

A REVIEW OF TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS ASPECT OF CONTRACEPTION (MANE'Y-HAMAL TADABEER)

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ABSTRACT

There have always been societies or at least important groups within them who have for one reason or another at some period in their history taken steps to limit their progeny. Religious and cultural factors have the potential to influence the acceptance and use of contraception. Religions differ in their stand on fertility regulation. Unani contraception offers an alternative for women who have difficulty with modern contraceptive options or who just want to try a different way. Various drugs and methods are mentioned in classical Unani texts, used thousands of years ago. Therefore, the aim of this article is to review the ancient concept of contraception in context to religion and tradition in different era.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The practice of contraception is as old as human existence. For centuries human have relied on their imagination to avoid pregnancy. The search for effective method has sprung up spontaneously in almost every corner of the world, and has continues through the centuries. Efforts to control fertility have always depended on social factors as much as on research. Religious beliefs have played a large part in the provision or prohibition of contraception. Therefore, the aim of this article is to review the ancient concept of contraception in context to religion and tradition in different era.

Folk Beliefs and Medical Nostrums

One of the first method was the technique of withdrawal (coitus interruptus) which is mentioned in the book of Genesis and in the Talmud¹. It is the most effective of the early methods and is still widely used today. Much less effective technique was to jump up and down after

intercourse to dislodge the semen^{2,3,4,5}. A Greek physician of about 1900 years ago recommended the dual technique: A women was advised to hold her breath during the man's orgasm, presumably on the theory that muscle tension would prevent the semen entering the womb, then to sneeze afterward to get rid of semen. Islamic women used pepper or onion and other substances after intercourse² presumably a primitive attempt to kill the sperm through chemical action. These methods resemble the modern douche. Of all the methods used in the ancient world, the most sophisticated was a mechanical barrier, inserted in advance of sexual intercourse, to prevent sperm from entering the womb. Various substances have been used to form barrier largely mentioned in the Ebers Papyrus from 1550 BC and the Kahun Papyrus from 1850 BC. These Papyrus have within them some of the earliest documented descriptions of birth control⁷. Another early document is the Kahun Gynaecological Papyrus Provide with a fascinating insight into ancient Egyptian gynaecology, contraception, conception techniques and more evidence of man's desire to heal and control

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fertility. The Egyptian Papyrus refer to contraceptive techniques using a plug made of crocodile dung and fermented dough. Some other writes also refer to vaginal plug made of grass, seaweed, gum, honey, acacia, dried figs, mustard seeds, leaves, beeswax or cloth^{4,6}. In India 2000 years ago, a piece of rock salt dipped in oil was used as a plug⁷. In 18th Century, in the writing of Casanova the use of half a lemon is mentioned⁸. The use of oil of cedar or frankincense mixed with olive oil as a spermicidal is prescribed by the Aristotle. The use of a piece of sponge as a mechanical barrier had been discovered about 1800 years ago⁷.

Another kind of barrier method is condom has an interesting history; it was firstly use by women rather than a men⁹. They were loose pouches made of the membranes of animals as mentioned in Roman literature. The Italian anatomist Gabriello Fallopio in 1564 recommended the use of linen sheath as a male condom¹⁰. In addition, one of the Greek physicians suggested to people who want to prevent pregnancy that one should avoid intercourse on the days just before, during and just after menstruation. Later in 1920-1930 the modern Rhythm method is studied by two gynaecologist, Kyusaku Ogino in Japan and Herman Knaus in Austria. They studied ovulation carefully and conclude that it normally occurs from 12 to 16 days before the onset of the menstrual period¹¹. Like all other modern methods, however, it is only a refinement of a very ancient idea. by 1880, contraceptive materials and spermicides were advertised. The first IUD made of silk worm gut was inserted in uterus by Dr Richard richter in 1909¹². Grafenberg in Germany and Ota in japan reported their experience with the intra uterine rings made of copper and silver around 1928¹³. The search for some means of limiting the size of families is far older than the discoveries of science.

CONCEPT OF CONTRACEPTION IN THE UNANI SYSTEM OF MEDICINE:

The glorious of Unani Medicine in which it was formulated as definite branch of study starts with Hippocrates (460-377 B.C.). He contributed a lot to study of abortions and abortifacients. Many pieces of information became basis for modern contraceptive means^{14,15}. He mentioned the value of pennyroyal as a birth control agent with few other herbs. The Hippocratic writings describes a hollow lead tube partially inserted through the cervix into the uterus.

In Ancient Greece, The Father of Botany” Theophrastus” (371-287 B.C) documented the use of silphium plant as contraceptive¹⁶. Aristotle (Arastoo)

384-322 BC was renowned philosopher of Greece. He and Plato in the 4th century advocated the one- child family. Aristotle recommended covering the cervix and vagina with cedar oil⁵. Descoridoos (40-90A.D.) who is referred to as Father of herbal drugs. His book “Kitab al Hashaish”¹⁷ dealt with around 100 herbal drugs which effect semen, contraception, abortion menstruation etc. The descriptions of contraceptive techniques by famous roman physician, Soranus of Ephesus (98-138 A.D.) are viewed as the best in history until modern times. Soranus has often been referred to as the greatest gynaecologist of antiquity¹⁸. He recommended that “one should abstain from coitus in the period which is especially sensitive, that is the time just before and just after the menstruation”⁶. The Procreation theory was put forward by Galen (130-200 A.D.) who was the great Roman Physician¹⁹. He described various drugs which are beneficially used as contraceptives in his treatise. Few of them are *Banjankusht* (*Vitex agnuscastus* Linn.), *Gharab* (*Salix Babylonica* linn) *Na'na* (*Mentha Arvenis* linn), *Qatran*, *Sarkhas*, *Sudab*, *Khabsul hadeed*, *Ghariqoon* and *Hurf* (*Peganum harmala* linn). As mentioned in "ALCANON" written by Ibn Sina 980-1037 A.D, the contraception is mandatory for the young girls who are susceptible to have a complicated and high-risk pregnancy , patients with uterine diseases and females with urinary bladder weakness in which pressure can lead to rupture of urinary bladder and may result in lifelong urine incontinence^{20,21}. The third volume described some drugs like Qatran as a pessary, balsam oil and asfidar (white lead) as local application, pulp of pomegranate and alum as suppository after intercourse , suppository made of pulp of colocynth, white bryony, iron rust, sulphur, scammony and seeds of cabbage, black pepper, dung of elephant, sesame oil, leaves of lablab (ivy), sweet basil juice orally to be used for the purpose of contraception. Paul of Aagenate (676-732 AD) wrote exhaustive book on gynaecology entitled “Kunnash”⁶. Zakariya Rhazi (850-925AD) revived the writings of Hippocrates, Galen. Descoridoos, Rufas, Orebaseos, Paul of Aaegenate, Ibn Sarafeun, Rabban Tabri, Ibn Masawayh, Al Kindi and Hunain bin Ishac etc in his book *Al Hawi Fit Tib*²⁰. He also advocated different techniques of birth control in his book “*Khulasal tajraba*”⁶.

Al Majoosei (d.994 A.D.) said “Although we shouldn't mention drugs which prevent conception, lest they be used by corrupt women, we are obliged to give them some time to women with small uterus or with diseases which might prove fatal if the women conceive and delivers. According to him contraceptive diets like

Amaranthus Gangeticus (Chaulae), *Chenopodium Album (Bathua)*, *Kadu (Cucurbita Moschata)* possess Mizaje Barid (Cold temperament) which can be used as spermicidal. *Inderani* salt, leaves or flower of cabbage, green leaves of rue, rabbit rennet, leaves of *asfidar* (*populus alba* Linn.) have the contraceptive quality^{6,22,23}. In the *Zakhira-e-khawarzam Shahi* by Ismail bin Husain Jurjani (D1135CE) mentioned Sneezing by women after intercourse helps in expelling semen or women should jump to and fro after intercourse so that semen is expelled²⁴. *Hibatullah bin Jami Israili* (D.1198 A.D.) mentioned some contraceptive devices in his *Kitab al Irshad li Masalih al Anfas wal Ajsad*. eg.onion juice as local application before coitus, a suppository made of myrrh, galbanum, common rue, hellebore and leaves of *Aegle Marmeloscorr* or suppository of mint (*Mentha arvenis*) and *Allium Ascalonicum* Linn. after menstruation. It is said that if seeds of broad beans are taken on empty stomach is very useful in preventing pregnancy²⁵. *Ibn Baitar* (1197-1248) ad wrote *Kitab Al Jami Mufradat Al Adwiah Al Aghziya* in which he has given details of more than 1400 herbs and eatables⁵³. Among which 150 drugs are for contraception. There is lot of regimen has been introduced by Unani studies for contraception (*Mane'y Hamal*) like "*MANE'Y HAMAL BIL GHIZA*"(in the forms of oral contraceptive act as spermicidal ,"*MANE'Y HAMAL BIL TADBEER KHUSOOSI*"{*Azl* (coitus interruptus), safe period (rhythm method) and barrier methods like to cover the organ with the help of cloth and *Sesamum* oil} & *MANE'Y HAMAL BIL DAWA*"{*Mudire haiz* (emmenagogue), *Musqite janeen* (abortifacients),*Manay hamal* (antifertility agent), *Mafaside mani* (antispermatogenic agent), *Muzafe baah* (anaphrodisiac) }^{20,21,22,23,26,27} These contraceptives are mentioned in the various dosage forms i.e. *Mumool*, *Firzaja*, *Fatela*, *Shayaf* (types of vaginal pessary), *Tila* (liniment), *Aabzan* (Sitz bath), *Pichkari* or *Zarewiq* (vaginal douche), *Bukharat* (fumigation), *Zimad* (paste) etc.

The first form of contraceptive mentioned by any of the classical writers are "Potions". In the Hippocratic writings, a potion is the only contraceptive described. It is a drink of misy, which could mean either a plant called a truffle or copper from Cyprus; the plant would seem more likely to have been effective, but later writers appear to understand the word as *Coppey*'. It is clearly distinguished from an abortifacient. It is also clearly intended to achieve only temporary sterility; it is said to be effective for one year only

²⁸. A second kind of Contraceptive method familiar to the ancient was a blocking of the entrance of the sperm to the uterus by means of suppository anoint or pessaries. Salve or ointment is the third kind of contraceptive to be applied to the male genitals. Either the ointment is spermicide, or it is intended to function, like the pessaries, to close the uterus on penetration into the vagina^{28,29} Several other Unani physicians described and advocated the use of safe period, *Azl* (coitus interruptus), barrier methods and various oral as well as local contraceptive measures as single drug and compound formulations. some of these Physicians are -**Khan M.A.** recommended that the local application of paste made by 5 gm powder of *Abhal*, *Suddab* and *Natroon* (*Pinus Sylvester*) before coitus on penis act as contraceptive³⁰. *Abhal* (*Juniperus communis*), *Heeng* (*Ferula asafetida*) and *Ushq* (*Dorema ammonicum*) in the form of tablet result in miscarriage³¹

HKM Mohd. Aazam khan in his treatise *Aksee-re-Azam* mentioned that the use of *halelaa* in the form of pessary prevents conception³².

Arzani Mohd. Akbar mentioned *Haldi* as an antiovolatory in his book *Qarabadeene- Qadri*.

Ghongchi surkh as a contraceptive is advocated by **Hkm. Kabeeruddin** in his book *Ifada Kabeer Mufassal Mojazul Qanoon*. *Khayar shambar*, *Kahu*, *Neem*, *Dhak* are few other herbal drugs explored as a contraceptive in Unani literature.

Religious aspects of contraception:Contraception in Jewish Law³³: Female methods of contraception were permitted while male methods were not. Abstinence is prohibited, since it is against the commandment 'be fruitful and multiply' and since it also fails to fulfil the wife's conjugal rights (the *MITZVA* of *ONAH*). Coitus interruptus is forbidden, based on the prohibition of improper emission of sperm, as first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 38 by Er and Onan. The use of 'cup roots' was practiced in the Talmudic period, and was recommended by Mamonides, Kario's codes, and later by various Rabbis.

Roman Catholic Church: In Roman Catholic doctrine, the contraceptive act destroys potential life and violates the principle purpose of marriage, and therefore it is a 'sin against nature'. Abstinence and the rhythm method have been approved by the Pope. In the 5th century writings of Saint Augustine, who formally and unequivocally condemned contraception³⁴.

The Protestant Church: Protestant doctrine has recently permitted the practice of birth control. It was approved by the Lambeth Conference and Anglican Bishop in 1958.

Contraception in Islam³⁵: Islam calls for the provision of protection for both parents and offspring against the hazards of reproduction on the basis of the rule that no one should require to do anything beyond his capacity. God says “God will not burden and soul beyond its power” (Quraan. Surah 2/286). A mother should not made to suffer because of her child, nor should he to whom the child is born be made to suffer because of this child. This concern for the health and life of the mother was so important from the early days of Islam that even abortion in the early weeks of pregnancy was allowed if pregnancy or childbirth was thought to be seriously harmful for the mother's health. Prolonged periods of lactation were also advisable. This is a relatively safe method of contraception and so we can say that this is indirect call for the suitable spacing of childbirth in Islam. God says we have commanded men concerning his parents. His mother carrieth him with weakness upon Weakness. Nor until after two years is, he weaned”. (Surah 31/14). Almost the same meaning is repeated in another Quranic verse which says: “Moreover, we have enjoined on man to show kindness to parents, with pain his mother beareth him; with pain she bringeth him forth: and his weaning is thirty months (Surah 46/15). These two verses are to be taken to mean that the duration of complete lactation is two years. But it can be shorter if it causes suffering to the mother, and in this case wet-nursing can be resorted to. This show again how Islam is keen on ensuring safety from the hazards of reproduction and childbirth. The method of contraception in current use varies in various Islamic countries. The pill is most popular method in most of them. Usually it is the women who resort the contraceptive means. Coitus interruptus and condom are frequently used in Turkey. Sterilization is seldom resorted too. In some countries, as in Turkey, it is illegal. postpartum programmes and mobile teams have been to a limited extent resorted too. The application of IUCD is only allowed as a rule by medical personnel³⁶.

Hinduism: There is no specific religious prohibition to the use of contraceptives.

Buddhism: Buddhist doctrine does not put a stress on procreation. Therefore, birth control methods can be applied.

CONCLUSION

Knowing the past helps you succeed in present. Hence it is obvious that contraception is not new to human kind and it is presumed that the search for contraceptives have been eluded since the birth of human. Religious and cultural factors influence the acceptance and use of contraception. Unani system of medicine comprises safe, effective, acceptable, inexpensive, reversible and simple to administer contraceptive drugs for oral as well as for local application in different forms. These drugs and methods can be an alternative choice for people in order to achieve benefits of contraception.

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