DOHADA (PREGNANCY CRAVINGS)*

Jerome H. Bauer

Dohada is a motif in Sanskrit literature, particularly in the religious literature of the Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains. It refers to the cravings of pregnant women, which are often interpreted as transfer of karmic substance (especially by Hindus) or as coordination of two karmic substances (especially by Jains). In literature, the dohada may be used as a stock motif, serving, like dreams, to entertain the monks. The craving of a Buddhist woman may involve auspicious cravings, whereas in a Jain context, dohada stories usually involve dangerous cravings, which may involve auspicious cravings for pious acts.

Examples of auspicious or evil dohada are more numerous. For example, in the Thusa Jataka, Prince Ajatasatru’s mother has a dohada to drink blood from her husband King Bimbisara’s knee, which is satisfied; she gives birth, after an unsuccessful attempt at abortion, to a child who is destined to kill his father and seize his throne. The Vipaka Sutra (a Svetambara Jain canonical text) contains many especially sinister dohada stories.

Dohada stories usually involve some direct or indirect danger to the husband, who must perform heroic deeds to satisfy his wife’s cravings, ensuring a safe and auspicious birth. Sometimes a dangerous dohada is satisfied by trickery, or dohada may be feigned to trick the husband. Dohada stories usually involve inauspicious, dangerous cravings, and dohada stories are more numerous. For example, in the Parisistaparvan, the Machiavellian political theorist Canakya (Kautilya), planning to destroy the Nanda dynasty, searches for a suitable proxy to rule for him. A village chief’s daughter has a dohada to drink the moon, and Canakya promises to fulfill it if the infant is given to him to raise. The dohada is fulfilled when the mother drinks a reflection of the moon, and her son, the future Mauryan emperor, is named Candragupta, “Moon Protected.”

Many stories involve feigned dohada. In the Vidhurapandita Jataka, the queen, wishing to hear the sage Vidhura discourse on the Dharma, feigns dohada. In the Nigrodha Jataka, a woman feigns pregnancy and dohada in order to improve her status in the household.

Cases of inauspicious or evil dohada are more numerous. For example, in the Thusa Jataka, Prince Ajatasatru’s mother has a dohada to drink blood from her husband King Bimbisara’s knee, which is satisfied; she gives birth, after an unsuccessful attempt at abortion, to a child who is destined to kill his father and seize his throne. The Vipaka Sutra (a Svetambara Jain canonical text) contains many especially sinister dohada stories.

Dohada is often satisfied by deceit. In the Kathasaritsagara, Queen Mrgavati has a dohada to bathe in a lake of blood, which is satisfied by her husband, who makes for her a lake of red colored lac. In the Parisistaparvan, the Machiavellian political theorist Canakya (Kautilya), planning to destroy the Nanda dynasty, searches for a suitable proxy to rule for him. A village chief’s daughter has a dohada to drink the moon, and Canakya promises

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Similar tales are found in the world’s folk and popular literature. (See Motif T571, “unreasonable demands of pregnant women”; Thompson 1957: 402-403).

References


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Dohada (Sanskrit), dohala (Pali), dohala (Prakrit, Hindi), doladuk (Sinhalese), “two-heartedness,” is the pregnancy whim, when the will of the foetus influences the moods and desires of the mother. The word is probably derived from Sanskrit (divi + hrda), literally “having two hearts”; from Sanskrit daurhrda, “sickness of heart,” “nausea,” or “evil-hearted”; or perhaps from Sanskrit doha + da, “giving milk.” Dohada is sometimes a euphemism for pregnancy.

The condition of having a second heart, causing vicarious cravings in the mother, is discussed in Sanskrit treatises on medicine and love, and in religious literature, where it is often interpreted as transfer of karmic substance (especially by Hindus) or as coordination of two people’s karma (especially by Jains). In literature, the dohada motif is used as a stock embellishment. For example, many poetic descriptions of spring feature the pregnancy longings of the mother. The foetus influences the moods and desires of the mother. The second heart, causing vicarious cravings, ensuring a safe and auspicious birth. Sometimes a dangerous dohada is satisfied by trickery, or dohada may be feigned to trick the husband. Dohada stories usually involve inauspicious, dangerous cravings, but, especially in a Jain context, may involve auspicious cravings for pious acts.

Examples of auspicious or good dohada are the craving of a Jain woman to hear continuously the Jain teachings, and to spend money for religious purposes, or the craving of a Buddhist woman to entertain the monks.

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