

It's labour minus pain as hypnobirthing comes to India

Divya A | TNN

New Delhi: Saloni Zutshi was terrified of labour just like any mother-to-be. But on November 4, she surprised herself when she gave birth to her first baby in a pain-free delivery. She is so thrilled she she wants to "do it all over again". While this Delhi mother is extraordinary in wanting to repeat labour, she is also the first in the country to use hypnobirthing, a new technique that makes childbirth easier.

The term 'hypnobirthing' may conjure up an image of a hypnotist standing in front of a hapless woman with a swinging pendulum. But it is actually a combination of relaxation, breathing and visualisation methods.

Already popular in the West — celebrities such as Hollywood actress Jessica Alba have opted for it — the technique has just come to India. It is fast gaining ground. "Two of my patients are taking hypnobirthing classes," says Dr Ameet Dhurandhar, a Mumbai-based gynaecologist. Both are expected to deliver at month's end at Bandra's Chrysalis Hospital.

"Hypnobirthing is the use of self-hypnosis to achieve maximum relaxation, comfort and relief during childbirth," explains Divya Deswal, the gynaecologist and certified hypno-therapist who handled Saloni's delivery.

But didn't Saloni and her husband have any reservations at all about using a method untried in India? Yes, at first, but their desire for a natural birth made them choose hypnobirthing. "Caesareans have become very common now but we wanted Saloni to have a natural birth. So when we heard about a hypnobirthing workshop in Mumbai, we attended and learnt about this new technique from Dr Deswal. But it was only after we read up on it and were confident that we said yes," says Saloni's husband and birthing partner Vasant Goel. The couple attended classes and were given books and tapes to practise at home.

Deswal, who's been certified by the Hypnobirthing Institute in New Hampshire, USA, admits that it took some time to convince the couple. "I assured them that there would be a gynaecologist on stand-by, in case of any emergency."

When the time came, Saloni stayed calm. "We had dimmed the lights and played soothing music as Vasant whispered the hypno prompts to her. After just three hours of labour, Saloni gave birth," says Deswal.

Success hinges on preparation so that when the time comes, a woman is actually looking forward to giving birth rather than dreading the pain. This is what happened with 28-year-old Saloni, who works as a researcher with the United Nations Development Programme on HIV/AIDS. "The technique is based on the power of suggestion," Marie Mongan, founder-director of the Hypno-Birthing Institute, told TOI by email. The method is based on English obstetrician Grantly Dick-Read's 1944 manual '*Childbirth Without Fear*'. Dick-Read said that hypnosis during labour helps women break what he described as the "fear-tension-pain syndrome". Once contractions start, fear kicks in as a reflex, causing blood to flow away from the uterus to muscles in the legs. The reduced blood flow causes the uterus to cramp, resulting in pain. So, if women could only relax, they would have less pain, more effective contractions



PAINLESS LABOUR? Hypno-therapist Divya Deswal (centre) holds baby Anaadyanta, flanked by her proud parents Saloni and Vasant Goel. The baby was born using hypnobirthing, a method which helps in an easy labour

and shorter labour.

That's where hypnosis helps. "It allows a woman to enter a state of deep relaxation. The feeling is similar to daydreaming or when one is lost in a book or movie," explains Mongan. A review of patients who had used hypnobirthing was published in the British Journal of

Anaesthesia in 2004. The review suggested that there was evidence of a reduced need for pharmacological analgesia. A controlled trial is currently under way in Australia, which is seeking conclusively to prove that hypnosis can make a significant difference to women in pregnancy and labour.

Hypnosis during labour helps women break the fear-tension-pain syndrome. Once contractions start, fear kicks in as a reflex, causing blood to flow away from the uterus to muscles in the legs. The reduced blood flow causes the uterus to cramp, resulting in pain. If women would relax, they would have less pain, effective contractions and shorter labour

"The method has been gaining acceptance in the US, where there is a growing trend of moving towards natural birthing. Of the 1,059 cases that came to us between October 2005 and January 2008, as many as 80% were from the US," says Kathie Dolce, who works at the Hypnobirthing Institute and is as-

sistant professor, paediatrics, at the University of Colorado.

Dr Urvashi Sehgal, whose hospital was used for the hypobirth, says she had no reservations at all about the procedure. "Doctors should understand that hypnobirthing is not a parallel medical procedure, it simply eases the labour. It also eliminates the use of drugs to hasten labour. If used in combination with water birthing, as was done for Saloni, it gives wonderful results."

Gynaecologists who use conventional delivery methods don't seem averse. Dr Asha Sharma, senior gynaecological consultant at Delhi's Rockland Hospital, says, "Such positive techniques can help check the rise in C-sections which more and more women are choosing over natural births as they get very stressed about labour and obstetricians don't have the time and patience to address those fears."

Hypnobirthing helped Vasant and Saloni tackle those fears and bring baby Anaadyanta into the world without pain. Could it herald the birth of a whole new order for Indian women?