

## Going the natural way: Natural Birthing

In today's fast changing world we are impacted by the growing advances of science and technology. This has affected us in various aspects of our life starting from what we wear, eat, travel, communicate and procreate. Who would have thought that sitting in a suburb of mumbai we can speak, see each other and communicate with someone who is new york city through skype. Similarly the medical advances have given us test tube babies, ivf & surrogate mothers.

Technology is good, advances in medicine are great and has improved longevity of life. And yet equally there have been a rise in diseases which are proving to be more lifestyle oriented like diabetes, stroke, cancer etc. Equally disturbing is the impact of medicalization of birth which is not only affecting the mother but also the future generation of babies who are born. Today birthing which takes place naturally & normally is overshadowed by cesarean section and unnecessary intervention. Why is this so? What has gone wrong? The world health organization (who) believes that the c-section rate should be between 10-15% {world health report, 2010} in any country which means 85-90% of women can deliver normally. Whereas what is seen is almost 80-90% of women land up in a c-section in most of the cities of the world more so in private practise.

Is there hope ? Can a woman birth normally more importantly naturally. Yes very much and this is a reality; every woman is designed by god to give birth naturally and she can.

The history of natural birth

Natural birth is as old as man, when the first baby was born he or she was born naturally & unassisted without any intervention or even a doctor being present

Next came the midwives who assisted the women in labour and helping her give birth naturally without any external intervention.

Doctors came on the scene when the need arose for intervention to safeguard the lives of mother & child

So then what is natural birth???

Natural birth is vaginal birth without any kind of intervention. No medication (pitocin or analgesics) no epidural, no episiotomy. In simple terms a non invasive, non medicalized, non

interventional birth where you allow the baby to enter into this world at his/her own time without hurrying or rushing.

Natural birth is also a very personal, sacred, warm, secure, emotional and physical experience wherein the woman/mom is in charge of her birth as she introduces the baby to this world.

It is very important for us to realize that a woman's body is designed divinely to give birth naturally and it's the most primary or basic way for the baby to come out into this world. So even if you don't do anything the baby will find his/her way out of the womb into this world just as other mammals do for eg. Cows, dogs, cats and most of the animal planet. I know it is a bit hard to digest yet nonetheless it's true. We have medicalized our births & have forgotten our natural instincts.

At this juncture it is necessary to mention the role of midwives as they play an important role in regards to birthing. The first mention of midwives is recorded in the bible around 1350 bce in exodus ch 1: v 15-20 when midwives shiphrah & puah went against the pharaoh (king of egypt) and saved the lives of the male babies of hebrew women. In india references to midwifery practise are found in the writings of charaka and sushruta ancient indian physicians. Even today if you go to the villages of india, women give birth in the comfort of their homes and are being attended by midwives who are called "dai's"

In india natural birth generally takes place in rural areas under the experienced guidance of traditional midwives or "dai's" as they are called; whereas in urban areas predominantly births are medicalized and attended by nurses & obstetricians which are interventional in nature. Traditional midwifery and natural birthing took a backseat as these midwives were accused of infant mortality and lack of professional knowledge. Whereas even today in villages of india largely these "dai's" have been successfully delivering babies with their ancient wisdom & knowledge handed to them from their mothers and grandmothers who themselves were midwives.

An interesting fact I wish to share is that as we file the birth report to be given to the municipality recording the birth in our centre; it clearly asks where the birth has taken place a) govt institution b) private or non govt institution c) delivery at house or any other place and who attended the birth a) doctor/ nurse/trained midwife b) traditional birth attendant c) relatives or others. Which goes to say that the government has given you the privilege to birth

where you want, how you want and with whom you want. It is the decision and the willful right of the woman to choose how she wishes to birth her baby.

Water birth:

Water birth is an extension of natural birth wherein you birth/deliver your baby in water. The water used is warm water maintained at 37 degree centigrade and the woman is lowered into a birthing pool upto her chest in water. Once in the pool she remains there till she births her baby.

An adult body consists upto 60% of water and a three day fetus is 97% water and a eight month fetus has around 81% of water. Water is part of us and hence when the baby is birthed in water the transition is very smooth from the mother's womb into the water as all along the baby was surrounded by amniotic fluid.

Water birth has many benefits to both the mom & baby too. The warm water relaxes the mom in labour; she relaxes physically and mentally too. It also eases her off stress, anxiety and enables her to concentrate on her birthing process. It's been noted that labouring in water increases the elasticity of the tissues of the perineum and thus reduces the incidence & severity of tearing; eliminating the need for episiotomies.

The water baby equally benefits as he/she comes into this world peacefully, relaxed and with no trauma whatsoever. The babies thus born are alert, open their eyes in water as they come out and move their limbs too.

Water birth must have started many centuries back as its part of natural birthing and helps the woman in labour. The earliest record of waterbirth is 1803 in France wherein a woman after nearly 48 hours of labour sought relief in a warm bath and delivered her baby just moments after entering the bath tub. Water birth came into prominence in Russia, France and other advanced nations like USA, UK, Japan, China, Switzerland etc. One of the chief proponents of water birth was Dr Michel Odent, a French physician who noticed the benefits of water birth and offered it to all the women who came to the state hospital of Pithiviers, France. And today's modern day missionary is Barbara Harper, founder of Waterbirth International; who goes around the world teaching & training people in waterbirth. We ourselves have been trained by Barbara and have hosted her workshops in Mumbai, India.

Internationally natural birthing and water birthing are carried out in hospitals, birth centres either stand alone or attached to a hospital or even at home. These births are generally assisted by midwives who are professionally qualified as cnm (certified nurse midwives) or cpm (certified professional midwives) who are trained in midwifery.

In india the natural birthing generally take place in the rural areas for lack of medical facilities and even the trust factor. Most of the rural women still feel comfortable when a traditional midwife is helping her in her birth. In the cities this is gradually gaining ground as many women are aware of their options, they have travelled abroad and even through internet and having read books & articles have acquired knowledge about natural birth & water birth. There are three birth centres which practise both forms of birth in india 1)birth village,cochin 2) healthy mother natural birth center, hyderabad 3) daimaas natural birth & wellness centre, mumbai.

Today's indian women is knowledgeable, well travelled and aware; she is confident and is very clear what she expects of life. Yes, she respects tradition too & has respect for ancient wisdom.this i am not just talking of the urban woman but also of the rural woman who is no more a silent or a "abla naari" an example is bhanwari devi who was raped by upper caste gurjar men from her own village bhateri near jaipur as she opposed child & infant marriage. She fought against her oppressors and inspite of facing ridicule and challenges she won. The formation of "gulabi gang" by sampat pal devi in atarra, banda district, uttar pradesh against oppressive husbands and domestic violence.

So today's women knows what to do with her life & body. We need to stand by her and give her the privilege and dignity to choose the way she wishes to birth. Going natural is the most natural thing to do.

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