



Practicing Child Birth Rituals: Reproducing Motherhood and Patriarchy

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Abstract: This paper seeks to investigate the birth rituals described in Hindu scriptures and the indigenous birth rituals performed by the Bengali community in order to comprehend the implicit value system they embody. The rituals' ingrained value system is viewed primarily in two categories- first, the conditioning of women for motherhood through birth rituals and, second, the extent to which these rituals sustain patriarchy. This socialisation through birth rites contributes to a woman's social and self-identification as a mother. To analyse these processes, attempts are undertaken to examine birth rites in the social life of Bengali folk culture and in Hindu scripture sources. This study will concentrate solely on Hindu birth rites found in scriptural texts and folk birth rituals performed by Hindus. A field study was also conducted in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of traditional ceremonies.

Keywords: Birth Rituals, Socialisation, Social Change, Motherhood, Patriarchy

Received : 24 October 2022

Revised : 20 November 2022

Accepted : 05 December 2022

Published : 23 December 2022

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Sharma, R. (2022). Practicing Child Birth Rituals: Reproducing Motherhood and Patriarchy, *Society and Culture Development in India*, 2: 2, pp. 339-353. <https://doi.org/10.47509/SCDI.2022.v02i02.08>

Introduction

According to Van Gennep (1960), rituals are the foundation of social organisation, and the social structure is derived from rituals. Rituals foster cooperative existence so long as they have a shared symbolic significance within a society. Despite ongoing social change, rituals serve a crucial role in integrating society. Almost all communities practice rites of passage, and the rituals are performed in both religious and nonreligious ways. For a culture like India, where religious fervour predominates, every ritual activity is regarded as a crucial facet of society and a vital component of its structure (Van Gennep, 1960). Rites of passage like birth ritual, initiation, marriage and death rituals are the “ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally

well defined” (Gennep, 1960, p. 3). How rites of passage or rituals contribute to the socialisation of identity development has been the subject of scholarly discussion. According to Jenkins (2000), socialisation is the fundamental category that makes interaction possible, organises social life, and teaches one how to engage social life. Rajbali Pandey (1949) also underlines that rituals aid in the moral, social, spiritual, and cultural growth of the individual. Rituals serve the purpose of socialisation by emphasising the formation of a certain identity in conjunction with prescribed behaviour. Similarly, birth ceremonies transform women from physical beings to social beings, from women to mothers. By means of these rituals, which are socially established and practiced, a wife or daughter-in-law acquires the identity of a mother. Jenkins (2000) says that an individual is not alone responsible for the formation of their self-identity; rather, it is a reciprocal process. The first is self or group identification (internally focused), while the second is external classification (externally oriented). The performance of the birth ritual assists women in building both a “personal image” and a “public image,” thereby creating an identity, in this case that of a mother.

Rituals lay the path for socialisation in which regular behaviour patterns are established. Collins and Lewis (2008) believe that the process of socialisation not only transmits norms of good behaviour, but also establishes consequences for the individual if their behaviour does not reflect the norms. Internalisation of norms is a fluid process that is continuously interwoven with the formation of a person’s identity. Consequently, socialisation is a process that never ends. The primary agents of socialisation are always members of the family or clan. The family also transmits its ideals through a variety of rituals including symbols and enigmatic messages. The norms are embedded in the rituals and ceremonies that an individual participates in throughout his lifetime. Using in-depth research into the practice of birth rituals, this paper attempts to analyse a method for uncovering these signals hidden in the rituals and the implicit value system embedded in them, as well as a series of myths that obfuscate these messages. Following this, one can have a greater understanding of how the group ensures its members adhere to the assigned behaviour through rituals.

This paper seeks to investigate the birth rituals described in Hindu scripture and the indigenous birth rituals performed by the Bengali community in order to comprehend the implicit value system they embody. The rituals’ ingrained value system is viewed primarily in two categories- first, the conditioning of women into motherhood through birth rituals, and second, the extent to which these rituals sustain patriarchy. This socialisation through birth rites contributes to a woman’s

social and self-identification as a mother. To analyse these processes, attempts are undertaken to examine birth rites in the social life of Bengali folk culture and in Hindu scripture sources. Therefore, a full analysis of pre-natal and post-natal rituals is studied to demonstrate how birth rituals efficiently socialise a woman towards motherhood. This study will concentrate solely on Hindu birth rites found in scriptural texts and folk birth rituals performed by Hindus. A field study was also conducted in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of traditional ceremonies. The comparison is conducted between the two in addition to the alterations that have been incorporated. The current investigation incorporates both primary and secondary data. The study's scope has been limited to the city of Siliguri in the North Bengal region of West Bengal. Eighty women were investigated to shed light on the modern state of birth rituals and related difficulties. Systematic and snowball sampling was used to select the sample. The chosen respondents represented a variety of castes and classes. In addition to interviews, the method of participatory observation was also applied. Participation in the birth rituals helps to generate more detailed information.

Rituals as a Means of Socialisation of Motherhood

Women's experiences as mothers are generally overlooked, as pointed out by Maushart (1999). Although becoming a mother is a significant life event, it is often overlooked in favour of celebrating the birth itself. She also points out that although having a child is a life-altering experience, being a mother is generally unseen in society. Her research is grounded mostly in twentieth-century American western culture. However, in India, we might be able to make a different case. In ancient societies like India, where festivals are held for every occasion, motherhood is honoured with a number of ceremonies and observances that are more about the community than the individual. It's a big, extended family event in which the women play a central role. The socialisation of motherhood is discussed in relation to birth rituals in the next section. The article intends to examine the role of the mother or mother-to-be in the rituals surrounding the process of giving birth.

Garbhadhana- Beginning with the Garbhadhana, or first birth ceremonies, which are practiced by Hindus, has been covered in depth by Rajbali Pandey in his book "Hindu Samskara". Through the rite of garbhadhana, a man implants his sperm or seeds into a female. Although there are several interpretations in the various texts on the day of conception, the majority of people hold that the four to sixteenth nights after the termination of the monthly cycle are the most auspicious

times to conceive. The farther the samskara is from the monthly course, the more meritorious a child is. A boy who is conceived on the fourth night is typically poor, short-lived, and of poor health. A girl who is conceived on the fifth night is thought to have only female offspring when she grows up; on the sixth night, a mediocre son is conceived; a girl conceived on the seventh night will be barren as an adult; on the eighth night, a boy who is conceived grows up to be a lord or a prosperous one; and on the ninth night, an auspicious woman is believed to be conceived. A boy conceived on the ninth night grows up to be knowledgeable, whereas a girl conceived on the eleventh night matures into an agnostic woman. When a boy is conceived on the twelfth night, a best man is born; on the thirteenth night, an adulterous woman is conceived; on the fourteenth day, a boy who is religiously grateful, self-aware, and firm in his vows is conceived; on the fifteenth day, a woman who is the mother of many sons and who is completely devoted to God is conceived; and finally, on the sixteenth day, a boy of all the best qualities is conceived. It is strictly prohibited for partners to have sexual relations during a woman's menstrual course (Pandey, 1949). Here, it should be highlighted that menstruation is seen as unfavorable for the objective of creating a being. Women have been subjected to discrimination on the issue of menstruation for a very long time, and they are still bound to a number of taboos related to menstruation under the guise of cleanliness and pollution.

Each specific day following menstruation has been designated for developing a specific type of child's personality. The female child was conceived on an odd day, whereas the male child was conceived on an even night. The quantity of semen and menstrual blood was thought to be a determinant of the child's sex. Parents may choose to raise their children in accordance with their desires. Once more, the desire of a male child is presented in the most artistic ways. It is unmistakably stated that there are only two days available for the birth of a meritorious girl kid, although there are numerous favourable days for the birth of a male child. Inden and Nicholas (1977) provide a good explanation of the theory behind the belief in the conception of males and females on odd and even days. The ratio of male and female substances, such as semen (beeja) and uterine blood (artava), is supposed to influence the child's sex. On even days, semen is stronger than uterine blood; on odd days, uterine blood is stronger than semen. Male offspring would be conceived if semen predominated, and female offspring would result if uterine blood predominated. Hermaphrodites, or people with both the male and female reproductive systems, are born when there is an equal amount of blood and semen in the mother.

These rites are controlled by duties and prohibitions for both genders. In addition to demanding compliance, it also threatens sins against those who do

not obey. One who does not approach his wife even when he is in good health is responsible for committing abortion. Woman, who did not bath and approach her husband, would become a swine in her next life and she can even be abandoned if the abortion took place. According to Pandey (1949), these compulsions are a social condition from a time when having more children was thought to be beneficial for the family politically and economically. Being numerically dominating was crucial in the initial stages, therefore people sought to expand. They prayed for boys who would number at least ten. Religious approach was equally vital to having children, in addition to political and economic approaches. The father in heaven would be happier the more children there were. Children were the only way to satisfy an ancestor's obligation, and it was considered sinful for a family to disband. These were the prerequisites that made the rite of *Garbhadhana* a required ceremony. Time brought about changes in social, religious, and ideological situations. When they multiplied, there was no longer a social or political requirement for ten sons in every home. The fascination of heavenly pleasure by begetting many sons began to become less important than salvation that could be achieved from the moral life of the individual. As a result, the requirement to visit their wives once a month loosened up and eventually vanished altogether. The prayers for ten boys were still included in the verses after the birth of one son, when they ceased to be effective. Later, it was asserted that having just one son is sufficient for a parent to qualify as *Putrin* (having sons) and fully settle his ancestor's debt.

One could claim that the *Garbhadhana* ceremony only exists in the text as a prenatal rite. According to the investigation, the rite didn't actually exist. With the exception of one instance, where two respondents revealed some understanding of a ceremony she was familiar with, terminology knowledge was similarly lacking. She was a converted Vaishnavite and claimed that *Garbhadhana* was preached as a prenatal ritual in ISKCON temple where she was a regular visitor. The statements were confirmed in an interview with the preacher Bhaktashakti Prabhu. However, he rejected any gender bias in the rite, stressing that all genders were equal in the eyes of the Almighty. Despite not being a prevalent cultural practice, we can observe that both spouses have equal responsibility for the performance in this ceremony. It demonstrates both the mother's and the father's obligation to have the brightest child possible within the allotted days. Therefore, *Garbhadhana's* characteristic is the socialisation of both fatherhood and motherhood.

Pumsavana- *Pumsavana's* rite comes after *Garbhadhana*. *Pumsavana* was commonly considered to be the ritual that produced male children. On this occasion, Vedic ceremonies were recited that mentioned *Pumanor Putran* (a male) and a

favour of a son's birth. Simply put, the *Pumsavana* is a ritual performed to accelerate the birth of a male child. Typically, it takes place in the third or fourth month following pregnancy. One of the most notable aspects of this Samskara was that it was carried out during a period when the moon was in a masculine constellation, which was thought to favour the birth of a male child from astrological point of view (Pandey, 1949; Inden & Nicholas, 1977; Naraindas, 2009). Nariandas (2009) elaborated on the therapeutic effects of pumsavana performances. The banyan tree is said to treat a number of ailments that might occur during pregnancy. Later, he also added that while this may not lead to the production of male children, it unquestionably promises a feasible and promising one. The ritual engages mother with her kin member in a set up that focuses on anticipatory socialisation towards motherhood. According to Inden and Nicholas (1977) this ritual is no longer performed by the Bengali Hindus as a separate ritual. Depending on the source from the ethnographic research done, this ritual cannot be said to have a basis on the ground in the present context and not seen to be practiced by the Bengalis. However, according to Harish Naraindas (2009) among his Tamil informants the ritual was still performed.

Simantonnayana- Simantonnayana can alternatively be regarded as the rite of the expectant mother's "hair parting." There are many different interpretations on how this ritual should be performed, and whether it should be performed in the modern era is also debatable. Inden and Nicholas (1997) assert that this practice facilitates a simple delivery of the child. It must be carried out either in the sixth or eighth month. Its attributes have symbolic significance. Similar to how the husband marks his wife's parted hair with vermilion in the marriage ritual to symbolically effect marriage intercourse, the husband does the same in this ritual to symbolically effect a smooth delivery by parting her hair with auspicious and fertile objects like unripe figs and *dharba* grass. The bonding and procreation of husband and wife are also emphasised. The process of shifting the focus from the husband and wife's wellbeing, to the wellbeing of their child, who concretely embodies and represents their one body relationship, begins with the wife preparing for a smooth birth (Inden & Nicholas, 1977).

Rajbali Pandey (1949) stated a different goal from Inden and Nicholas (1977), who claimed that the goal of this *Samskaras* was somewhat superstitious and partially practical. The superstitious explanation was based on the widespread notion that pregnant women were more susceptible to evil eye threats. It was believed that the evil demons were always in the opportunity to suck the blood of the child in the womb especially during the first pregnancy. As a result, the *Simantonnayana* rite

was done to drive away all evil spirits. The physiological expertise of the Hindus, who first introduced this ceremony, provided the practical justification. The brain of the foetus begins to develop around the fifth month, thus the mother must exercise extreme caution to speed up this process and minimise any physical trauma to the foetus. And the separation of the hair highlighted this fact. Another practical goal, according to Pandey (1949), was to make the expectant mother cheerful. To achieve this goal, husbands adopted tactics that vastly deviated from Inden and Nicholas' assertion, such as parting and hair dressing (1977). Further Petitot (2007) asserted that part of this ritual was also to satisfy the wants and cravings of the mother as if the unsatisfied mother died during childbirth, she might also return to haunt them as *prêt* (ghost). Albeit the ritual of *Simatayana* is not practiced among the Bengali respondents, a similar ritual with similar purpose is practiced, that is much common among the Bengali community.

Sadh- The folk ritual of *Sadh* which is a pre-natal ritual is widely prevalent among all castes and class, though the degree of the observance may differ. According to Bose who has worked extensively on the cultural life of Hindu Bengali says *Sadh* can also be understood as a “gratification of craving”, which is performed at the seventh or eighth month and it may be repeated during each pregnancy. Here the bodily needs of the expectant mother are fulfilled by husband's mother and other females with gifts of clothing and choice of food (Bose, 1929). While other scholars point out a different characteristic that emphasises on symbolism of this ritual gives importance to the union and fertility between the husband and the wife (Inden & Nicholas, 1977). In the field work done the ritual of *Sadh* has more engraved details attached to it. *Sadh* is divided into two parts where different place of performance and different people in kinship are present. It is practiced at both the husband's as well as in the woman's own natal family. First *Sadh* is carried out on the fifth month of pregnancy, which is termed as *Pancamitra*. A small ceremony is carried out. ‘*Panchagarba*’ (a sacred drink) is essential for the ritual. This mixture is made out of five essential ingredients, containing milk, honey (*modhu*), clarified butter (*ghee*), liquid jiggery, yoghurt (*doi*). The mixture may sometimes differ in ingredients being replaced either by a banana or *gau mutra* (cow urine).

Panchagarba- is a dish that represents the semen. It is thought that consuming a symbolic food representing semen aids in the birth of male children. Nicholas and Inden (1977) provide this explanation of the symbolic food, but the respondents have an alternative explanation. Majority of the respondents denied any such gender preference and believed that *panchagarba* helped to purify the body. It was also noticed that the meaning of the symbols of the sacred objects had changed or was

understood in accordance with the present ideology. Going through the explanation given by Lynn Bennet (1983) we can say that pregnancy is ritually recognised after the fifth or sixth month, when the life breath (*sas*) is believed to have entered the embryo. The women then become “two-bodied” and are barred from participating in the religious ceremonies, especially memorial rituals for the ancestor spirits (*Sraddha*) (Bennett, 1983). The following *Sadh* is performed in the seventh month, known as *Sattammitta*. This ritual, similar to *Pancamittra*, begins with a morning bath involving the application of turmeric paste to the body, followed by a twelve-hour fast. These rites are performed primarily for the health of both the expecting mother and the unborn child. In an interview, Birla Paul, the health in-charge of a health centre, deemed the practice of these rites to be unhealthy for both the mother and the kid, as the mother is forced to fast until the ritual begins, which often consumes half a day. However, despite her opposition to the *Sadh* rite, Birla Paul carried out the ceremony in her *Sadh*. During this time period, numerous ceremonies and rituals are performed. New clothing, jewellery, bangles, and numerous other goods are brought for the pregnant woman. These goods are typically presented by the family of the expectant mother. Cecilia Van Hollen (2003) discovered the identical practice of bride’s family gift-giving in Tamil Nadu. She viewed the practice of gift-giving by the bride’s family as an occasion to support the bride’s status in her family of procreation, so placing a huge financial burden on the bride’s parents. Despite the fact that on the ground it was discovered that both families of orientation and procreation were accountable for meeting the needs of the ritual in their whole. In addition, carrying out the ritual of *Sadh* was mostly the duty of her husband’s family.

Adding to the discussion, a short ceremony is performed in *Sadh* to foretell the gender of an unborn child. Two objects, *seel* (often a circular-rectangular rock used for grinding spices) and *deep* (a little mud lamp), symbolise a boy and a girl, respectively. Both symbolic objects are placed on the ground. Following this, a large bowl (*patra*) conceals both objects. The pregnant woman must select between the two *patra*. If she chooses the *patra* with *seel*, it is believed that the foetus is a boy, and if she chooses the bowl with a *deep*, a girl is anticipated. The belief in the outcome of this particular ritual is weak, given the majority of women claimed to have received diverse outcomes. After the accomplishment of this rite, *seel* is placed on her lap, where she displays maternal tenderness, before being passed on to the other mothers participating in the ceremonies, who do the same, pretending that *seel* is their child. Though they do not agree that they prefer a specific gender, this particular rite with *seel* and *deep* is systematised in such a way that it again symbolically demonstrates a preference for the male child, albeit with different connotations; for example,

when showing affection to the *seel* on the lap, the *seel* is not viewed as a son but as a child. This practice may be tied to James Frazer's (1958) idea of sympathetic magic, sometimes known as the "rule of similarity" or "like produces like." The employment of *seel* as the recipient of care and affection demonstrates the concept that "like produces like" in action. It is anticipated that the effect of the mothers' affection for their young will be comparable. Typically, imitation employs artifacts such as effigies, fetishes, and puppets to produce a certain effect on the environment of the people, and sometimes on the people themselves (Frazer, 1958). Here, the object serving as the puppet is a *seel* which implicitly represents a male infant.

Jattakarma- Jatakarma stands as one of the significant rituals where the rites are done by the father when the child is physically separate from the mother yet connected by the umbilical cord. Inden & Nicholas (1977) in their analysis of the Bengali culture stated that the actual performance of Jatakarma was carried after the child is born and before the naval cord has been cut and also before the mother feeds the child with milk, the father offers food to his ancestor and then enters into Atur-Ghar (A separate hut made especially for the delivery of the child) where the child has been born and views his face for the first time. With powdered rice he cleanses the tongue of the child and then with a piece of gold along with honey and clarified butter, simultaneously chanting mantras into his ears. This part of the ritual is termed as *medhājanana*. Apart from eliminating inauspicious effects of the parents which the child might have acquired from them it also gives the quality (*guna*) of intelligence to the child. The second rite that follows is called the *āyūṣya-karma* which brings long life to the child as his father utters some *mantras* into his ears, the father then asks the mid-wife to cut the cord and finally he is fed with breast milk. The period of untouchability starts after the umbilical has been severed. At this moment the child is separated from his mother, even after becoming a separate entity he is still believed to share the same body as his parents, which is because his body contains the particles of both their mother and father. Hence the boy is believed to bear a resemblance to his father and a daughter to her mother. Thus, same body relationship is established in concrete terms by the representation of parent child relationship. Among the fieldwork undertaken in Siliguri, it was discovered that the common people did not practice Jatakarma. The fact that the vast majority of births occur in hospitals may be the explanation for its poor performance. The rules and facilities of the government have rendered home births virtually impossible. Consequently, this ceremony has lost its relevance due to the shift in childbirth patterns. Even after birth, children are surreptitiously fed honey in institutions, despite the fact that the honey's symbolic significance has

altered. It represents the boy or daughter's wish to have a soft voice, speak lightly, and sound as sweet as honey.

Cha-Sashti-*Cha-shasti* is another obligatory traditional practice performed on the sixth day following the birth of a child, alongside *Sadh*. This practice is widespread among Bengalis. In Bengali culture, *Sashti* is the goddess responsible for the health and longevity of children. This rite is performed within the confinement of the room. The majority of the ceremony consists of the mother holding the kid in her lap. A feast is prepared for the invited relatives and guests. This ceremony is done on both the mother and her kid, regardless of the gender of the child. Keeping a mud lamp blazing during the night is however the responsibility of both partners. The light from the mud lamp can enable visibility to the goddess *Sashti*, allowing her to write the child's finest fate without error. According to Sukumari Bhattacharya (1990), women's *Sashti*-related vows increase their fertility because she is the highest child deity and protects the infant from all dangers.

Suddhikaran- Given that birth, like death, is one of the most dramatic declarations of man's participation in the organic processes of life that govern *Samskara*, it is consistent with the Hindu worldview that birth should cause terrible pollution. However, this pollution only affects the new mother. The child has not yet fully activated its *Karma* and entered *Samskara*; hence, the typical rules of purity and pollution do not apply to it. However, this does not imply that the infant has no *karma* (Bennett, 1983). This period of impurity ends after the performance of the ritual called *Suddhikaran* or *Surja Pooja*. This entire period is known as *sūtikāśauca*. Throughout this period the mother is kept in a special parturition hut (*sūtikā-grha*) also known as *Atur Ghar* in folk language. *Atur-Ghar* was constructed for the purpose of delivering the child although in the present days they are kept in the separate room which is not outside the house but inside. The period of confinement depends on the gender of the child. The concept of such purification rites is significant in the examination of diverse cultures by numerous researchers. Robert Redfield (1949) in his study in Tepoztlan, a Mexican hamlet, analysed a few rituals upon the birth of the kid, where he revealed that the new mother and the other women who are caring for her must take a ritualistic bath every week until the mother is in a separate bed. Pranee Liamputtong (2009) investigated the Hmong culture in Australia, which likewise observes a thirty-day period of seclusion. Inden and Nicholas (1977) stated that in Bengali culture, sharing the same dwelling or living together generates specific kinship relationships. Consequently, residents maintain a time of impurity. Few respondents in the field reported that they were treated poorly because of the concept *janamasauca* (impurity due to

birth). They shared their experience and informed that they were asked to leave a rental house when they were pregnant because it could cause serious pollution to the place and to the landlords. Despite the fact that many scholars have stated that a simple understanding of purity and contamination cannot be applied to the study of the period of confinement. There are several degrees, such as health and hygiene that can serve as the focal point of this analysis as explained by Harish Naraindas (2007). The symbolic meaning among the people serves a basis attached with severe pollution caused by birth. Widely practiced period of confinement was twenty-one days of confinement that has to be maintained if a male child is born and if a female child is born thirty days of confinement is maintained. The period of confinement varies widely and depends on many factors like caste and place of residence (if they reside on rent then they reduce the period of confinement), and forms of social support.

Significance of the Eunuch - According to M. Michelraj (2015), the *hizras* had a significant part in the royal courts of the Rajas, but once the British branded them as criminals, their professional standing fell while their social significance grew in the ceremonial life of the society. In Indian culture, the most prominent traditional function of the *hijra* is to perform upon the birth of a child. The birth of a kid, especially a boy, is a momentous occasion and cause for celebration. On this joyous occasion, the *hijras* bestow blessings upon the kid and the family and sing and dance for the family, their friends, and their neighbours (Nanda, 1999). Finally, they pass their hands over the newborns to bless them with the potential to produce a new life by fathering numerous boys and continuing the family's lineage, which they lack. Sons are blessed to become engineers, surgeons, and business tycoons, whilst daughters are blessed to become "Laxmi," the "goddess of wealth," and to marry into a wealthy family. Therefore, there is either direct or indirect socialisation of gender roles. In addition, when there is a male child, a higher fee is charged during payment collection. There are other rituals that follows like *Niskarma* (the first outing), *Churakarna* (tonsure ceremony), *Karnavedha* (boring of ears), *Naamkarna* (name giving), *Anna-prashana* (rice feeding), after the birth of the child. Here the focus of the ritual is the child itself. As it is clear by the performance of the above ritual that expectant mother or the mother is the main performer in the ritual even shortly after the child is born. Only *Sadh* among the folk rituals and *Simantayana* among the Scriptural rituals focus on the wellbeing of the mother and rest all the rituals are for the child. Therefore, through rituals a woman is socialised to be a mother who has defined social duties and obligations. A social value is transmitted that her supreme duty is to nurture her children throughout even before herself. The

presence of the societal members in the conduct of the ritual gives out the meaning that compliance towards her children is both social and religious.

Birth Rituals as Vehicles of Patriarchy and Reproducing Motherhood

According to Rothman patriarchy is “any system of male superiority and female inferiority”. There are many rituals which provide the instances of male supremacy over female. However, the role of the father in the rituals cannot be denied. Most of the rituals of the great tradition like *Grabhadhana*, *Pumsavana*, *Simantayana* are not performed by the Bengali people. But the case of *Garbhadhana* has seen some changes due many socio-political and cultural factors. The matter of great concern is that whether these rituals were ever in practice in the ritualistic life of the Bengalis, or they only remained restricted to the sacred books of Hindu rituals. However, Inden and Nicholas (1977) have claimed that few rituals like *Pumsavana* and *Simantayana* were performed among the Bengalis in nineteenth and twentieth century. The genesis of this question arises from the findings. The study shows that the common Bengali people were not conscious even with the terminology of the rituals. Instead, pre-natal rituals like the *Sadh* were performed extensively by them as a compulsory Bengali folk pre-natal ritual. The ritual of *Garbhadhana* in Hindu scriptures promotes the birth of the male child extensively, although in practicality the performance of this ritual is a big question. Even if it gains its revival in the concerned area through *Vaisnavism* the biasness of gender is refuted altogether. The concern of the expectant mothers or mothers only lies in accomplishing an ideal birth which is mostly medically guided by their gynecologists and least bothered about the gender of the child as reported by the respondents.

In the case of *Pumsavanam* also the practice stands to be very doubtful. This ritual was not part of Bengali folk culture. One may criticise this scriptural ritual for its biasness as it is performed to produce the male child. Yet scholars argue that the performance of this ritual has medicinal benefits as well (Naraindas, 2009). This may not necessarily result in a male child production; although it indubitably produces a healthy child. In *Simanatayana* though the ritual is performed on the expectant mother the roles of the husband were over everything to satisfy the wishes and desires of his wife. The fulfillment of the wishes is considered to be so significant that the birth of an unhealthy child or even an abortion is held responsible for not satisfying the desire. There were also other rules that after six months the husbands were supposed to avoid cropping hair, coition, pilgrimage and performing *Sraddha* were prohibited, pairing nails, joining war, building a new home, going abroad,

marriage in the family and bathing in a sea were to be avoided. The conduct of all these activities may shorten the life of the pregnant women. Thus, it could be said that though there was no direct socialisation in the form of rituals conducted on the would-be father, but there were many social, economic, moral obligations on the father. *Simantonnayana* only remained confined to texts and was not performed by the Bengalis in the present days. Though there always existed a sense of patriarchy in the rituals conducted but there were many instances where change had occurred, and patriarchy was less visible. The worship of the Goddess *Sasthi* also showed the supremacy of the female Goddess over the male God, although at the same time it also showed that only women could understand the child and could be the better nurturer and protector than the male counterparts thus incurring more duties on the mother to look after her children. The use of the term of impurity or impure as used by many scholars to address *asuaca* caused by the birth may be contested. The period of untouchability might be practiced for the purpose of hygiene and safety for both the mother and the child. The mother and the child both are physically vulnerable from the environment outside, and people might be the carriers of germs that may affect the health of both the mother and the child. Building separate room outside the house called *Atur-Ghar* for parturition can also be explained outside the preview of purity and pollution. During an operation in the hospitals, for example, the way patients are taken to the operation theater for various major medical reasons, in the same way a mother giving birth to the child needs medical attention and a clean environment where there is limited access. Moreover, when she is kept away from the kitchen, she is also given rest from the household chores. Although the understanding of impurity caused due to birth is strong among the folks and it cannot be denied that people who specifically lived in rented houses faced problems.

Janmadin (Celebration of Birthday)—The celebration of the birthdays exists in Indian culture in the form of celebration of *Janmastmi* (the birthday of Lord Krishna), celebration of *Ramnavami* (the birthday of lord Ram), and even *Buddha Jayanti* among Buddhist. Celebrating birthdays have become a common phenomenon throughout the world. In India too, celebration of the birthday is not an uncommon event and has become a part of Indian culture. A sociological event can always be traced in all social events. Therefore, in the celebration of birthdays too we can find a certain degree of dominance of males in the family when the first cake is fed to the father and then to the mother. This action is quickly carried out without making it seem as a sociological phenomenon and mostly done subconsciously, although it carries a great sociological meaning. Father traditionally in the patriarchal society is believed to be the bread earner of the family and the

ultimate saviour and protector, so the cake is fed first to him. This action is quite similar to the common practice of feeding males of the family first. Leela Dubey (1988) had discussed about the sociology of food and its role in the maintenance of patriarchy. She claimed that a significant feature of serving and distribution of food within the household was that the leftovers should be eaten by females and not by the male members of the family and therefore the capacity to adjust should be of the prime importance for the females in the family. According to her “The notion of tolerance and self-restraint are also rooted in a consciously-cultivated feminine role which is embedded in and legitimised by culture and cultural ideology. The cooking, serving and distribution are important constituents of a prestigious and valued role for Hindu women. This role contributes to women’s self-esteem, offers them a genuine sense of fulfillment and is central to the definition of many female kinship roles.” *Vidhya-Arambha* is discussed here to bring out the factor of selection of gender for the ritual performance. An educational *Samskara* also called *Hathe-Khadi* in the folk language is extensively practiced by the Bengali folk. Although traditionally as elaborated by many scholars (Rajbali Pandey, 1949; Sukumari Bhattacharya, 1990; Inden Nicholas, 1977; Leela Dubey, 1988) that it is practiced only for the male child before they attend educational institutions. The reason being that only male child was entitled to receive education. However some changes have taken place. In the present context the ritual of *Hathe-khari* is also practiced for the female child. The reason may lie in the fact that education in present days is equally important for both males and females.

Conclusion

It can be concluded with this remark that birth ritual is the direct means of socialisation of motherhood. Albeit, it should also be marked that although father directly does not participate in the rituals he does have many rules, duties and prohibitions to follow. As far as the presence of patriarchy in the rituals is concerned it can be said that it does exist specially in the scriptural rituals which mainly focus on the male child. However, in practice the meaning changes and less gender biases in the rituals is reported specifically in the folk rituals.

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