

PRACTICING CHILDBIRTH RITUALS: A STUDY OF MOTHERHOOD

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Abstract

Motherhood and the definition of mother varies based on how social, cultural, and religious roles are defined in a particular culture or society. The social roles associated with motherhood are variable across time, culture, and social class. The expression of motherhood too therefore is different across cultures. The role of symbols, rituals and practices in the expression of motherhood is recognized in the society as essential to the practice of motherhood. Rituals play a key role therefore in defining and further expressing motherhood in a culture. The performance of the birth ritual helps women in creating a self-image as well as a public image which thereby creates an identity and in this case an identity of a mother. This socialization through birth rituals provides social as well self-identification of a woman as a mother and introduces her to the societal role of mother as defined by her culture.

We through this study will look to highlight the rituals involved in the expression of motherhood in India confining ourselves to the Hindu ritualistic practices associated to motherhood.

Keywords: *socialisation, motherhood, rituals, society, family, practice*



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Introduction

According to Van Gennep (1960) rituals are the backbone of the social organization and it is from the rituals that the society system is formed. Rituals support co-operative life as long as it entails the shared symbolic meaning within the society. Despite continuous social change, rituals play an important role in integrating the society. Rites of passage are practiced in almost all societies, and the rituals are practiced both in religious and non-religious ways. For a country like India where strong religious sentiment dominates, every single practice of rituals, is measured to be an important aspect of the society and plays a significant part in its structure (Van Gennep, 1960).

Rites of passage like birth ritual, initiation, marriage and death ritual 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). Scholars have discussed how the rites of passage or rituals help in the socialization of identity formation. According to Jenkins (2000) socialization is the basic category through which interaction is possible, within which social life is organized and one learns how to enter into the social life. Rajbali Pandey (1949)

also emphasizes that ritual morally, socially, spiritually and culturally helps in the development of the personality. The functions of rituals are also the function of socialization that it emphasizes on the creation of certain identity along with the prescribed behavior. Likewise, birth rituals convert women from bodily being to social being that is from a woman to a mother. These rituals are socially established and practiced by which the wife or a daughter-in-law receives an identity of a mother. Jenkins (2000) asserts that a person is not completely responsible for the creation of their self identity, it is a two-way process. One is self or group identification (internally oriented) and second is categorization done by others (externally oriented). The performance of the birth ritual helps women in creating a “self image” as well as a “public image” which thereby creates an identity and in this case an identity of a mother.

Rituals pave way for socialization where a set behavior is established. Collins and Lewis (2008) assert that process of socialisation not only passes on the norms of desirable behavior but simultaneously it establishes the sanctions for the individual if they do not reflect their set behavior. Norm internalization is a flexible process and is continuously interwoven together with the development of a personal identity. Therefore, the process of socialization is a never ending process. The most primary agents of socialization is always family members or clan. Various ritual processes, which include symbols and unexplained messages, are also a means by which the family passes on the values they believe in.

The norms are embedded in the rituals and ceremonies attended by the individual in his life time. A way of discovering these messages entrenched in the rituals and the non-explicit value system embedded in them and a series of myths which stench these messages is attempted to be analyzed in this paper by an in-depth research in the practice of birth rituals. Following this can understand better how through rituals group ensures that they remain within the behavior assigned.

This paper attempts to explore the birth rituals that are mentioned in the Hindu scriptural text and the local birth rituals that are practiced among the Bengali community and understand the non-explicit value system embedded in them. The value system that is entrenched in the rituals is mainly seen in two terms. Firstly, socialization of a women towards motherhood through birth rituals and secondly to what extent these rituals contribute towards sustenance of patriarchy. This socialisation through birth rituals provides social as well self identification of a woman as a mother. In order to investigate these processes an attempt is made to

investigate birth rituals in the group life of Bengali folk culture as well as in the Hindu scriptural texts. Therefore, a detailed account of the rituals of pre-natal and post-natal is examined to show how birth rituals effectively socialize a woman into the status of a mother. The present study will only focus on the Hindu birth rituals that are mentioned in the scriptural texts and folk birth rituals practiced by the Hindus. A field study has also been conducted in order to bring out the detailed analysis of the folk rituals. The comparison is also made between the two along with the changes that it has accommodated. The present study entails both the use of primary data and secondary data. The city of Siliguri in area of North Bengal in West Bengal has been made the universe of the study. A total of 30 women are studied to bring out the contemporary condition of birth ritual and the related issues. The sample was selected by random sampling. The selected respondents cut across castes and class. The method of participatory observation apart from interviews was also employed. The participation in the rituals of the birth would help to generate more in-depth information.

Ritual as a means of socialization of motherhood

Maushart (1999) noticed that women's experienced as mothers is often left out of history as a result of its diminished importance. The process of birth is celebrated the world over yet the process of becoming a mother passes relatively unnoticed. She also notes that although becoming a mother is an enormous personal transformation, it remains largely socially invisible. Her fieldwork is largely based on western society that was America. Although in India we can have a different claim. In the traditional society like India where there is celebration of all occasions, motherhood is also celebrated in various rituals and in the "public" domain which is more social than personal. It is a family or to say huge family affair, where particularly females take part. The following section will explore the relation between birth ritual and socialization of motherhood. It will try to analyze the participation of the expectant mother or mother in the rituals of Birth.

The Rituals

Garbhadhana- Beginning with first birth rituals among the Hindus that is *Garbhadhana* and most elaborately discussed by Rajbali Pandey in his book "*Hindu Samskara*". *Garbhadhana* is a ritual through which man places his semen or seeds into a woman. Though there exist several views in the different scripts regarding the day of conceptions, the most common view of the auspicious time to conceive the child was from fourth to sixteenth nights after monthly course is over. The more away it is from monthly course the more meritorious a

child is. A son who is conceived on the fourth night is short-lived and suffers from bad health and often without wealth. A girl conceived on fifth night is believed to give birth only to female children, on a sixth night a mediocre son is born, a girl conceived on the seventh night will remain barren, a boy conceived on the eighth night becomes a lord or prosperous, if the conception takes place at the ninth then an auspicious woman is born. A boy conceived on the ninth night becomes wise, a girl conceived on the eleventh becomes irreligious women. A best man is born when a boy is conceived in the twelfth night, on the thirteen night a woman who is adulterous is born, a boy who is conceived in the fourteenth day is religiously grateful, self-realized, who is firm in his vow, on fifteenth a woman who is mother to many sons and who is complete devotee to her is born and finally on sixteenth the best of all qualities boy is conceived who is learned, auspicious, truthful, self controlled and a refuge of all creatures is born. Any sexual relation between the spouses during monthly course is strictly forbidden (Pandey, 1949). Here it has to be noted that menstruation period is considered to be inauspicious for the purpose of creating a being. Since ages women have been discriminated on this account and are still attached to various taboos on the ground of menstruation on the pretext of purity and pollution.

Each particular day after menstruation is over has been assigned for molding a particular type of child's personality. Even nights were selected for the birth of the male child and odd once for the female child. It was believed that sex of the child is determined by the quantity of semen and menstrual blood. Parents could act according to the desire for the conception of particular type of child. Again here the preference of male child has the presence in most elaborate forms. It is explicitly clear that there exists only two days where a meritorious girl child can be born on the other hand there are various days where an auspicious male child is born. The belief behind odd and the even days for the conception of a male or a female is clearly explained by Inden and Nicholas (1977). The sex of the child is thought to be effected by the proportion of male and female substances i.e. semen (*beeja*) and uterine blood (*artava*) respectively. Semen is stronger than the uterine blood on the even days and uterine blood on odd days. If the semen predominates the offspring would be male and if uterine blood dominates then it results in female offspring. An equal proportion of both semen and blood results in the conception of hermaphrodite which means a person who has the reproductive organ of both male and female.

Duties and prohibition on both the gender regulates these rituals. It not only commands the performance but also the non-conformist are threatened with sins. 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 abortion. These compulsions, according to Pandey (1949), represents a social condition in an early society where higher number of children was considered to be better for the family, both politically as well as economically. People in early days were seeking expansion because being numerically dominant was very important. So, they prayed for sons at least ten in number. Besides political and economical approach towards begetting children, religious approach was equally important. The more the number of children the happier would be father in heaven. The debt of the ancestor could be paid only in the form of children and extinction of the family was regarded as a sin. These were the conditions which made the performance of the ritual *Garbhadhana* a compulsory ritual. With the course of time the social as well as religious conditions and ideology changed. When their number increased there were no need of ten sons in every household for political or for a social reason. 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. Therefore, the compulsion to approach their wife in every month became less strict and therefore was completely eliminated. After the birth of one son it became ineffective, and the prayers for ten sons remained in the verses. Later it was suggested that the birth of one son is enough for a father to become *Putrin* (possessing sons) and pays well his ancestral debt.

The ritual of *Garbhadhana* as a pre-natal ritual may be said to exist only in the text. In the research done, the ritual had no existence on ground. The knowledge of the terminology was also absent, except one exception where an informant gave some information about her knowledge of the ritual. She was a converted Vaishnavite and claimed that *Garbhadhana* was preached as a pre-natal ritual in ISKCON temple where she is a regular visitor. An interview with the preacher named Bhaktashakti Prabhu assured the claims. However, he refused any gender biasness in the ritual emphasize all gender are equal in the eyes of the almighty. In this ritual though it is not in the common cultural practice we can find that both the spouses are equally responsible for the performance. It not only exhibits responsibility on the part of the

mother but also father to bear the most auspicious child within the prescribed days. Therefore, both socialization of motherhood and fatherhood is the feature of *Garbhadhana*.

Pumsavana- The ritual of *Pumsavana* proceeds *Garbhadhana*. *Pumsavana* was generally understood as that rite through which a male child was produced. Vedic rites recited on this occasion mention *Puman* or *Putran* (a male) and a favour of a birth of a son. The *Pumsavana* in simple terms can be understood as a rite quickening a male child. It is generally performed in the third or the fourth month after pregnancy. One of the main significant feature of this *Samskara* was that it was performed from astrological point of view when the moon was on a male constellation, and this time was considered to favour the production of the male child (Pandey, 1949; Inden & Nicholas, 1977, Naraindas, 2009). *Pumsavana* performance has medical benefits as elaborated by Nariandas. Inserting the juice of banyan tree may avoid abortion and ensure the birth of the male child. The banyan tree is considered to remove various illnesses during pregnancy. Later he also added that this may not result in male child production but it undoubtedly promises a viable and promising one.

According to Inden and Nicholas (1977) this ritual is no longer performed by the Bengali Hindus as a separate ritual. Depending the source from the ethnographic research done this ritual cannot be said to have 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 also be understood as the ritual of ‘parting of hair’ of the expectant mother. There are various interpretations for the practice of this ritual, moreover this ritual if performed in contemporary period is in question. According to Inden and Nicholas (1997), this ritual brings easy delivery of the child. It is to be performed in the sixth or the eighth month. It has symbolic meaning in its features. Just as in the marriage ritual husband symbolically effects marriage intercourse by placing a vermilion mark on the parted hair of his wife, thus in this ritual he effects the smooth delivery by parting her with auspicious and fertile items like unripe figs and *dharba* grass. It emphasises the union and fertility of husband and wife. The preparation of the wife for an easy delivery begins a transition from attention to the well being of the husband and wife to attention to the well being of their child, who concretely embodies and symbolizes their one body relationship (Inden & Nicholas, 1977).

The purpose provided by Rajbali Pandey (1949) varied from Inden and Nicholas (1977) who said that the purpose of this *Samskara* was partly superstitious and partly practical. The superstitious reason lied in the belief of the people that pregnant women are vulnerable to the attacks of evil eye. It is believed that the evil demons are always in the opportunity to suck the blood of the child in the womb especially during the first pregnancy. Therefore, the ceremony called *Simantonayana* is performed to ward off all the evil spirits. The practical purpose came from the physiological knowledge of the Hindus which instituted this ritual. From the fifth month the brain of the child starts to develop thus the mother needs to take utmost care to facilitate this process, and avoid as much physical shock as possible to the foetus. And this fact was emphasized by parting of the hair. Another practical purpose given by Pandey (1949) was to keep expecting mother in good cheer and thus parting and dressing of the hair by the husband was used as methods which drastically differ from the statement given by Inden and Nicholas (1977). Further Petitet (2007) asserted that part of this ritual was also to satisfy the wants and cravings of the mother as if the unsatisfied mother die in during childbirth might also return t haunt them as prît (ghost).

Sadh- The folk ritual of Sadh which is a pre-natal ritual, is widely prevalent among all caste and class, though the degree of the observance may differ. *Sadh* can also be understood as “gratification of craving”, which is performed at seventh or eighth month and it may be repeated on 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 B. , 1929).

The symbolism of this ritual give emphasis 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 her 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 replacing either from banana or *gau mutra* (cow urine).

Panchagarba is symbolic food of the semen. It is believed that eating a symbolic food of semen helps in giving birth to the male child. This explanation of the symbolic food is given by Nicholas and Inden (1977), but there are other explanations given by the respondents itself. For most respondents *panchagarba* helps to purify the body and they reject any such gender preference theory. It may also be given notice that the meaning of the symbols of the sacred objects have also been changed or understood in accordance with the present ideology.

By 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 barred from participating in the religious ceremonies, especially memorial rituals for the ancestors spirits (*Sraddha*) (Bennett L. , 1983).

The next *Sadh* is carried out on the seventh month which is termed as *Sattammitta*. This ritual alike with *pancamittra* starts with taking bath with turmeric paste applied over the body in the morning and then keeping fast up till twelve in the noon. These rituals are mainly conducted for the well being of both the expectant mother and the unborn child. In an interview with Birla Paul, a health incharge of a health centre, considered the practice of this rituals as unhealthy to both the mother and the child as the mother is required to keep fast till the ritual initiates which usually takes away half of the day. However, Birla Paul though she was against the ritual of *Sadh* she also performed the ritual. There are many rites and rituals that are carried out during this period. New clothes, jewelry, bangles and many more items for the expectant mother are brought. These items are mainly brought by the expectant mother’s family of orientation. Cecilia Van Hollen (2003) found the same practice of gifts giving by bride’s family in Tamil Nadu. She associated the practice of gift giving by the bride’s family as an event to uphold the status of the bride in her family of procreation, thus incurring heavy economic burden on the shoulder of the bride’s parents. Although in the field it was found the both families of orientation and procreation was responsible to carry all the requirements of the family. Moreover, it was found that *Sadh* was majorly the responsibility of the husband’s family.

Further adding to the discussion small rite is followed in *Sadh* where the gender of the child to be born is predicted. Two objects, *seel* (usually made of a circular rectangle rock, used for grinding spices) and *deep* (small mud lamp) are representatives of male and female child respectively. Both symbolic objects are placed in the ground. Thereafter both of the objects

are hidden by big bowl (*patra*). The expectant mother chooses between the two *patra*. If she chooses the *patra* with *seel*, it is considered that child in the womb is a boy and if she chooses the bowl with *deep* then a girl child is expected. The belief in the result of this particular rite is not strong as most of the women claimed that they came with different results. After the completion of this rite, *seel* is given to her lap to which she shows motherly affection and then it is passed on to the mothers participating in the rituals who show similar affection to *seel* pretending it to be the child. Though, they do not agree that they prefer any particular gender, this particular rite with *seel* and *deep* is systematized in a way that it again symbolically shows the preference of the male child, though the meaning which they attach to them are different, i.e. when showing the affection to the *seel* on the lap the *seel* is not seen as a son but simply as a child. This practice might be related to the theory of James Frazer (1958) of sympathetic magic which means 'law of similarity' which means like produces like. The way *seel* is used to be the object which is affected with pampering and mothering shows the belief of like produces like in action. The love which the mothers show to *seel* like a baby is expected to have similar results. Imitation usually involves objects like effigies, fetishes or puppets to incur a particular result to the environment of the people sometimes on the people themselves (Frazer, 1958). Here the object which serves to be the puppet is *seel* which is implicitly representative of male child.

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 son is born and before the naval cord has been cut and also before the mother feeds the son with milk, the father offers food to his ancestor and then enter 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 son might have acquired from them it also gives the quality (*guna*) of intelligence to the son. The second rite that follows is called the *āyusya-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 field work conducted in Siliguri, it was found that *Jatakarma* was not practice by the common people. The reason for its non- performance may lies in the fact that almost every delivery is conducted at hospitals. Government policies and facilities have made birth at home merely impossible. So this ritual has lost its significance due change in the pattern of child birth. Although after birth even in the institutions the child is secretly fed with honey despite of the fact that the symbolic meaning has changed. It symbolises the desire on the part of the son or daughter to have a soft voice and talk delicately and sound as sweet as honey.

Cha-Sashti-Cha-shasti is another folk compulsory ritual as *Sadh* performed on the sixth day after the birth of the child. This ritual is prevalent among all Bengalis. *Sashti* in Bengali culture is the Goddess who is responsible for the well being and long life of the child. This ritual is performed inside the room of confinement. The entire ritual is carried out mostly by keeping the child in the lap of the mother. Feast is arranged for the kith and kin and friends who are invited. This ritual is performed on the mother and their child irrespective of the gender. However, rites of keeping a mud lamp light throughout the night is the responsibility of both spouses. The light from the mud lamp can provide visibility to the Goddess *Sashti* so that she does not commit any mistake writing the best fortune for the child. According to Sukumari Bhattacharya (1990) women's vows related to *Sashti* are visibly increasing their fertility, because she is the supreme deity of children and protect the child from all the odds.

Suddhikaran-Since birth like death is one of the most radical assertions of man's involvement with the organic processes of life that govern *Samskara*, it is consistent with the Hindu world view that birth should create severe pollution. This pollution, however, affects only the new mother. The infant has not really activated its Karma and entered fully into *Samskara*: thus the ordinary rules of purity and pollution do not apply to it this is not to say that the infant is without 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-gṛha*) also known as *Atur Ghar* in folk language. *Atur-*

Ghar 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. Twenty-one days of confinement 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 is also adjusted depending on many factors. In the field work done it was found that the belief in pollution caused by birth among the people. The concept of such purificatory rituals are prominent among many scholars in their analysis of various cultures. Robert Redfield (1949) in his study in Tepoztlan, a Mexican village analysed few rituals at the birth of the child, where he that explained after giving birth to the child, till the mother is in the separated bed, the new mother along with the other women who are looking after her should take a ritualistic bath every week. Pranee Liamputtong (2009) studied Hmong culture in Australia who also practices the period of confinement for thirty days.

Inden and Nicholas (1977) said that sharing the same place of residence or living together give rise to certain relationship of kinship in Bengali culture. Thus the residents also maintain certain period of impurity. Few respondents claimed that they received ill treatment due to the concept *janamasauca* (impurity due to birth). They expressed their experience and narrated how to they were refused or asked to leave the rented house when they were in the period of gestation it may cause severe pollution. Although many scholars have argued that the simple understand of purity and pollution cannot be applied to the study of the period of confinement. There are various degrees like the example of health and hygiene can become the focus of this analysis.

Significance of the Eunuch

M. Michelraj (2015) said that the *hizras* had important role in the royal courts of Rajas but later the British branded them as criminals, this event simultaneously decreased their occupational status but slowly gained social importance in the ritualistic life of the society. The most popular traditional role of the hijras in Indian society is performing at homes at the birth of a child. The birth of the child especially male is of great significance and a cause of celebration. On this auspicious occasion the hijras give blessings to the child and to the family and sing and dance to the family and their friends and neighbours in their event of happiness (Nanda, 1999). Lastly they pass their hands over the new born to bless them what they themselves do not posses and that is the ability to create a new life of begetting many

sons and continue the lineage of the family. Sons are giving the blessing to become engineers, doctors and big business persons whereas a girl child is given the blessings to be “laxmi”, ‘goddess of wealth’ and blessed to be married off in wealthy house. So here we can find the direct or indirect socialisation of gender roles. Moreover, while taking payment higher price is charge when there is male child.

There are other rituals that follows like *Niskarma* (the first outing), *Churakarna* (tonsure ceremony), *Karnavedha* (boring of ears), *Naamkarna* (name giving), *Annaprashana* (rice feeding), after the birth of the child. Here the main 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 well being of the mother and rest all the ritual is for the child. Therefore, through rituals a woman is socialized 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?

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. Though, the matter of great concern is that whether these rituals were ever in practice in the ritualistic life of the Bengalis or it has only remained restricted to the sacred books of Hindu rituals. However, Inden and Nicholas (1977) have claimed that few rituals like *Pumsavana* and *Simantayana* was performed among the Bengali in 19th and 20th 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 ritual like *Sadh* was performed extensively by them as a compulsory Bengali folk pre-natal ritual.

Though the ritual of *Garbhadhana* in Hindu scriptural promotes the birth of the male child extensively although in practicality the performance of this rituals is a big question and even

if it gaining its revival in the concerned area though *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.

In the case of *Pumsavanam* as well its practice stands to be very doubtful. This ritual was not the part of the Bengali folk culture. One may criticize this scriptural ritual for its biasness as it is performed for the production of 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.

Also 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 fulfilment of the wishes is considered to be so significant that the birth of the 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 are not suppose 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. The conduct of all these activities may shorten the life of the pregnant women. Thus it can be said that though there is no direct socialisation in the form of ritual conducted on the would be father, but there lies many social, economical, moral obligation on the father. *Simantonayana* only remains confined to texts and not performed by the Bengalis in the present days. Though in the study of Harish Narayaindas (2009) among the Tamil the practice existed, but instead of performing them separately they were merged in the ritual of *Pumsavana*. The ritual is only practiced among the Brahmins among the Tamil.

Though there always existence a sense of patriarchy in the rituals conducted but there are many instances where change has occur and patriarchy is less visible. The worship of the Goddess *Sasthi* also shows the supremacy of the female goddess over the male God, although at the same time it also shows that a only a women can 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 environment outside and people might be the carriers of germs may affect the health of both the mother and the child. Building separate room outside 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 theatre for various major medical reasons in the same way 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 understand of impurity caused due to birth is strong among the folks and it cannot be denied that people who specifically live in rented houses have to face 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 the part of the Indian culture. A sociological event can always be traced in all social events. Therefore, in the celebration of birthday too we can find 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 seen a sociological phenomena 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 savior 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) has discussed about the sociology of food and its role in the maintenance of patriarchy. She claims that a significant feature of serving and distribution of food within the household is that the left-overs should be eaten by female and not by the male member 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- restraints 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 of are important constituents of prestigious and valued role for Hindu women. This role contribute to women’s self esteem, offers them a genuine sense of fulfillment and is central to the definition of many female kinship roles.”

Though *Vidhya-Arambha* is not directly related to socialization of women into motherhood but it 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 practice by the Bengali folk. Although traditionally as elaborated by many scholars (Rajbali Pandey, 1949; Sukumari Bhattarcharya, 1990; Inden Nicholas, 1977, Leela Dubey, 1988) that it is practice only for the male child before they attend educational institution. 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 practice for the female child. The reason may lie to the fact that education in present days is equally important for both males and females.

It can be concluded with this remark that birth ritual is the direct means of socialization of motherhood. However, 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 focuses on the male child. However, in practice the meaning changes and less gender biasness in the rituals is reported specifically in the folk rituals.

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