from his Queen Trishala in this particular case.

This angle, to look at the whole episode, may annoy many a blind followers and fanatics but needs to be explored for solving many a myths created by vested interests and to bring out historical facts as authentically as possible. The modern mind with its scientific aptitude cannot accept such unimaginable happenings as historic truths unless they could be rationally perceived or explained. Even the myth of Five-hooded-serpent-head as canopy over the 23rd Tirthankar (तीर्थंकर) Parasvanath has been challenged by the modern scholars. These serpent-heads are said to be the creation of medieval Jain-Acharyas. The sculptures and literature depicting the canopy only go to explain Parsva's association with Nagraj (नागराज) Dharmendra (धरणेन्द्र), Sri U. P. Shah, a Jainologist of

repute, in his essay on the subject while explaining the depiction of serpent-canopy (नागछत्र) over Parsva interprets it to be a totemic symbol of his link with his ancestral Naga-tribe (नाग वंश) and Nag-worship (नाग-पूजा). The eminent scholar Dr. M.A. Dhaky in his essay 'Arhat Parsva and Dharmendra Nexus' (published 1997) supporting Shah's views suggests that in the total absence of this serpent-canopy in any of the sculptures found in Kankali tila (कंकाली टिला) of Mathura-excavations dating them to be of 1st century B.C. the so called depiction are obviously a Nirgrantha (निर्ग्रन्थ) adaptation of the Brahmanical myth of Sesh-Nag (शेषनाग) supporting Globe of Earth on his head or followed from the myth of Krishna-Govardhan episode of Hindu-scriptures. Likewise the embryo-transfer-myth could be interpreted rationally to be a creation of the later Jain-Acharyas to avoid the Brahmanical parental linkage of Lord Mahavir. The medieval period between 5th to 10th century A.D. saw a phenomenal upsurge of hatred against Boudhas (बौद्ध) and Jains generated by the followers of Adi-Guru Shankaracharya when not only vast number of Jain shrines were demolished and or destroyed and a disheartening number of Jain And Boudh Acharyas and Muni's were slain in Southern India. The possibility of one-up-manship creating such myth cannot be ruled out.

The most revered Jain scholar of the 20th century Pundit Sukhlal Sanghvi has in his critical analysis of such mythical representations in Lord Mahavir's life challenged the Embryo-transfer episode (चार तीर्थंकर) and suggested that it could be an addition to the Agamic literature by later Acharyas. What gave strength to his argument was the fact that the Jain scriptures of its Digamber sect have completely ignored this transfer episode. Mahavir according to them was born of Trishala and there is no mention of Devananda as Mahavir's mother of conception at all.

The Archaeological finds of Kankali tila (कंकाली टिला) in Mathura and the inscriptions found there support the above view. The famous Western Archaeological and Historian Vincent Smith has in his treatise "Jaina Stupa & other Antiquities of Mathura" dated the inscriptions and sculptures to be of 1st century B.C. These sculptures faithfully depict most of the important events of Lord Mahavir's life but the total absence of the Embryo transfer-episode in those depictions clearly is a pointer to its concoction later on.

Some passages in Kalpa Sutra depicting hatred towards Brahmins also seem to be later-age creations giving credence to the Additon-theory. The Stanza (गाथा) 17 of Kalpa Sutra is explicit in this regard :

तए णं तस्स सक्कस्स देविंदस्स देवरत्तो अयमेयारूवे
अज्झत्थिए चित्थिए पत्थिए मणोगए संकप्पे समुप्पज्जित्थन्न
एयं भूयं, न एयं भव्वं, न एयं भविस्सं, जं नं अरहंता वा
चक्कवट्ठी वा बलदेवा वा वासुदेवा वा अंतकुलेसु वा
पंतकुलेसु वा तुच्छकुलेसु वा दरिद्रकुलेसु वा किविणकुलेसु
वा भिक्खायकुलेसु वा माहणकुलेसु वा आयाइसु वा
आयाइत्ति वा आयाइस्संति वा एवं खत्तु अरहंता वा
चक्कवट्ठी वा बलदेवा वा वासुदेवा वा उग्गकुलेसु वा
भोगकुलेसु वा राइण्णकुलेसु वा इक्खागकुलेसु वा
खतियकुलेसु वा हरिवंसकुलेसु वा अन्नतरेसु वा तहप्पगारेसु
विसुद्धजातिकुलवंसेसु आयाइसुवा आयाइत्ति वा
आयाइस्संतिवा ।

(Lord Indra oversees from his heavenly abode by Awadhigyan (अवधिज्ञान) that Lord Mahavir has incarnated on Earth into the womb of Devananda (देवानन्दा) Brahmani (ब्राह्मणी). He contemplates over it and thinks that Thirthankers, the enlightened ones can not take birth in low castes (अन्त्य कुल, अधम कुल, नीच कुल, तुच्छ कुल, दरिद्र कुल, कृपण कुल, भिक्षुक कुल अथवा ब्राह्मण कुल) such as the most down trodden shudras, criminals, poverty stricken, misers, beggars and the Brahmins. Therefore Indra thinks it to be his duty to transfer the embryo of Mahavir to the womb of a lady of Khsatriya Kul, a race of pure blood. Then Indra proceeds to instruct his man to execute the plan.)

This kind of bias against Brahmins showing them at par with the low castes is not depicted any where else in the Agamic literature of ancient times. On the contrary 'Uttar Purana' contains references of some Tirthankars (eg. Shantinath, Kunthunath and Arhnath) whose spouses belonged to Mlechha community of extremely low and out castes.

Muni Punyavijay (मुनि पुण्य विजय) a learned Commentator on ancient Agamic literature has in his introduction to an modern edition of Kalpa Sutra expressed his doubt about the authenticity of a number of Stanzas in it. Trisala's dreams in elaborate poetic form are thought to be such doubtful additions to the original text of Kalpa Sutra. The Embryo-transfer

episode could well be one of such additions by later Acharyas. This appears to be more so because the author of Kalpa Sutra Acharya Bhadrabahu was a born Brahmin. He was the 8th successor to Lord Mahavir. Brahmins in those times were ardent followers of Jins. Admittedly the Agamic literature were for the first time reduced to writing in 453 A.D. As discovered by scholars, the second and third part of Kalpa Sutra namely Sthaviravali and Sadhu Samachari contain passages definitely written by later Acharyas.

Some historians go to the length of suggesting that Jamali was the son of Nandivardhan, Trishala's own son and elder brother of Lord Mahavir. According to them Mahavir's daughter Priyadarshana was given in marriage to Nandivardhan's son Jamali. If that be so, Mahavir could not have been the son of Trisala. He might have been adopted after having born to Devananda, the Brahmin lady.

The most authentic proof of Devananda being the real mother of Mahavir and Mahavir having born of her comes from the most revered Jain scripture Bhagvati Sutra itself. Lord Mahavir is said to have attained enlightenment in 557 B.C. and two years later he visited his birth place Brahman Kunda when Jamali and Priyadarshna (his son in law and daughter respectively) are said to have taken Sanyas and joined Mahavir's Religious order. There Devananda came to pay her respects to the Lord. This incident is vividly described in stanza (गाथा) 4 and 5 of part (उद्देशक) 33 of Chapter (शतक) 9 of Bhagvati Sutra as follows :

तएणं सा देवाणंदा माहणी आगयपण्डाया, पप्फुयलोयणा
संवरिवलयबाहा, कंचुयप रिक्खितिया धारा हयकलंबगं पिव
समूसवियरोमकूवा समणं भगवं महावीरं अणिमिसाए दिट्ठीए
पेहमाणी देहमाणी चिट्ठइ ।

(Looking at the Lord her (Devananda's) whole body shivered with ecstasy and excitement. Tears burst out of her eyes and milk oozed out of her breasts. The sensation pulsating in her limbs inflated the wet breast covering).

प्रश्न – भंते! त्ति भगवं गोयमे समणं भगवं महादीरं बंदइ
णमंसइ, चंदिताणमंसित्ता एवं वयासी – किणं भंते। एसा
देवाणंदा माहणी आगयपण्डाया, तं चेव जाव रोमकूवा
देवाणुप्पियं अणिमिसाए दिट्ठीए पेहमाणी पेहमाणी चिट्ठइ ।

("Oh Lord!" addressing thus, Muni Goutam saluted and asked Mahavir – "How is it that this lady's body is shivering with excitement and milk is oozing out of her breasts and she is standing staring continuously at you")

गोयमाइ! समणे भगवं महावीरं भगवं गोयमं एवं वयासी – एवं खलु गोयमा! देवाणंदा माहणी ममं अम्मगा, अहणं देवाणंदाए माहणीए अत्तए, तएणं सा देवाणंदा माहणी तेण पुब्ब पुत्त सिणेहरागेणं आगयपण्हया, जाव समूस वियरोम कूवा मम अणिमिसाए दिट्ठीए पेहमाणी पेहमाणी चिट्ठइ। तएण समणे भगवं महावीर उसभदत्तस्स माहाणस्स देवाणंदाए माहणीए तीसे च महतिमहालियाए इसिपरिसाए जाव परिसा पडिगया।

(Lord Mahavir answered—"Goutam, she is my own mother. I was born of her. That is why because of Love and excitement of seeing her son after long long time her body is shivering and milk is oozing out of her breasts." The Lord then addressed the gathering including Rishabhdeva and Devananda and after hearing his sermon the gathering dispersed.)

The above mentioned narration, in my view, conclusively show that Devananda herself had given birth to Mahavir. Such an ecstatic excitement at seeing her son after a long time and in such an enlightened state could only emerge in a lady who had experienced the pangs of giving birth to him. Devananda was not an enlightened one and she or anybody else could not have knowledge of the so called transfer of embryo from her womb on the 83rd day of her pregnancy. Lord Mahavir while answering Goutam's query does not speak either about the so called transfer. The Lord on the contrary asserts in clearest terms that he was born of her. It would be traversity of facts if we in our zeal to upgrade the perentage from the so called low caste of Brahmin to the so called upper caste of Khsatriyas and stick to a myth created with bias against Brahmins and most probably to show one-up-manship to the Brahminical myths. The husk should be sorted out of Rice. The ancient scriptures thus need to be interpreted rationally and honestly with a visionary's perception to straighten the historical records.