



Practicing Motherhood: A Case Study of Rural West Bengal

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Abstract

Motherhood is a characteristic, which has differential meanings, that is based on the basis of place, time and locality. It may be considered that variation in motherhood practises has its own importance in sociological understanding. Rural society has its own settings. Its socio-cultural uniqueness also reflects exclusivity of mothering in rural community. Needless to mention that globalisation or for that matter the global forces of social change in the contemporary period has reduced the urban rural gulf but question remains how far it has succeeded in changing the fundamental value structure governing the notion and reality of mothering and motherhood. This article reflects findings of an empirical study conducted in Nadia District of West Bengal. Mothers, both from young and elderly age groups were interviewed. Adopting such theoretical discourses, the present paper tries to understand the impact of such role differentials of the mothers in maintaining social continuity as well as integrity of their children's personality.

Key Words: Motherhood, Practicing, Rural

I

This paper basically deals with early motherhood practices by the rural women of the study area, which is very important in any kind of village society. Mothering is of course diverse; it is a caring of children and it has differentials meanings on the basis of place, time and locality. It may be considered that variation in motherhood practices has its own significance in sociological perspective (Miller, 2005). Rural society has its personal settings. It has socio-cultural uniqueness, which reflects superiority of mothering in rural community. Needless to mention that globalization or for that matter the universal or global forces of social change in the contemporary period has reduced the urban rural gulf but question remains how far it has succeeded in changing the fundamental value structure governing the notion and reality of mothering and motherhood. In comparison to their urban counterparts, the mothers in rural societies appear to occupy different places not only in the social fabric but also in the mind and lives of their children. Adopting such a methodological

framework (Miller, 2002) the present paper tries to understand the impact of such role differentials of the mothers in maintaining social continuity as well as integrity of their children's personality.

Is motherhood all about the responsibilities related to childbearing? Or is it more a social fact having socially structured expectations and obligations wrapped up with unparallel emotions and sentiments than a biological reality ingeniously used by the cruel patriarchy to subjugate the women? These questions have been flying high in the academic world since the second half of the twentieth century when different scholars have started thinking that motherhood should neither be considered as the ultimate goal of womanhood nor as the ultimate human achievement (Ezeama and Ezeamah, 2014). It rather enslaves the women. The protagonists, on the other hand say that before assailing the state of motherhood as such, one should take into consideration the feelings and emotions the word mother evokes in the mind of women themselves, just as the fatherhood completes the life of a man. They suggest that if there are any exploitative ploys that could be eradicated instead of undermining the institution itself. The connotations of the term practicing motherhood have been changing over. What did the mother mean in the fourteenth century England is quite different from what do we mean today in rural society. Motherhood for example appears differently to a rural women or mother, to a working woman or to, what is called a single mother. There are reasons to believe that it bears a totally different meaning to a transgendered or to a surrogate mother. With growing socio-biological heterogeneity and rising individual freedom, the traditional categories are being redefined sometimes in a very fundamental or primary manner that needs to be analyzed.

II

Objective of the study:

The present study has tried to explore the various dimensions of motherhood including the challenges it entails and the implications it brings in not only about the life of a woman, but about the wider rural society as well. In my study, I have highlighted different objectives and they are framed as follows:

- i) To know the exact age of Mothers in rural areas.
- ii) To know the opinions about the practices of motherhood during the antenatal phase.
- iii) What is the special practices in New born child after postnatal phase?
- iv) To know what are the types of beliefs & practices done on newborn child.
- v) To know the nature of influences & responsibilities enforces on mothers.

Methods for this study:

I have used Purposive sampling for data collection in my study. In this study, data have been collected purposively from the area of Hanskhali Block in the District of Nadia in West Bengal. Seventy three (73) respondents' data which contribute to the observations, arguments and reflections developed in this study were generated by women through the time in their lives in which they became mothers. This detailed, iterative research process involved women being interviewed on face-to-face occasions by questionnaire, which was used to collect data on the participants' experiences of being researched.

Review of the Literature:

Luong (2008), in his writings “*Life after teenage motherhood*” analysed the general view that has been the teenage childbearing & childrearing is a one type of practicing motherhood in Indian rural system, which will have long-term negative effects on the mother’s well-being and also negative effects on the rural setting.

In this perspectives, Hayes (1987) describes during the 1970s and 1980s consistently documented the negative effects of teenage childbearing across a range of outcomes, finding that teenage mothers were more likely to be socially & economically disadvantaged throughout their lives than women who deferred childbearing. Teenage mothers were also less likely to complete their education, because of their family poverty or be married. Furthermore, he also mentioned that they were more likely to have larger families and receive welfare.

Pandey and Tiwary (2001) have explained in the article entitled *Socio-cultural Reproductive Health Practices of Primitive Tribes of Madhya Pradesh: Some Observation* that social and cultural beliefs & practices of three primitive tribes during pregnancy. Some of their practices are good and can be utilised for strengthening reproductive health and they believe that it will affect the shape of the unborn child, which have been come from protodynastically.

III

Data Analysis:

The quantitative study includes 73 female respondents’ practicing motherhood in the rural area, which is homogenous in terms of their socio-demographic characteristics so there are no issues regarding the representativeness of the respondents. The Socio-demographic profile of the participants is described in table no. 1. 30.14% (22) respondents belonged to the ‘Other Backward Caste’ (Generally Muslim & Hindu Community) category and over 68.38% of the respondents’ belongs to 21 to 25 years age group and single-family system (83.56%, 61). Literacy rate among the respondents was 100%.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of the study respondents (n=73)

Socio-demographic characteristics	Number of Respondents		Total
	Hindu Mother	Muslim Mother	
Age group (Years)			
< 20	6 (8.22)	4 (5.48)	10 (13.70)
21-25	23 (31.51)	24 (32.88)	47 (64.28)
26-37	7 (9.59)	9 (12.33)	16 (21.92)
Family Types			
Single	29 (39.73)	22 (88.00)	61 (83.56)
Joint	7 (9.59)	5 (6.58)	12 (16.44)
Education			
Primary (1 th - 4 th std)	9 (12.33)	7 (28.00)	19 (26.03)
Middle School (5 th -12 th std)	25 (34.25)	23 (31.51)	48 (65.75)
Graduation and above	3 (4.11)	3 (4.11)	6 (8.22)
Caste category			
Gen	7 (9.59)	6 (8.22)	13 (17.81)
SC	12 (16.44)	7 (9.59)	19 (26.03)
ST	15 (20.55)	4 (5.48)	19 (26.02)
OBC	13 (17.81)	9 (12.33)	22 (30.14)
Occupation			
Housewife	26 (35.62)	24 (32.87)	50 (68.49)
Service	-	1 (1.37)	1 (1.37)
Maid Servant	4 (5.48)	3 (4.11)	7 (9.59)
Daily Labour	6 (8.22)	9 (12.33)	15 (20.55)

(Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages)

Near about 68.49% (50) respondents were housewives and the respondents were collect from rural areas with purposive sampling in order to have a meaningful information. The woman belongs to the age group of 20-37 years; were Hindu and Muslim by religion and were literate. One among them was a government service holder, five were maidservant, ten were daily labour and rest were housewives. The area where the respondents were collected has a predominant Hindu (Schedule Caste & Schedule Tribe) population.

Table 2: Characteristic of different practices of the study respondents (n=73)

Different practices & beliefs	Number of Respondents		Total
	Hindu Mother	Muslim Mother	
Opinion during antenatal phase			
Don't go out in home at Saturday	6 (8.22)	4 (5.48)	10 (13.70)
Don't go out in home at Tuesday & Saturday	31 (42.46)	32 (43.84)	63 (86.30)
Opinion during postnatal phase			
Worship of a particular Goddess "Shasthi"	37 (50.68)	36 (49.32)	73 (100.00)
Nutritional or healthy foods	37 (50.68)	36 (49.32)	73 (100.00)
Protection of newborn children			
"Najor Tika"	37 (50.68)	36 (49.32)	73 (100.00)
Influence & responsibility of mother on children			
Comparatively daughter are more dearer than Son	15 (20.55)	10 (13.70)	25 (34.25)
Comparatively Son are more dearer than Daughter	22 (30.13)	26 (35.62)	48 (65.75)

(Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages)

Table 2 describes the different practices during the antenatal and postnatal period in the study area. According to the respondent mother, 13.70% (10) expressed that do not go out in home at Saturday before delivery time and most of the mother (86.30%, 63) preferred that also don't go out in home at Tuesday and Saturday, because this days are dangerous day for newborn child. After the baby is born, the mother of newborn child, they worshiped a "Shasthi", consume nutritional foods for baby and all of them protected to the newborn children by the "Najor Tika" (Lamp-black or Collyrium / Evil eye protector). Near about 65.75% respondents preferred that son are dearer than daughter and rest were beliefs that daughter are dearer

IV

Findings

The age division, caste differential, religion of the respondents, type of family etc. were noted in the beginning of the study. This was relevant information for the study in the sense that the socio-cultural background serves an important aspect with respect to the respondents and in this paper; the researcher has depicted some instances from his collection of primary data.

There were many traditional mothering practices observed and recorded in the livelihood of the respondents. Since all of the respondents were mothers is either the antenatal or the postnatal phase, the observation and data collection was interview.

There are variety of practices during the antenatal phase in these two villages for example there are certain "pro-health" practices includes the right time eat and keeping away from heavy household activities. During the antenatal phase, the expected mothers are also prohibited do not go out in home at Tuesday and Saturday and from entering the sacred places like the temple or idol worship etc.

Also, during the post natal phase mother has to abide by some norms like worship of a particular Goddess, “Shasthi” for the well-being of the new born baby. In this regard, either a Nine (9) days or an eleven (11) days special separation of mother and the newborn is practiced and the mother is also provided nutritional food during this period; Even the mother is expected from any household activities until the baby is two (2) months or three (3) months old.

There prevail various kinds of beliefs and practices for the protection and care of the newborn children. Most of rural mother did their practices of “Najor Tika” (Evil eye protector) forwarding of the evil spirits. The mother of the newborn also has to go through similar practices. On the other hand, there were differences in attitude of their respondents with respect to the gender of the newborn child. The mothers perhaps in most cases seemed completed to discriminate between son and daughter also. The presence of most of the respondents of their newborn turned out to be their sons rather than their daughter or daughters. The respondents also indicated severe discriminating attitude between the male and female child. However, as far as motherhood is concerned the study indicate that during the early stages of child bearing and rearing, almost as the responsibilities is to be became by their mother along with the other female members of the family. This antenatal and post-natal care of the newborn children is a special treatment that mothers of various age groups seems compelled to go through.

Conclusion

We know the mothering is of course diverse; it is not a universal experience and yet many mothers (and fathers) will share similar ‘struggles, joys, and hopes and dreams for their children’ (Miller, 2005) and becoming a mother changes lives in many ways and how women try to make sense of and describe their experiences of first-time motherhood in the rural world. The study documented indigenous beliefs and practices exits that have implication for the health care seeking during pregnancy and other mothers believed that they need to protect their pregnancy by keeping from their religious practices. The study also indicated that, as the child grows up, the influence and responsibilities of the mother decreases gradually on their children and the role of a father as well as other members of the family increases on their children in as a whole.

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