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## Motherhood and Child Birth : A case study in the Khowang Kaoimari Kaibartta Gaon Dibrugarh.

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### Abstract

*Motherhood is the best part of an women's life which brings a lot of changes in their lifestyle. In almost every society the mothers have to go through some traditions of the society which are meant for the betterment of a child. By studying the role played by women of a particular ethnic group during the child birth, focus could be made easily on the values and customs of people of that society in that sphere. Among the Kaibarttas of Assam also women follow certain rule and regulation in childbirth, where the particular lady as well as the elderly women of the society and also family plays important role during the whole period. In this paper an attempt has been made to study the motherhood and childbirth in Khowang Kawoimari Kaibartta Gaon of Dibrugarh, Assam. For the study 50 women of the age of above 40, were selected by using simple random sampling method from the Khowang Kaoimari Kaibartta Gaon of Barbarua block, Dibrugarh. The respondents are interviewed to assess their knowledge. Secondary source is also proved to be helpful to some extent.*

Key word : Kaibartta, Motherhood, Rituals, Child

## **Introduction**

By studying the role played by women of a particular ethnic group during the child birth, focus could be made easily on the values and customs of people of that society in that sphere. Woman form an integral part of the society as she has to play various role of a mother, sister, wife, daughter etc. in every society. In the human world, women constitute a governing group in the field of child birth even before and after pregnancy. During the child bearing period women have to go through a vulnerable period and so need some special care. In every society, during the period of child birth women are being cared by every one of the family and society. At the same time, they have to go through some special rule and regulations which are basically ordained by the elderly women of respective family as well as the society for the benefit of the pregnant lady and also for the well being of the foetus. Likewise, among the Kaibarttas of Assam also women follow certain rule and regulation in childbirth, where the particular lady as well as the elderly women of the society and also family plays important role during the whole period.

## **Objective of the study**

In this paper an attempt has been made to find out the rule and regulation that are followed by women during pregnancy, delivery and postpartum period among *Kaibarttas* which are basically ordained by the elderly women of the society. Through which we can find the role of Motherhood in the whole course as well.

## **Methodology**

For the study both primary and secondary data have been collected. The secondary data has been collected from published materials, books, websites etc. For the study 50 women of the age of above 40, were selected by using simple random sampling method from the Khowang *Kaoimari Kaibartta Gaon* of Barbarua block, Dibrugarh. The respondents are interviewed to asses their knowledge

## **Khowang Simaluguri Kaoimari Kaibartta Gaon**

The case study has been carried out in Khowang *Simaluguri Kaoimari Kaibartta Gaon* which is an exclusively *Kaibartta* inhabited area of Barbarua block. It is situated near Khowang Ghat , in the bank of deserted course of river *Burhidihing*. The area is consisting of 82 household and about 560 (aprox.) of its population. The investigator is informed that that the people of the

village have been inhabited in that area since before the time of independence and after the great earthquake of 1950 A. D. most of the people of that area were migrated to the villages like *Jokai* and *Cherepakhati* of Dibrugarh district.

### **The Kaibarttas**

The *Kaibattas* are one of the aboriginal ethnic groups of Assam. The civilization of mankind says that people usually select to live in the river bank for fresh water, for their every day needs and fertile land that supported agriculture thus providing all necessary means to maintain life and in that way they most of the people may had been also involved in fishing to support their eating habit. Thus the Kaibarttas must have been adopted fishing as their prime occupation from time immemorial. The most established theory is that the *Kaibarttas* are [Dravidians](#) or they belong to Dravidian stock. They were the makers of civilization in the [Indus valley](#) at [Harrappa](#) and [Mohenjodaro](#), the developers of Indian writings, township and drainage and central heating system before 2500BC. These people were of a royal tribe. Historians such as Jagabandhu Singh have referenced the *Padma Purana* and the *Brahmavaibarta Purana* and have come to the conclusion that *Mahishyas* and *Kaivarttas* (Kaibarttas) are the same caste. In general terms, "the child born of a *Kshatriya* father and *Vaisya* mother is called a *Kaivartta* or [Mahisya](#) . According to historical documents like "Kalika Puran", the *Kaivarttas* were living in [Kamrup](#) even before the 9th century BC and they rule over the land several centuries. In [Sanskrit](#), the word 'Kaivartta' means one who depends on water, in other words, the community that earns its livelihood from related occupation (<http://pages.rediff.com/kaibarta--caste-/727508> ). The dictionary meaning of the word *Kaivartta* from the product of water as *Koi* means water and *Brit* means subsist or live ( Das 1986:13)

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

During the journey of pregnancy and childbirth women have to go through several rule and regulation regarding their food habit, day to day activities, several rites and rituals where the elderly women plays and important role with their advice and help the pregnant lady or the mother of a baby throughout the whole course. Here, the investigators tried to find out the role of the elderly women and even the mother of the child or pregnant lady during the course that is consisting of pregnancy, time of the birth of the child and post-pregnancy tenure. Accordingly the findings and discussions are designed in that way.

## **PREGNENCY PERIOD**

### **Food Habit :**

Pregnant women are being advised by the elderly ladies about their food habit and what they eat during their pregnancy because eating habits – good and bad affected the foetus in the womb.

- The pregnant ladies are advice not to take Papaya and Pineapple during the period.
- They are prohibited to take alcohol
- They won't have to take *Khar* (One type of Assamese dish having Soda i.e. Sodium Carbonate in it) which would definitely harm the baby of the womb.
- A pregnant lady is advised to take safe food which is very important. The elderly women of the family and surroundings make them to know what can be eaten safely during pregnancy.

### **Daily Activates**

For most of the women, it is important to do some regular physical activity during pregnancy as part of living a healthy lifestyle and it is strictly followed among the *Kaibarttas* in the studied village and the elderly women make the expecting mother aware about the benefit of the physical labour. The pregnant women among the *Kaibarttas* are found to do daily activities like weaving, working in the paddy field and other household activities.

### **Rites and Rituals**

During this period women have to go through some rites and rituals from time to time where the elderly women play the most important role in performing all those.

- The *Kaibarttas* observe a ceremony in the fifth month of pregnancy in the maternal house of the pregnant lady where the mother or other elderly lady plays an important role. On a suitable day of the very fifth month, 5 or 7 number of married women or *Gopinee* are invited to perform the ceremony. On the day, the pregnant women is fed *Panchamrita* , an especial food item that is made of five sweet and delicious ingredients like *Gakhir* ( Milk) , *Ghee* ( A clarified type of Butter), *Kol* ( Banana), *Mou* ( Honey) and *Cheni* ( Suger). At the very outset of the ceremony they elderly ladies pray for the well being of the mother and the baby of the womb. The *Panchamrita* is first offered to the pregnant

lady than after all of the ladies and the other people have those. With this the lady with the baby in her womb gets blessings of these elderly women.

- In the nine month of pregnancy again 5 or 7 (it should be an odd number) number of *Gopinee* i.e married women gathered to bless the pregnant lady again. The *Kaibartta* people call this rite as *Pithaguri Khuwa* (To feed the rice flour). On a day of nine month they again prepare a food item i.e made of *Pithaguri* (Rice flour), *Cheni* (Suger) and *Kol* (Banana) and first offer the preparation to the *Suryadevata* (Sun God) and after that they have the preparation of *Pithaguri* altogether.
- The pregnant women are barred to do some work like they are asked not to left behind the household work like washing the cloths after bath, washing the utensils after use etc. which is not a good sign at all for pregnant women. They are also barred to sit directly on the flour as they believe that the mother earth won't be able to hold the weight of the lady with the baby in the womb. They won't have to place her bare feet on the floor during the eclipse. They are even asked not to place their bare feet on the flour during eclipse. They are asked also not to cross the *Pogha* (A rope made of jute generally which is used to tie the neck of a cow), not to step on the shadow of the elders of the family and society etc.
- The pregnant lady is asked to keep a *Kotari* (Knife), *Horiyoh* (Mustard seeds) etc with them. It is generally believed that these articles would be able to save the lady with the baby in her womb from evil beings.

## **DELIVERY**

In the near past, the women of the Kaibarttas usually gave their child birth at home with the care of a *Dhai* (Nurse) and even now they ask *Dahis* to help the mother to give birth to child or sometime they admit the pregnant lady in the hospitals nearby.

- During the study we came across and respondents who has given birth her 4 (four) children without the help of a *Dhai*. She informed the investigators that in presence of her mother in law has given birth to the child cut the *Nai* or *Navi* (umbilical cord) of the baby with a *Bahor Chuch* (a sharp, thin and small piece of a bamboo) and tie the cord with new thread, wash the baby herself with hot water that was kept in a *Kol gosor potua* (bark of a banana tree), wrapped the baby with warm cloths and fed the baby. She even took a bath in the river nearby and washed all dirty cloths of her own. In other cases the *Dhai* performs all the activities regarding delivery.

- From the very first day the mother and the baby are to sleep on a bed made of *Kher* (straw) till the impurity continues.
- At the time of child birth there is a tradition to blow a bowl of bell metal which make loud sound and it is considered as a sound of joy.

## **POSTPARTUM PERIOD**

During the postpartum period the elderly women of the family and the society have to perform an unavailing role in every aspect of the rites and rituals and also advice the mother to do the best regarding their food habit, child care and daily activities.

### **Food habit**

- Till the third day of the birth the mother is given *Gilabhat* (a soft preparation of rice) and other vegetarian food.
- On the third day of the child birth the mother of the new born baby is allowed to have *Jaal* (a food item made of one type of Lentil, Chicken, and papaya with black peeper). They believe that this food helps in increasing the milk of the mother which is very necessary for the baby. On the day the mother have the *Jaal* with *Bhat* (Boiled rice) with the baby in her lap. The mother is asked to act like she is feeding the baby before she has the food prepared for her. She repeated the act for three times, than only she can put the *Jaal Bhat* into her mouth.

### **Rites and rituals**

- The period till the fall of the *Nai* or *Navi* (umbilical cord) of the baby is called *Chuwa* (impurity) among most of the Assamese as well as among the *Kaibarttas*. During this period, usually the mother of the new born are asked not to go out of home and if she does so, water are thrown on the path that is crossed by the mother and raw cow milk is thrown on the mother, thus they believe that evil spirit won't be able to harm the mother and the baby. On the other hand, they believe that by throwing water over the path that crossed by the mother who is considered as *Chuwa* (impure), to purify the ground.
- When the *Nai* of the baby fall out from his body the *Kaibartta* people observe a ceremony called *Bajole Uluwa* (Bring the baby out of the roof). They believe that on this day the *Chuwa* is no more with the baby and the mother. So, they wash all the clothing of

the house and lay emphasis on the utmost cleanliness of the household. On the day, usually the hair of the baby is shaved, make the baby to take a bath, adorned with new cloths and make the baby to feel the taste of sweet on the very day. On the day they place a *Kanhi* (A big plate of Bell Metal) with rice, onion, potato, mustard oil, betel nut, new cloths of baby and the mother, ornaments, some money of their capacity on the plate. They call it *Akhon* (A word of respect) and place it on the side of the head of the mother and child while sleeping at night. The *Akhon* is placed by an older married lady of the family and the very next day the same lady after having her bath remove the *Akhon* from the bed in the name of God. Except the new dresses and the ornaments the other ingredients of the *Akhon* are donated to the older lady and with this the mother and the baby seek blessings from the lady.

- They keep *Bogori dal* (some small branches of *Zizyphus* tree) on the windows and door of the newborn and the mothers' room and also keep a flame whether of a kerosene lamp or coal in the room believe that it will prevent the evil beings to enter the room and harm them.

### **Post natal care**

- They give importance to breastfeeding to the child. Usually the baby has mother milk till four to five months and after that the baby is given a solid food prepared with *Bheemkol* (One species of banana), *Pithaguri* (Rice flour) and Milk.
- After the three days of the birth the *Dhai* or the other elderly women of the family and sometime the mother give massage to the baby with a mixture of mustard oil with garlic which is being kept over the flame for some time. They believe that this massage will help the baby to become strong and healthy.
- The women after the birth of the child is advised not to take heavy food in one time but to take food in short intervals. They believe that it would help the mother to make her physique especially the abdomen intact.
- To keep the muscle of the abdomen tight the mother is being massaged by the *Dhai* or any elderly women and the abdomen is pressed by a pack of hot sand wrapped by cotton cloths.
- Moreover, the lay emphasis on the cleanliness and hygiene regarding the care of the child and even mother.

## Conclusion

The respondents have satisfactory level of traditional knowledge and a positive attitude regarding pregnancy and postpartum care and also newborn care of their own and as such playing a traditional role of motherhood. This knowledge is all about normal pregnancy but they took help of medical care too for the well being of the mother and baby. Still they practice the traditional beliefs, knowledge and attitude of woman regarding maternal and newborn over times. It is found during the study that the new mothers are also interested in doing all those practices showed by the elderly woman of the society or family. With this we can come to the conclusion that these practices will continue among the ethnic group in coming time as well.

## References

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