



Pregnancy and Birth in Iranian Culture (Case study, Abarkooh City)

Neda Hooshmand Abarkhooyee¹, Ali Edalati¹, Mostafa Nadeem² and Hossain Arbabee¹

¹Payame Noor University, Iran.

²Shiraz University, Iran.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 7 February 2012;

Received in revised form:
17 March 2012;

Accepted: 28 March 2012;

Keywords

Pregnant,
Birth,
Believes,
Culture,
Abarkooh,
Iran.

ABSTRACT

The present research studies the ceremonies about birth and impregnation in Abarkooh city, Iran. Abarkooh is one of the cities of Yazd Province, Iran, that is of great importance to do anthropology and historical researched, due to its old and rich cultural record. Customs and ceremonies about the birth in Iranian culture are more interesting and considerable. They are conventions that are more considerable in male chauvinistic Iranian society. Society in which women have always been surrounded within a four-way intersection, appealing to any superstition for the purpose of being pregnant was considered a usual affair. In such a society, the female barren had no place for herself in her society as well as among the members of her own family, thus, taking this fact into account, the importance of giving birth to offspring will fully be understood. This paper attempts to investigate the beliefs related to pregnancy and birth.

© 2012 Elixir All rights reserved.

Introduction

One of the important stages in bride's life was her pregnancy period. When the bride became informed of her own pregnancy, the first person to be told about the matter was her mother. Upon being informed about her daughter's pregnancy, she became very happy, because she could hold her head upward and boast due to her daughter not being a barren and she was secure of hearing the taunts of her daughter's mother-in-law. In the past years, if a woman hadn't a child, this was considered as a fault only for the woman and all scolding and taunts were imposed on the poor woman, and this in itself was an indicative of a patriarchy society and superiority of the male sexes over the female ones that no fault and sin was included for boys and men. The bride's mother didn't tell anybody about her daughter's pregnancy for two months and sometimes even until the time when the signs of pregnancy appeared on her daughter's face.

Although a pregnant woman worked at home as well as on the farm, she was more being paid attention to by her husband and other relatives in her pregnancy period in contrast to other days. Everyone tried to meet her needs specially in case of edible materials because it was believed that if a mother saw something in her pregnancy period and had a sudden urge to eat it and couldn't have access to it, then her offspring's eyes would be green and a child with green eyes after being borne, was a cause of disgrace for his / her red-blooded father, because this was considered as a sign for the man's disability to meet her wife's needs. In the past, when nobody had been aware of genetic science and heredity factors they justified any signs on their faces. It was possible for a pregnant woman to have a yen for something during her pregnancy period and this was known as "nāxāši" in Abarkooh. Most of the women were inclined to eat mud and straw mixture, and raw rice during their yen periods and since in ancient times people didn't know about the body's iron deficiency and /or about the woman's body's vitamin

deficiency, they didn't prevent them eating mud and straw mixture, and raw rice, and when the wives of the nobles and liege lords went somewhere during their pregnancy period, their housemaids had to take some raw rice with themselves to present them if they wished to eat some.

In case of some women who had experienced several consequent abortions, in other words any offspring didn't remain for them; they offered a technique known as "locking the back". When a woman was pregnant after several abortions, she went to see a person who inscribed prayers during the first months of her pregnancy. He fastened a thread around her back and equipped its two ends with a lock. The lock was kept with her and the prayer inscriber wrote a prayer or a Sura of the Koran for the woman to fasten around her back. They unlocked the bolt after the baby was born. When a pregnant woman was in her seventh month of pregnancy, her mother took the clothes which she had prepared for the newborn to her daughter's house and the relatives of the bride-groom were present there.

Conventional Methods for Determining the Sex of the Newborn:

Different ways for determining the sex of the newborn in Abarkooh had some features in common with other ones used in other districts of Iran:

- When they prepared the head of a sheep to be cooked, they opened its mouth with the intention of two parturients and, for example, they allocated the right side of the head for one of the parturients and the left side for the other parturient. They opened the jaw. If it was without any appendix, the newborn would be a boy, otherwise it would be a girl.
- They spread the newborn's clothes. If the first person entering the room was a man, then the newborn would be considered to be a boy, otherwise the newborn would be considered to be a girl.

- They poured salt on the head of the pregnant woman without making her aware of this. If she touched her own face, the newborn would be a boy, and if she touched her own hairs, it would be a girl.
- If the pregnant woman, becomes beautiful in her face and her abdomen becomes smaller, her child will be a boy and if her face puffs up and her abdomen becomes bigger, her child will be a girl.
- If the pregnant woman eats a lot of warm foods and date palm, her child will be a boy.

Some points that should be observed by the pregnant woman:

- The pregnant woman shouldn't look at a dead, otherwise her child will have evil eyes.
- The pregnant woman shouldn't put her hand on her abdomen when eclipse occurs, otherwise newborn's body will bear a black spot at the time of birth – and this was known as “eclipse”.
- The pregnant woman shouldn't be left alone at home, otherwise she will suffer from demons.
- The pregnant woman shouldn't be afraid of something, otherwise she will have an abortion.
- The pregnant woman shouldn't use cardamom and thyme because it will cause to have an abortion.

Birth Ceremonies

When the birth pain began, the husband went to see the local midwife who was known as “mumĈeh” in Abarkooh, and the child was born at home. After giving birth to the child, if the placenta didn't come out, the midwife didn't free it and even she fastened it to an odd shoe and didn't let it return into the woman's abdomen, in other case it would lead to the parturient's death. They spread soil under the feet of the parturient and this prevented the child from being hit. The midwife had an assistant who was told “pišnešin” and she helped the midwife in bringing the child. After the baby was born and it began its first cry, midwife's assistant informed the baby's father-who had worriedly been waiting outside the door - of his child health and gained reward from him, and if the newborn was a boy, the amount of award was many folds. Of course, taking the previous descriptions into account one may find out the cause for the merits of giving birth to a boy baby and this hasn't been true only in case of people living in Abarkooh, rather such a happiness has been evident in all parts of Iran, and Henry Maseh also mentions it in his book:

“They preferred the boy to the girl in general. If the newborn is a boy, he lights the oven and opens the door of the house. But in case of giving birth to a girl they say she is infertility. Furthermore, the happiness due to giving birth to a boy newborn is evident in all of the Muslim countries.” (Henry Maseh, 2535: 31-32).

Ceremonies about hard-delivering

- They poured the “lady's finger” (some kind of a plant) into the water and said, “By the time when this lady's finger blossoms, the baby will be born.
- They poured water on a part of the husband's cloak or shirt and asked his wife to drink it. They believed that in this case God will be kind to the in-labor's husband.
- They gave the in-labor watermelon-vine, cardamom and thyme and believed that it would cause giving easy birth.
- They forced the in-labor to blow to a jug. In this case, due to the exerted force the baby will be born.
- They gave the four-plant essence consisting of plantain, fleawort, purslane seed and quince seed to the in-labor.

- They sent someone on the roof and asked him to say “Azan” (calling to prayer). They believe that this will cause God to hear the in-labor's cry due to the pain.

- They took a piece of candy or hard sugar from an honest sayyid and gave it to the in-labor, and believed that in this case Imams will come to help her.

After giving birth, they took the in-labor to the bathroom and poured “Ĉeleh water” over her. This meant pouring forty times full-hand water over the head of in-labor and they believed that this will prevent the elf coming to her, and in case of loneliness no danger will threaten her. However, the main bathroom for the in-labor was the one that she was taken ten days after giving birth. The midwife had the duty of inviting the relatives' women for this affair. The night before going to the bathroom, the midwife mixed two eggs with some wheat flour and plastered it over the head of in-labor. Then, she mixed some animal fats with honey and wheat flour and plastered the mixture over the dimple on the back of in-labor and fastened a piece of cloth over it.

This was known as “kalo kemar Ĉasbundan ” (fastening the head and back) and they believed that in this way the force due to giving birth will go out of the head and back of in-labor. In the tenth day morning the guests went to the house of in-labor to take her to the bathroom. There, each of the relatives brought an edible thing or fruit with herself and gave it to the in-labor and others during taking a bath. Midwife, rubbed the mixed liquid consisting of animal fats, back pills, egg, thyme, turmeric, nigella, and dill seeds that had prepared beforehand. Then she put the in-labor to sleep on the bathroom's hot floor and with the help of two masseur women she massaged the in-labor's body to make her bones get their previous positions from which they had been displaced due to the birth. In Abarkooh, this was known as “tang o tir andaxtān” (forcing the bones to take their own places). They also, rubbed the ground form of a red plant to her face to spoil the spots created on her face during her pregnant period, then they gave her the yellow parts of two eggs (yolk) to eat. They washed the in-labor's head for about ten times with a kind of soap, locally called as “pi” and using the loofah and face powder they cleansed her body's dirt because they believed that if a tiny bit of dirt remains on the body of in-labor, her prayers will not be accepted until her next birth.

After taking the bath, even in hot seasons, they dressed the in-labor in warm clothes because they believed that her bones were warm and upon encountering the first wind she would catch a cold. It took five to six hours for them to take a bath. The brought the baby into the bathroom during the last hours and began to wash him/her. The in-labor remained in her bed another further day after the bath and beginning from the eleventh day she was considered as a mother and she led her daily life like the past days.

Ideas and beliefs about pregnancy and the newborn

- If the in-labor gave birth to a girl, they gave her chicken - which is of warm characteristics- to eat in order to give birth to a boy in her next birth.
- If she had given birth to a boy, they gave her chicken and rooster soup to prevent the newborn becoming inflamed, i.e. having epilepsy.
- They poured “Ĉeleh water” also over the baby to prevent the demons changing the newborn.
- Anyone who was a barren became pregnant upon eating the in-labor's leftover.

- If two women in a house - for example two sister-in-law or two sisters - were pregnant, they had to sacrifice two hens or roosters for them to be healthy.
- If a newborn suffered jaundice, they washed his / her body with distilled fumitory and milk and gave him/ her hedge-mustard.
- When a woman didn't enjoy milk, they gave her fennel and hard sugar.
- They believed that anyone who splits the bread into pieces at the tablecloth, he /she will have more children in future.
- When the in-labor went to the bathroom, the female sterile individuals went with her, to enjoy the poured water over the body of the in-labor. This caused them to be pregnant until the next year.
- The intense heartache that in-labor experienced after the birth was known as "Geriban" and they believed that the woman's womb seeks for the child and for this very reason the in-labor experiences heartache. After three days, the womb gave up the hope and the ache was relieved.

Conclusion:

From discussions about being pregnant to the baby's born, following points can be reached. Although the first signs of being pregnant caused happiness for the new bride, it shouldn't be ignored that this new bride had to bear the anxiety of keeping the womb into her own abdomen for nine months because due to the lack of hygiene and polluted environment every moment it was probable for her to abort. The other point was the issue of determining the sex of the baby. Although with the help of conventional sonography individuals were to determine the sex of the baby it was only the baby-born that brought peace or storm to the house. In the past patriarchy system the boy was considered as the light of the house, a cause for the door of father's home to be remained open, light of the relatives and the bowl of honor. In such a society that the girl is considered as the platform of the door of the house and every noble and ignoble can offer marriage proposal for her, mother was in the right to be anxious about the sex of her offspring. The mother who had

always heard and understood the difference between giving best wishes concerning the sex of her offspring from the very beginning of her marriage, was surely anxious about the future of her offspring if it was a girl. Although when the baby was a girl, some people enthusiastically told her "The girl is blessing and a cause for bounty, don't be worried about her, her God is generous", the mother was fully aware of the fact that these words are nothing except heartening, and that, those who say these words talk other ways outside the door of the house, and they will express such words as "helpless, it is not known for us whether her next offspring will be a girl or a boy.". The other point to be considered is being a barren. Even only one year after a woman's marriage, and even if she was at her teen years of age, in case of not becoming pregnant she was so worried that she decided to do everything such as prayer, mumbo jumbo, appealing to the old trees, old people and children because she knew that in the society whose family system was so that several generations lived in a single family, she had to bear ironies and taunts, and bad behaviors from her husband's relatives and/or her own ones because the fault of being a barren was imposed to the helpless woman and she had to bear all words and threats of the husband concerning the choosing a second wife.

References

1. Ary, D., L. C. Jacobs, et al. (2002). *Introduction to research in education*, (6th Ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
2. Mansoorfar, K. (2007). *Statistic in social science* (6th Ed). Tehran, Payame-Noor.
3. Roh Alamini, M. (2008). *Around City with Lights*, (15th Ed). Tehran, Attar, 2008, Attar Co.
4. Tarzipoor Khoramabadi, D. (2010). *A path to Mystery World*, (First Ed) Ghom, Henares Co.
5. Yin, R. K. (1989). *Case study research: Design and method*. Newbury Park, California, Sage publication, Inc.
6. (2008). *Ancient rituals and celebrations in contemporary time of Iran*, (40 Ed). Tehran, Aghah Co.