

An Interesting Village Delivery

By

Sister Mary Mercedes, R.N., R.M.

Early one morning a man came to call us to conduct a confinement in one of our neighbouring villages. Hurriedly we went, but the little boy was faster than we, and just as we entered the house, he also arrived. The umbilical cord was not yet separated, and we were about to do the needful when one of the attending women, who held the child in her lap interrupted us and told us not to do anything as otherwise the *Chamarin* who had already helped her, would become angry. Out of curiosity we squatted down just to see how she would cut the cord, etc.

Within a few minutes she came, looking like an old witch, and washed her hands and feet outside the door, and then took ashes and smeared it all along the cord. Then she asked for a "*Kurpi*" (garden tool used to cut weeds!) and for a thread which had been pulled in the most "sterile" manner. She tied the cord loosely, cut it with the "*Kurpi*" and daubed the cut end well with ashes. As the placenta came, she cleared a little place in the room; put the placenta on it, the cord coiled above, on top of which came burning cowdung. You could imagine the agreeable smell!

Now came the mother's turn. She had to undress herself and stand against the wall, the woman kneeling before her pressing and kneading her abdomen from down upwards and above downwards in such a vigorous manner, that the poor girl was just groaning and whincing. After this she had to sit on a small stool, and the *Chamarin* took a filthy rag, soaked it with oil, and introduced it internally, as far as she could reach. On being asked about this strange practice, she answered laconically: "This is to keep her inside cool". The patient was then made to lie flat on her abdomen on a mat, and oil was poured over her

back, enough to "fry" a person! Another vigorous massage followed, not with the hands, but with the legs; the *Chamarin* moving her leg dexterously on the back of the poor girl, from neck to heel, and left to right. Then she was turned round and her abdomen massaged in a similar way. The *Chamarin* explained to us, that the "hard round gola" (ball), meaning the Uterus, had to disappear, and which she could only achieve through such good massages and that sometimes she required 6 days to be successful in it! We laughed and told her, that we could do the same thing, but without harassing the poor girl so much. By now, we really felt a pity for the mother as she lay groaning and we asked how she felt. She replied "Sister, I think, she is nearly killing me!" She was quickly interrupted by the woman who said, "No, she is feeling quite well, only she won't tell". A piece of cloth was then twisted into a rope and her abdomen tied, just as one would tie a wheat-bundle. Next she was made to sit up and then came more oil—this time on her head. At last she could sit down on a plank of wood, and it was the baby's turn. The little fellow was well greased with ghee and then ground mustard was rubbed all over the body. Judging from his shrieks he didn't seem to like it a bit!

At last the torture for mother and child was over, but will be repeated twice a day for 12 days! Throughout this "wonderful" treatment, the *Chamarin* talked of little else, but the "nice saree" she would be getting as a reward for her troubles and efforts to get things "right" again.

How many more years will it take to get these poor village women out of the clutches of the *dais* and *Chamarins* who still exercise such a stronghold in these backward places?