

Hinduism and the child bearing process theology religion essay



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Having a baby and changing your life with a new being is a very important part of life. Regardless of culture and traditions, it is a very special process for most mothers, fathers and families in all cultures around the world. This essay will look in depth into the ways the Hindu culture views child bearing, infant feeding, post partum beliefs and in general how their beliefs differ from our Canadian modernized culture.

Child-bearing

The Hindu religion in itself is a very tight-knit culture, relying a lot on the power of their God's and finding enormous strength in the faith itself. The child-bearing process is no exception. " Ceremonies are usually performed during pregnancy to ensure the health of the mother and growing child" (Hindu, 2012). Initially at conception a ceremony called ' samskar' is performed and this involves prayers of hope that a child will fulfill the parent's obligation to continue the human race. There are rituals that the father practices with the mother such as the father parting the hair of the pregnant mother three times upward from the front to the back, this is believed to assure ripening of the embryo inside. Also, charms may be

placed on or around the mother that ward off evil eyes and witches and demons.

As the pregnancy advances there are a set of prayers that are held during a ceremony to continue the blessings of the mother and child. Between the fourth and seventh months of pregnancy a ceremony called 'Simantonnayana' is held in which the father combs his wife's hair and expresses his love and support for her. Traditionally in the seventh month of pregnancy Hindu's have another ritual that is performed which would be compared to a modernized Canadian version of a baby shower, this is called 'Seemantham'. This event is organized by the family members and involves gift-giving and religious rituals. "A prayer to fire is recited to sooth the expectant mother. Light instrumental music is played, and it is believed that this will refine the development of the baby's ears" (Hindu, 2012).

"During pregnancy the mother usually assumes a passive role and follows directions of the trained professionals" (Leifer, 2011). During all examinations and the actual birthing process a female couch is usually preferred and they value the teachings of professionals. While the woman is in labour, her head is usually covered and if any examinations are to be done to the mother the husband must always be present.

Rituals immediately following the birth of the child are practiced as well. "Prior to the cutting of the umbilical cord, the father may touch the baby's lips with a gold spoon or ring dipped in honey, curds and ghee. The word 'vak' (meaning speech) is whispered three times into the right ear, and mantras (prayers) are chanted" (Leifer, 2011). This ritual is normally called '

Jatakarma' and is viewed as a sacrament or samskar. This ritual is given by the father to welcome and give blessings to ensure a long life, peace and to continue the generation of talent for the newborn child. After the newborn is delivered the sex of the child is not revealed until the placenta is delivered. This information is with-held to delay stress of the mother if the gender of the child is not of her preference until after the placenta is delivered.

One of the last rituals in this category includes the performance of ' Namakarana' (a ceremony done to name the child). This is held between the tenth and forty-first days of life. This particular ceremony marks the child's formal entry into his or her seat of Hinduism. " Names are chosen according to astrology" (BeliefNet, 2012) and a consultation is done in deciding the name of the child and usually names of Hindu gods or goddess are chosen and preferable. Hindu's believe this tradition is special and a blessing because you will have an added benefit of remembering how your child was named.

Infant Feeding

Typically a newborn baby in the Hindu culture is breastfed; the belief is that by feeding the child breast milk, mothers are worshipped by the Hindu goddess ' Durga' (the mother goddess). It is believed that breast milk is thought to have special powers which are in their religious text as the ' Sushruta Samhita'. These texts also recommend delaying breastfeeding until ' true milk' comes in." (McKenna, 2009). Following religious beliefs a mother's colostrum and prelacteal feeding is discarded. Among some Hindu's " colostrums is discarded because of a belief that its thickness and viscosity may be difficult for the newborn to swallow. Also, there are beliefs <https://assignbuster.com/hinduism-and-the-child-bearing-process-theology-religion-essay/>

that the first breast milk is 'stale' or 'old' from being stored in the breasts for the duration of the pregnancy" (McKenna, 2009). Mothers ensure that their breasts are washed and all colostrums are discarded for the first day until the true milk comes in. Hindu's also believe that by discarding the colostrum they are 'purifying the tubes of the mother's mammary glands. Prior to the mothers giving their child the true milk, Hindu's give 'prelacteals' which their religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds state they are to have positive effects on the baby's gastrointestinal and genitourinary systems. "Hindu's use prelacteals like honey and ghee, which are thought to evacuate meconium, reduce colic and act as a laxative" (McKenna, 2009).

When the infant reaches an age of six or seven months an 'Annaprasana' ceremony is performed for the first solid foods. Annaprasana's meaning is anna= rice and prasana= to enter, thus the reasoning why rice is typically the first food given, and is given at this ceremony. The difference of the month for the ceremony depends on the gender of the child. A girl child's ceremony is held on an odd month, while a boy's ceremony would be on an even month. When a baby gets solid food for the first time numerous prayers are offered to the child. It is believed with Annaprasana that the flaws that arise due to intake of impure food are removed. At the ending of this ceremony different articles such as books, fruits, toys and money are spread in front of the child. The baby is allowed to touch these items and it is believed that what the baby touches first will be his interest for rest of its life.

Post Partum Beliefs

Typically in most Indian cultures after a baby is born there is a lot of family support for the mother and many believe that the baby is to be handled as little as possible to allow its spine to grow normally. For the post partum women “ sponge baths are usually done” (Leifer, 2011) in the Hindu culture. Usually the woman who delivered the child is “ kept in seclusion for 40 days postpartum” (Leifer, 2011). This time of seclusion allows for bonding of the woman and child and immediate family. After this bonding time is complete then other family, friends and presents are welcomed into the home of the child. A traditional art of painting the skin with Henna is also performed on the woman after having a baby. “ Hennaing a woman after she gives birth is a traditional way to deter the malevolent spirits that cause disease, depression, and poor bonding with her infant. The action of applying henna to a mother after childbirth, particularly to her feet, keeps her from getting up to resume housework. A woman who has henna paste on her feet must let a friend or relative help her care for older children, tend the baby, cook and clean. This allows her to regain her strength and bond with her new baby” (Cartwright Jones, 2002).

Personal Reflection

The process and importance of having a child in the Hindu religion really intrigues me. Although every culture finds importance and happiness in the process of a new child being welcomed into their family, the Hindu religion has opened my eyes into how special and meaningful this process can be. All the ceremonies and special activities that are done to embrace this beautiful time in life made me wish some of these special events were incorporated in

modernized Canadian cultures. I truly believe that having this much culture and religious belief incorporated into having a child makes it even more special.

It is very important as a nurse that you take the time and consideration to value all the different areas that cultures around the world celebrate and embrace different parts of life, such as having a baby. As a nurse you must be respectful of each and every person's beliefs and be culturally aware that every person regardless of race, color or culture may choose to embrace this part of life in their own way. It is the responsibility of the nurses and health professionals to make this the best possible experience for them and in turn being respectful to their wishes, regardless if they are different than your own.