

The Birth of the Goddess

(Labour room)

‘WHAT IS it, Doctor? Is it a boy or girl? Doctor, please tell me!’

‘Will you please shut your mouth for a minute? The doctor is resuscitating your baby!’ the nurse replied angrily.

‘But you can at least tell whether it’s a girl or a boy!’

I didn’t want to answer her. ‘Let me first stitch your perineum, it’s bleeding. The paediatrician is taking care of your baby, he will tell you soon.’

But Sarita knew the answer. It must be a baby girl, that’s why no one was answering.

‘Tell me doctor, is it a baby girl?’

By the time I had finished suturing, her uterus was very well contracted. Now I could tell her. Many a time I had seen in my practice that the new mother would start bleeding profusely as soon as she got the news that she had delivered a baby girl.

‘Sarita, you have given birth to Goddess Laxmi—the goddess of wealth. Who doesn’t want Laxmi?’ I asked tenderly and touched her head softly.



2 I Want a Boy

She started sobbing uncontrollably. The nurses, *aayas*, sweepers and everyone around her began sympathising with her. This was her third girl child.

‘Okay doctor, the baby is all right; breastfeeding can begin as soon as possible. Please explain the immunisation schedule to the attendants,’ the paediatrician instructed and left to attend another call.

I noticed the mother, still crying, not willing to look at her newborn baby. Meanwhile, the nurses and *aayas* were busy cleaning the instruments, floor, labour bed, preparing it for the next delivery.

‘Can’t your attendant bring some clothes for you and your baby?’ the *aaya* shouted. ‘You have been admitted since yesterday; does nobody in your family have the time to bring clothes? Your gown is soiled with blood and urine, how can I shift you?’

‘Doctor, there are no clothes for the baby and it’s getting cold. What kind of irresponsible people they are!’

I felt sick and nauseous as I watched the scene. This was not my first experience of delivering a girl child. I had seen countless young women weep over having another girl. Which baby would want to come into the world unwanted? Therefore, I prayed for the women who carried them. Every day, I prayed, ‘Please God, no girl child again.’ But God didn’t listen to me; perhaps he had a greater design behind what he bestowed us with.

Like a machine, I was writing delivery notes, but my mind kept wandering somewhere else, restlessly. Sunita Amma, the old *aaya* wrapped the baby in a sterile OT sheet and made her wear an OT scrub gown. This was almost a routine in



government hospitals: disappearing attendants, no changing clothes for the delivering mother or the newborn, no food, tea or coffee for the mother after the exhausting hours of labour.

The *aaya* said to me, 'Doctor, I will not give her the OT gown or sheet, as all of them have made it a habit to take these clothes home. The last time the superintendent made me pay for lost OT sheets. Let them be in soiled clothes! If they are this poor, why don't they deliver at home, why come to the hospital? In our times, we had all our deliveries at home. My sister did all my deliveries, she was a birth attendant at a government hospital, once upon a time. These people can't even pay `500 to the home attendant, and look at their audacity, they expect luxury treatment from the hospital. All my five children were born at home. They all are healthy, married now and having kids of their own. In her case, I am not even expecting any tip either! *Mari ne ladki jan di is bar bhi!*'

Aaya was muttering meaninglessly, and I was in no mood to listen to her. 'Please stop it, Amma!' I requested, 'What do you want? You want to leave her in soiled clothes, let her shiver and get sick? For god's sake, cover her with a blanket and wrap the baby in her shawl.'

By now, I assumed that the paediatrician attending the baby or the *aaya* on duty must have informed the relatives about the time of birth and the gender of the baby. I stepped out of the labour room after finishing my notes, called for her people, expecting a cold response as usual. The mother-in-law looked in my direction. She had been speaking with a bunch of women in the waiting area, and all of them had gloomy expressions on their faces.

'God save my son!' she said, in disgust. 'She is a curse on



4 I Want a Boy

him, delivering one girl child after the other. My poor son's life is ruined; how will he bear the responsibility of all these girls? My doors to heaven are closed, and without a grandson, my afterlife is ruined too. She will destroy our generation, our genetic lineage.'

All the family members were grieving in unison, worried about the end of their genetic inheritance—the impending doom. Suddenly, the fattest among them and the fairest, came up with a brilliant, successful idea.

'Don't you worry, please convince your son to remarry. I know a beautiful young girl. She's about fifteen years younger than your son, but don't worry, they are poor and without any resources. They will be happy to have your son as their son-in-law, a government servant with a permanent pensionable job.'

With a sparkle in her eyes, she added: 'I will convince them. Don't worry. With God's grace you will celebrate your grandson's birth next year; have faith in the Almighty.'

They ignored my presence, and went on with their insensitive, inhuman blabbering, as if they were dying to make me feel guilty for delivering a baby girl. I wanted to instil some sense into them, to make them understand that it was not the mother's fault or choice. A bunch of females, who had themselves been through the excruciating experience of labour at some point in their lives were abusing, cursing, and spewing venom at another woman, withholding support when she needed it the most.

Realising nobody was coming forward to help the patient, I paid for her tea and biscuits, and requested the nurse to feed the baby with lactose formula, left by one of the previous patients. After an hour, my shift was about to get over and



there was a lot of work which had to be done before that.
I gulped my cold tea, and quickly began wrapping up the
remaining rounds.