

Child rearing practices among the Bhumija of Sankhabhanga village in Mayurbhanj District, Odisha

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Abstract: *The present paper is based on empirical study among the Bhumija of the village Sankhabhanga in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. The village is numerically dominated by the Bhumija tribe who follows their traditional socio-cultural practices and exposed to modern trend of the greater society. This paper aims to examine the child rearing practices through different parameters from the pregnancy or pre- natal to the post natal care. Here, the focus is on the process that how people of this village maintain their traditional culture as well as go for modernization in the child rearing practices.*

Key Words: *child, Child rearing practice, Pre-natal care, Post-natal care*

1. INTRODUCTION:

In the state of Odisha, Mayurbhanj is a district with total geographical area of 10418 sq. km. It is situated in the northern boundary of the state with the district headquarter at Baripada. The district is bounded by Midnapur district of West Bengal and Singhbhum district of Jharkhand on the north, by Keonjhar district on the west and by Balasore district on the east. It is one of the tribal dominated districts of Odisha and has been declared as fully scheduled district of the state.

The present study is carried out in a village named Sankhabhanga under the district of Mayurbhanj. Bhumija tribe numerically dominates the village. The village is falling under the Saraskana Block. The Block headquarter is located at the 20 km distance from the village. The mountain of Simlipal ranges from all the sides except the east surround this village.

The Bhumija is a sub-tribe of the Munda tribe who migrated from the village of Bundutamad, which is situated near the capital city of Ranchi long years ago. Munda tribe is one of the major tribal groups who are living in the districts of Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Mayurbhanj and Balasore. However, the Munda tribe who are living in Mayurbhanj and Balasore are popularly referred by the name of Bhumija, whose culture is much more seminaries with the Munda tribe and the Bhumija speak Mundari language like Munda. The main occupation of the Bhumija is agriculture and they do it only one time in a year. For rest of the year they all depend on the nearest jungle to live their life

Bhumija is the combination of two words Bhumi (land) and Jata (born), which means the people who depend on land by born to live their life. The area has been selected to show how the people of this area still use both the traditional knowledge and modern health care at a same time. Here in this village the older are very traditional while the younger generation, especially who are educated, keep more interests to learn about the world outside their territory, of other's culture, technique, knowledge etc.

Here I have focused on how the people of this village maintain their traditional culture as well as go for modernization in the childcare and child rearing practices. Some, though, follow the traditional methods, but a majority follows the rules of the Anganwadi and adopting the method of the childcare according to the modern ways. Therefore, there are different views for child rearing practices in a society. The introduction of modernization in each and every sphere through various development programmes of the government has a visible impact on the childrearing practices in the village.

The word child denotes a young person of either sex, especially between infancy and young. However, pre-natal care is also most important and hence I considered all the rules and regulation from prenatal to post-natal period including the care during pregnancy.

2. METHODS:

The present study is a descriptive research. Participant observation and interview methods have been applied to collect data.

3. DISCUSSION

1. Parameters to get a healthy child

a. Determination of sex of the baby before birth

Since earlier times, the early determination of sex of expected child is found in every society and it is continuing until date. The women after confirming her pregnancy first approach a healer or other experienced old men or women to know about the child. They have a traditional method of predicting sex of the child in the basis of the shape of the belly during the time of fifth month of the pregnancy. The healer of the village determines the sex of the expected child on the basis of a calculation from the date of last menstruation. The tribal people feel it is essential to know about the baby who is in the womb, so as to pay the required attention. When they predict that, the baby is going to be a male they pay more care and attention but in case of female baby, they never take that much of care to the mother and the expected child. But in this village they never go to a hospital for a computerized check up.

b. Role of husband for healthy child

The husband of the pregnant woman never kills any living things during the whole period of pregnancy. Sometimes the healer restricts the husband not to take food and water from outsiders when the wife of the person could not give birth of a healthy child at her first pregnancy. In addition, the husband does not plough the agricultural field.

c. Rites connected with the first pregnancy

During first pregnancy, the Bhumija observe a ritual to protect the mother and child from the evil eyes. This is known as "*Sutamhalam Banga*". The ritual is observed during the fifth month of pregnancy. In this ritual, all the relatives of the pregnant woman and her husband gather in their home on a particular date. Then the head of the family worships all their gods and goddesses as well as the ancestors and pray to them to protect both the expectant mother and unborn child. After that, a holy thread is ceremonially tied around the wrist of the pregnant woman. On the occasion they sacrifice cocks, and offer liquor to satisfy the gods. After that, all the guests and the relatives eat together and enjoy the feast with exchanging jokes and sharing happiness.

Nowadays they are observing another type of ritual also during the time of pregnancy besides their traditional one. They are imitating this ritual from the higher caste people. In this ritual, they invite all the relatives on a fixed day during the seventh or ninth month of pregnancy. All the guests bring various types of foods and fruits for the pregnant women. Each one feed a little bit from these foods to the pregnant lady according to her wish. After that, the father-in-law of the pregnant woman arranges a feast in evening time to all the villagers as well as relatives of her daughter in-law. This ritual is called as "*Sadakhia*" by the Bhumijas.

d. Precautions to protect the child in the womb

If the pregnant woman feels any illness, then she goes to nearby healer with her husband and tells all her problems to the healer. The healer does the necessary black magic to save the expectant mother and the child in her womb. He also sacrifices one black cock or sometimes a male goat to decrease the pain during the time of delivery. He also gives some herbal medicine to eat and ties as an amulet on her arm for safe delivery. Very least people of the society go to the doctor in these cases.

e. Restriction in food habits

A pregnant woman is restricted to eat the sour, spicy and hot food though she would be inclined to eat them. Generally, she is allowed to take watered rice and boiled curry without spices. If she violates the food restrictions, it is believed that it would affect the child in womb and the child is likely to suffer from skin diseases. It is believed that the stomach should be kept cold by avoiding hot food with spices, chilly etc. Therefore, she drinks gruel, rice water, stale rice, cold food etc. to keep the body cool. For the pregnant woman they do not have any restriction on vegetarian and non-vegetarian food. However, she is restricted to eat the meat of the sacrificed fowl. She is restricted to eat more amount of food during pregnancy as it is

believed that if she eats more the size of the child will grow big in the womb and which, will ultimately lead to difficulty during delivery. She should not drink pure liquor (rashe) during this time; she can drink only *handia* (mixed liquor).

f. Other restrictions

During the time of pregnancy, they never allow a woman to visit the temples of gods and goddesses who are believed to be malevolent in nature. She is only allowed to go in front of the gods and goddesses who are benevolent in nature. They believe that if the pregnant woman worships the deities who are revered as peaceful, the child would get the same qualities. In their society, a pregnant woman is strictly prohibited to go even nearer to the graveyard as it might cause miscarriage. She is also restricted to go alone outside during night. If there is a dire need to go, she is to keep a piece of iron with her for protection from the evils spirits. She always avoids foods and other materials from outsiders during the period of pregnancy.

Generally, a pregnant woman is not restricted to do the normal daily routines. In fact, during this period a pregnant woman undertakes some of the hard household works including going to the top of the hills to collect the fuel and leaves etc, taking care of the cattle and cattle shed, doing all the work related to the agriculture etc. All these work she can do up to her eight months of pregnancy. These works are most important for her as it is believed that such works will help her to bear all the difficulties during the time of delivery and she gives birth of a healthy and active child to her family. If the woman feels uncomfortable or is not able to do hard works then in this case the family members or her husband does all the works.

A pregnant woman is not allowed to make new hearth or kill the living beings like animals, insects etc. Besides, she is restricted to do some works such as; frying the egg, burning the flesh and eat on the burnt leaves. If she does such works it will put bad affects on the child after birth. However, she is not restricted to cut the branches of the trees and leaves.

She never goes outside in the dark fortnight and full moon day. Because it sometimes puts some bad affects on the child in the womb; it might be the cause of miscarriage. During pregnancy of a woman if ellipse occurs, a woman is restricted to go out of the house because the rays come out during the ellipse causes bad affect on the child. These days a woman should sleep in straight position. If she disobeys the restrictions it will causes bad affects on the newborn baby's physical structure. The new born baby might be a deaf, one-eyed, ugly, blind, nose-clipt, dump, lamp, born-blind, squint-eyed etc after born.

g. Sleeping habits

After five month, a pregnant woman is restricted to sleep keeping the face upward. The experienced women teach her how to sleep in one-sided manner, which gives more relaxation to the child in the womb and the mother feels comfort in such sleeping posture.

h. Bathing

During pregnancy, a pregnant woman never forgets to take bath because it is believed that bathing helps to keep the baby cool in womb and mother's body as well. However, she does not have any fixed time to take bath in the daytime but she should not take bath after sunset because it is too cold for the mother and is not good for both mother and child.

i. Hygiene and sanitation facilities for the pregnant women

They do not take any special care for the pregnant women in relation to hygiene and sanitation. Like normal people, a pregnant woman also drinks water from the tube-well, open-well and river. A pregnant woman also uses same open field for latrine and toilet and takes bath in the nearest river. However, after sunset her husband escorts her if she is to go outside for toilet to the nearest field.

j. Exercise

In the society of the Bhumija there is no prescription of physical exercise for pregnant women. To them, all the hard works done by the pregnant woman is more effective than exercise and this will keep the baby active and strong in the womb.

k. Traditional care taken by the people during pregnancy

Generally, at the time of pregnancy many types of minor problems arise. The pregnant woman may face the problems of sudden bleeding, fever, swelling of legs, vomiting etc. but in such cases, they never go to hospital. Initially the old experienced women try to cure the problem by using homeopathic medicines. If failed, then they call the midwife or go to the nearest healer of their village. They believe that such problems are caused by some malevolent power such as witch, sorcerer, or some evil spirits. The healer (Ojha) gives some herbal medicines to eat or to tie on arm like an amulet, which gives some relief from the sufferings.

Under such situations, all the family members take care of the pregnant woman. However, normally she lives like any other normal person.

I. Pre-natal care taken by the Anganwadi Centre

In the studied village, pregnant women go to the Anganwadi centre for check up as they get food materials from this centre freely. Every month the Anganwadi workers visit the village to identify the pregnant women and advice their family members how to take care of pregnant women. Every month Anganwadi workers call a meeting for the children and pregnant women and teaches the expected mothers about pregnancy and childbirth. They check the weight and blood pressure of the pregnant women and the weight of the children up to five years of age. They enter the names of the expectant mother and her husband and number of their issues in a register and provide the mother a birth card. She is to go for health check up every month and Anganwadi worker takes attendance in their register regularly. They give two injections (T.T), one in the first month of pregnancy and another after completion of one month. They provide iron tablets to the pregnant women up to three months; with this, they also supply colloquies tablets without any cost.

Besides, they always give many tips and advices to the pregnant women to make them aware and for a healthy and strong baby. They ask them to eat sufficient food with iodized salt and to take rest minimum two hours daily in the daytime. They also provide some nutritional food including grinded popcorn, dhal to pregnant women in every month.

II. Post-natal care

As soon as labour pain starts, husband of the pregnant woman goes to call the midwife. The midwife makes arrangement of necessary items for delivery and starts the procedure in their traditional method. She asks the family members to arrange clothes and arrow or blade. She starts applying Mahua oil known as “*kachada tela*”. Sometimes mustard oil is also applied on the belly and push slowly and gently from upward to downward to understand the position of the child inside the womb. If she finds it difficult to give birth easily then the midwife instructs the pregnant woman to kneeling and put press on the belly. If she fails, they think that somebody has put an evil eye on her. Then immediately they change the room and perform some rituals. After safe delivery, the mid-wife cuts the umbilical cord of the child to separate the child from the mother’s placenta. They use the arrowhead to cut the cord in case of a male baby but in case of a female child, they cut the cord with a blade and tie the chord by a thread. After that, the mid-wife cleans the child with soap and water and anoints the paste of turmeric and oil. Then she cleans the baby by a piece of clothes. After that the mother takes bath and then the mid-wife keeps the baby on her lap. During this time father of the new born, dig a hole in a safe place inside the house to bury the placenta and all the dirty things. They never bury the placenta outside the house; it is believed that if they do so the child would suffer from cold diseases in later stage.

During the childbirth, males are forbidden to go to the place of delivery. Only the close female relatives can help the mother and take care of the child during birth. If the pregnant woman feels more pain than her family approaches the Ojha to get some herbal medicine for her. Immediately after childbirth, the mother is not able to feed her breast milk because the milk does not come for some hours. Therefore, they feed honey and warm water to the new born with the help of a piece of neat and clean clothes. However, even after mother’s milk comes out they never give the first yellowish milk to the newborn. They believe that the yellowish milk is not good for child health because it comes with germ. Therefore, they throw away the yellowish milk and then feed the white milk to the newborn baby.

They observe nine days pollution period from the date of childbirth. During this period the nursing mother and the newborn are restricted from taking bath. Every day the midwife comes and takes care of the baby, washes the clothes of the baby and teaches the mother how to take care of the baby, how to give a massage to the baby by rubbing turmeric and oil paste, sponging the body of the child, breast-feeding etc. All the family members also help the mother to take care of the baby and teach her the methods and techniques of childrearing.

a. Treatment of child and mother by the family members

Family members of a woman always keep attention towards her and her child up to three months after delivery. All elderly members try to teach the mother about child caring methods and to make her aware. The grandmother of the child takes all the responsibility of the new born for one to two months if

mother is not experienced. All help the mothers in her scheduled household work during the time of infancy of the baby. Family members cook food for the mother separately without spices and serve her separately up to ninth day from childbirth. During these nine days of pollution period the mother should not touch anything till the purification ritual is observed. She is not allowed to do hard work especially to fetch water for three months after child birth and. during this time, all the family members mutually manage her part of duties.

b. Restriction on foods and works after Delivery

The mother of the newborn baby is restricted to eat the spicy food. She is to eat boiled rice and vegetables and is to avoid non-vegetarian food. The mother should consume more garlic during this time because it will keep her body warm and will reduce the bad smell of the body. She is restricted to eat pumpkin, cucumber etc because these things put bad affect on the child. However, during this time she is allowed to drink plenty of gruel and water to increase the breast milk. A mother is restricted to do hard work such as collecting the fuel wood from the jungle, any kind of agricultural work etc during this time. Besides, she is also restricted to put vermilion (marriage symbol) on her fore head and to wear new clothes during the nine day pollution period.

c. Breast-feeding

The newborn is to be fed with breast milk in every half an hour till two months. Thereafter, the baby is to be breast-fed at least twelve to fifteenth times in a day up to six month. Whenever the mother goes to breast-feed her child, she throws two drops of milk on earth; these she offers to the Gods, Goddesses and the evil spirits for the safety of her child. It is believed that if she does not offer these and feeds her child her breast milk it would be poison for her child and the child may suffer from various types of disease for a long time. For breast feeding also she is to follow certain norms. First, she is to feed the baby with the right breast and then with the left breast. They believe that the right breast is as good as rice and the left one is as good as curry for the child. Mother feeds her breast milk to the child at least for four months, sometimes she feeds her child up to three and four days. She is always careful at the time of breast-feeding because if in case a drop of milk falls on the naval and ears of the child it will cause for cancer on that particular point. She is also to be careful so that her breast milk should not drop on hearth and soil. It is believed that a single drop of milk over the hearth will reduce the milk secretion of the lactating mother and ultimately it will fall insufficient for the child.

A mother offers her milk to her child only when the baby cries or sucks the thumbs or toes. The mothers who are unable to feed breast milk due to some or other problems feed the goat milk or cow milk to the child. In case, the mother conceives again after five months of delivery, she never gives her breast milk to the child because people believe that after pregnancy mother's milk becomes impure. In such situation the mother goes out for work from morning till evening so that the child can leave the habits of breast sucking and the grandmother takes care of the child and tries to habituate the child with gruel and watered rice. They believe that mother's milk is best for the baby but are not aware about the usefulness of the initial secretion of the yellowish milk for the children. They think that the yellowish milk is dirty milk and it contains germs.

d. Cleaning the mouth

Mother cleans the mouth of the baby every day with the help of a piece of wet clothes and warm water. When teeth comes out during seven or eight months of the baby, the mother daily cleans its teeth at the time of bathing with her finger and washes the mouth thoroughly with normal water. However, children of about three years of age clean their teeth themselves with tooth stick made out of Sal tree.

e. Bathing

Mother wipes or cleans the new born with sponge after applying oil before 12 O' Clock in noon. Later when the baby grows up a little bit she gives bath to the baby with warm water. But she washes baby's hair occasionally only when it becomes too dirty. Sponging and cleansing of the baby is done with soft clothes. Generally, small children below three years of age take bath at home but children above three years of age go to the nearest river with their mother.

f. Dressing the child

After bathing mother dress her child and then draws a black mark on the forehead and on the cheek of the child with collyrium (kajol). It is believed that collyrium marks will protect the child from evil eyes.

g. Sleeping habits

Children usually want to sleep after taking bath. So, the mother feeds her breast milk to the child and makes bedding for the child to sleep. Sometimes she tells various types of stories, riddles, lullabies, etc. to make the child sleep. The infants are never kept on floor at the time of sleeping because of the fear of insects.

h. Other care

Beside the above cares, the mother cleanse the toilet and defecate of the child, cleans the child properly and then she sponge the child, and massage mustard oil on baby's body to protect the child from the cold. She washes the dirty clothes of her child daily when she goes to river for bathing to keep the child clean and hygiene. She cuts the nail of the infants by her teeth. However, when the child becomes two years old, the mother pairs the nail of the child by blade. Mothers always try to feed solid food to their children after six months of birth. First she gives gruel to the child and thereafter, she mixes some boiled rice with the gruel and like this the amount of the solid food is increased in due course.

i. Taking care of the unhealthy baby

Among the Bhumija when a child is afflicted with any diseases they always attribute the cause for the same as the mistake or wrong doing of the mother. They also believe that because of evil spirits the child is afflicted with a disease. I have observed a number of diseases in their society like gangrene in naval, ear disease, rickets, abscess, acidity, skin disease, cradle cap, fever, cough, small pox, worms, diarrhea, hernia etc. they have own reasoning for occurring of such diseases. The reasons are as follows:

Gangrene and Ear disease: If mother's breast milk falls on the naval or ear of the child it causes the cancer of the naval and ear. Therefore, the mother should be careful at the time of breast-feeding.

Rickets: It is known as "*puni*" in their society. The child gets affected with this disease if the mother does not take nutritional food during her pregnancy.

Fever and cough: It is caused due to heavy cold. If the mother takes bath for a long time or drinks cold water or washes her leg during night time .the child suffers from fever and cough.

Acidity, abscess and diarrhea occur if the mother eats sour food and other restricted food items and it gets cured only when she stops eating them.

Worms are common among the children in their society and it is believed that if the mother and the child eat more sweets the child will get worms.

Skin wrinkles: Besides the above, skin wrinkles have also been observed among them. If the mother breaks or fries egg during her pregnancy her child will be affected with such disease. If a pregnant mother eats any burnt food the baby would get black spot on its body.

Cradle cap: It is believed that if a pregnant mother eats any sour food and prepares any non-vegetarian food item, the newborn baby will be affected with cradle cap.

Sometimes the belly of the child becomes hard and they think that it is due to eating soil. In such case they take the child to the healer (Ojha), who treats the child by using various traditional methods, sometimes by herbal medicines, sometimes through Ayurvedic treatment, simultaneously he prays to the god, sacrifices cocks to appease the deities or practice black magic to cure the disease.

j. Discrimination of sex on taking care

In this society, there is discrimination among the boys and girls. As a patrilineal society, they give more attention to a male child. After sex determination in their traditional way, all the family members always keep eyes on the pregnant woman who will give birth of a male child. The status of the mother of a male child is high in the society than that of the mother of a female girl child. After delivery they take more care of the male child than a female child. They try to full fill all the wish of a male child. In their perception male is superior to female. In every matter of eating, sleeping, education, and rituals a male child is more privileged than a female child. According to them males children are the bread providers or the economic supports for the parents in their old days.

k. Role of Anganwadi for post- natal care

Now in every village Anganwadi centers are playing vital role. For taking care of the children and the mother, government has launched various plans and programmes in every rural and urban area. In this village, there is one main centre and three sub-centers. All the centers take care of the child and mother to improve their health. They constantly advise all the pregnant women and the mothers of the newborn babies about childcare. The children up to five years of age come to the Anganwadi centre where they are taught of

certain basic things, such as, cleanliness, and primary education through pictures, stories, songs etc. These Anganwadi centers open at 7.30 am and close at 12.00 noon. Here, children are provided with food for their physical and mental development. Government is providing the food free to the children and is spending 80 paisa per plate per day. Anganwadi centre provides wet pulse and sugar (6kg) on Monday and Thursday, flattened rice and molasses (50g) on Tuesday, Friday and Saturday, parched rice (50g) on Wednesday in breakfast. Like this the government spends 4 rupees per meal in mid-day meal every day.

4. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The people of Sankhabhanga village generally follow the traditional method in childcare but they also go to the Anganwadi centre for check up or to get advice. Most of the educated people go to the nearest hospital when any crisis arises in prenatal and postnatal situation. However, there is discrimination for male and female child but no female infanticide is reported.

In the process of child rearing, the Bhumija mothers take care of their children with the help of their mothers or other experienced women among their relatives. Though the mothers take care of their babies very carefully but sometimes due to the pressing demand of the agricultural activities in the field and household chores, she has to delegate the responsibility to her elder children. Thus, the mothers, sisters, and grandmothers in the family share the childrearing responsibility. The role of father is very less in this affair. However, when a child grows an attachment towards father gets increased.

In the case of child rearing practices, the Bhumijas follow both the traditional and modern methods. They have many rules, regulations and restrictions for the pregnant woman in every aspect of her life such as food habits, sitting, walking, visiting the places etc.

In the case of normal delivery, they take all the suggestions and advise from the traditional midwives and healers. However, if they happen to face the situation like caesarean they strictly adhere to the procedures given by the modern allopathic doctor, which means that they are having distinctive views as to what kind of treatment they should prefer for which kind of ailments.

They also have strong beliefs and practices related to the prenatal and postnatal care.

Among the Bhumijas in childcare practices breastfeeding is important. However, they avoid feeding colostrums to their babies, which is an indication that they are not fully aware of the nutritive value of it. Nowadays lot of changes are taking place in their attitudes like the acceptance of medicines and food supplied by the Anganwadi centre and approach to the hospitals at least in crisis. But they mostly adhere to their traditional belief system and practices in explain.

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