

Mother-And-Child Mutualism

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So for the mother's sake the child we dear
And dearer was the mother for the child.

Samuel Coleridge

Sonnet to a friend

Mother And Child (MAC) represent, like Yoni-Lingam and Yin-Yang, a duo of balanced-opposites, one being *sine qua non* for the other. Modern medicine's moronic marvels like IVF, surrogate motherhood, and cloning can succeed only by obeying the foregoing. At Bandra-Mahim junction, in Mumbai, is a large MAC statue declaring a poorly acknowledged truth: *A child gives birth to a mother*. Every child that mother gives birth to, reciprocates the gesture by once again giving birth to the mother. In biological evolution, the shift from oviparity to ovoviviparity, and more particularly viviparity brought the MAC mutualism into sharp focus.

The cliché'-worn, politically customary and medically-mouthed platitude is concern over Mother And Child Health (MACH). But how effective have these exhortations been, the world over? David Werner wrote a classic (now translated into many Indian languages by VHAI) titled *Where There Is No Doctor*. Let us be more specific and think of situations bereft of the obstetrician, the pediatrician, and the GP. As an editorial in *The Lancet* 1972 pointed out, nearly 70 per cent of the world's births occur without *any* medical attention.

Kathleen Vaughan debunked obstetrical indispensability way back in *BMJ*, 1931: "The field-worker, the woman who lives out-of-doors tending to cattle, planting the crops, often knee-deep in cold water in the rice-fields, rowing the heavy boats used for transporting grain, the tent-dwellers, such as nomadic tribes of the North West frontier of India, all these have chil-

dren safely and with no more difficulty than the animals around them. On the other hand, the city dwellers find their confinements increasingly difficult and dangerous for themselves and their offspring." The July-Aug 2008 *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology of India* more than buttresses Vaughan by devaluing, as it were, the import of the much-celebrated APGAR scores vis-à-vis the health of the neonate: "Even a child with low APGAR scores has a 99% chance of not suffering (*sic*) cerebral palsy and over three-quarters of children with cerebral palsy have a normal APGAR score." Healthy growth which is the most important postnatal natural function, occurs on its own and with consummate efficiency *sans* any medical attention in many of the 70% of the world's humans, as best seen in an Ahir or an Afghan. In birth, infancy and adolescence, the less you do the better it is, and the least you do the best it is. It needed the lucrative American genius to spawn Well Baby Clinics, now popular in the poor countries as well, nurturing children with needless do's and don'ts, vitamin supplements and grooming the woman into anxious motherhood. It is a global experience that a check-up clinic is a magical place where a person walks out, an iatrogeny writ large on the wall of every 5-star hospital. The Hinduja Hospital has been offering physical and mental check-ups to children and adolescents, an exercise fraught with phobias and complexes. Our over assertion to MAC is at least a few centuries old. Cadogan writing *Essays upon Nursing and Management of Children* aphorized: "Children, in general, are overclothed and overfed. To these causes, I impute most of their diseases."

We grew up at the KEMH, and part of the curricular UG deal was to conduct 20 deliveries at the Wadia Maternity Hospital. There we saw, and many see, a gross disparity in the MAC mutualism, whereby a pale, tired, young mother with Hb no more than 5 gm per cent, would deliver a babe full-term, normal, pink, with a perfect APGAR score. So the gestational mechanism is awfully loaded in favor of the would-be-child at the manifest expense of the worried, harried, calcium/iron-deficient mother.

So, in India, the M part of MAC merits greater attention. Her psyche needs some semblance of freedom from the outlaw-like in-laws, from a demanding husband whose contribution to the whole game is a miniscule sperm head, and a social creed wherein a moron with XY chromosome is welcome more than a XX Marie Curie in the making. Medicos and conferences, government and NGOs go gaga over nutritional niceties, while there is a much larger issue of a tortured feminine soul in a famished body. Scientific "advances" can snowball into a tyranny for womanhood. Came Barr Body and sex-determination started. That meant selective female feticide so that many a state in India has terrible surplus of males. Came IVF, and childless couples dropped the idea of readymade orphan, and went into an orgy of selfish try at IVF, where till today many an expensive cycle has to be grown through before 1 in 3 succeeds. Both Barr-Body and IVF have been inimical t xx.

The societal fate of the C part of MAC is no better. Instead of assuming that every child, female or male, will walk into a school without the burden of fees or (de-) capitation donations, you witness long parental queues for a mere

admission form. Should your child get in, the tyranny of tuitions bleeds the family white. Then there are boring curricula and boorish teachers, all marks and no merriment, all competition and no camaraderie, and all studies and no sports. You create a fat zombie whose only competence is to punch a computer-key and fondle its mouse. [Editor: And instead of focusing on creating close friendships in school, we introduce the system of changing divisions every year, so that we learn to cope with different people! Firstly in life we should have secure close relationships, from where it is but a step to making many new acquaintances. Schools please hark]

The oft-repeated post-marital question "Any good news?" is to puzzle one of us. When we went into the details the fact emerged that the overexpectant arrival of a pregnancy and a baby was supposed to stabilize the marriage and prevent any possibility of a divorce. So, India's celebrated love of babies is a Fevicol that binds the couple. The child is the bond. If parents part from each other, the child is torn. If they collide the child is crushed. All stabilizing adults who opt for a early baby, have been almost deliberately ignorant of the generalization that most people become parents just because they are physically mature, without having any psychological maturity needed for decent, atonal parenthood.

Sir Allen Head, a British demographer lamented in 1960's that a child is brought into this world without the child's knowledge and consent. And then the child has to swim the unforgiving cross-currents of competitive cunningness, cruelty and killjoyness. MAC Health is truly more than meets the medical eye.

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