

Some aspects of Vedic embryology

In ancient India fertilization was believed to occur when three conditions are fulfilled, as WINDISCH made clear in *Buddha's Geburt und die Lehre von der Seelenwanderung* (1908): (1) a male and a female join together in a healthy condition, (2) the female is in a fertilizable period (*ṛtú-*), and (3) there is a Gandharva in waiting. The Gandharva enters the female's womb (*ava-kram* 'step(s) downwards, descent [from heaven to the womb]'), then becomes an embryo. The Gandharva seems to function as some form of transmigrating existence. Fertilization, in other words, consists of three elements: father, mother, and some principal existence different from both the father and the mother. WINDISCH analyzed this theme precisely based on Buddhist literature such as the Pāli canon, the Mahāvastu, and other texts. He observed, furthermore, that medical literature (the Caraka-Saṁhitā) presents a similar conception, and therefore we might understand this to have been a standard ontogenetic theory in the classical era. The theory goes back to Yājñavalkya who contributed to the doctrine of death and rebirth in the Upaniṣads, especially in the Bṛhad-Āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad IV.

This concept of embryology can, it seems, be traced to the Rgveda. In VII 33 (the birth of Vasiṣṭha and Agastya) or X 162 (on the prevention of miscarriage), for example, we might find that some principal existence, presumably that of transmigration, enters the womb and becomes an embryo. The brāhmaṇas of each Yajurveda school, moreover, contain the legend that Indra is reborn from the pairing of the sacrifice (*yajñá-*, masculine) and the officiant priests' fee (*dákṣiṇā-*; in the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa *vāc-* 'speech'; both feminine), entering the womb of the gift or the speech. Indra's "entering in" to be compared to the Gandharva's "descent" mentioned above. We can thus trace the development of theological discussion of ontogeny via examination and comparison of the various texts.

This paper examines certain hymns of the Rgveda, brāhmaṇas of the Maitrāyaṇī, Kaṭha- and Kapiṣṭhara-Kaṭha-, Taittirīya-Saṁhitā, and the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa aiming to improve current understandings of concepts related to the fertilization process presented in the Vedas.