



Empowering The Young Women-A Study With Reference To Puberty Rituals

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ABSTRACT

Rituals are society's way of sustaining, maintaining and teaching the culture to the younger generation. Rituals are essential to restore the matrilineal lines of initiation (old women teaching young women). A menarche (first menstruation) ritual can make this time easier and more meaningful for both the young girls beginning menstruation, and her mother. Such a ritual comforts the young girls and lets her know that her feelings are natural and have been shared by women throughout time. It focuses the attention of the community on the young women's needs at this time in her life. And it instructs the young woman about what her family and society expect of her now that she is entering womanhood. To analyse the nature of rituals, to know the positive things are gained directly and indirectly by the young women, and how this celebration leads to empowerment are some of the objectives of the study. The study has been conducted in kamandappatti village of Omalur Taluk of Salem district. A total number of 128 young women who have purposively selected were interviewed. It is clear from the analysis that the girls who were celebrated puberty rituals were felt very happy and they learnt so many unknown things related to puberty and they feel that they are empowered in a small way but it is very much essential to lead a successful life as a women.

KEYWORDS

Introduction

The first menstruation of a girl is known as puberty and it is otherwise known as age attainment, coming of age and becoming big girl. It is celebrated as a ceremony in India especially in south India with a big way. As soon as the girl gets her first menses the time is noted for knowing her time in future including her marriage life through horoscope. The girl will be given bath by the women in the family with immediate relatives and neighbours. The matter will be conveyed to maternal uncle (the eldest one) and he will make the trip as quickly as possible. If it is getting late to arrive his responsibility will be performed by his representatives.

Role of maternal uncle

Maternal uncle will built a hut with green coconut leaves for the girl. She has to stay there in the hut and restricted to enter into the house. She is also restricted to touch any things and people until the puberty ceremony is over. The ceremony will be conducted on fifth day or seventh day or ninth day or 11th day from the first day of menstruation. The girl will be provided with a separate plate and tumbler, blankets, bet sheets and pillows only for her use. No other will use these things. She is also restricted to enter in to other rooms at home especially in the pooja room. She cannot enter in to the temple or go in front of the temple.

The role of the relatives

Relatives of the girl those who are in the same residence or from other places will get an appointment to visit the girl. The reason for seeking appointment is that the visitors will bring special vegetarian food including vegetables, fruits, sweets and spicy eatables. Flowers, kungum(a red or maroon colour powder to keep on the fore head) and turmeric powder also will be offered by the visitors. These things are considered as auspicious to the women. Friends and neighbours from other caste also will visit the girl. The women who are visiting the girl not only offer nutritious food but also they instructed the girls about personal hygiene, food to be consume, rest to be taken, training to be taken on cooking and household work by helping the mother, getting ready to marriage etc.

The role of the friends and peer group

Members of the peer group may also visit the girl and discuss their experience about their puberty if they already attained the age. The girl may feel shy to talk about such restricted matter, even though they are very eager to understand many miserable matters that was never discussed openly by the family or by the school. It is an indirect method of imparting knowledge about sex and reproductive education.

The rituals

The girl will be isolated from others and make her to sit in the hut which is built by the maternal uncle. She has to stay according to the situation for three days, five days, seven days up to 13th day. Ritual will be conducted any one of these days. Nalangu sadangu will be started first. The women and at home, relative women, neighbouring women will apply sandal powder on the young woman's face, hands and legs. After the sadangu over she will be given bath with turmeric powder. No men are allowed during the ceremony. Dressed with new cloths and gold ornaments, she will be placed on a jewelled chair. She will be blessed with gifts and moi by the people who were attended the functions.

Review of literature

Sabrina Bachai(2014) concludes explains the nature of puberty ceremony. When a girl gets her first period, it is celebrated in a great way. The puberty ceremony is celebrated with friends and members who usually bring gifts. On the first day of her period, the young girl is bathed by close relatives, kept in isolation, and fed extravagant foods. After her isolation, she is given another bath, and then dressed up in a sari along with jewelry. The sari is significant in that it symbolizes her now becoming a mature woman.

The eastern region of Ghana, according to Sabrina Bachai(2014) the Krobo people celebrate puberty rites with a festival called "Dipo" — celebrated in the month of April. The festival is to initiate girls into adolescence because it is believed that girls who participate in this ritual before they ever have any sort of sexual contact with a man will be good

wives. After this ceremony, no one besides their husbands will see them like this again. The ceremony is two days, and the girls have a portion of their heads shaved, are given a bath in a river, and are fed foods such as sugar cane and peanuts.

In Japan, people celebrate both men and women in what's known as a "Seijin Shiki" ceremony. It's a coming of age ceremony for people when they are approximately 20 years old. Girls dress up in kimonos and boys in traditional Japanese clothing or black suits. It is similar to a prom, and after the ceremony, both men and women celebrate by going to parties sans alcohol (Sabrina Bachai, 2014).

In Bali, Indonesia, when a boy or girl is of certain of age they have a tooth filing ceremony called a "mesangih" or "mepandes"; it usually occurs in July and August. In Balinese culture, the ceremony is said to help people rid themselves from the forces of evil: desire, greed, and anger. Only four incisors and two canines are filed. It takes place before the sun rises, and the pubescent boy or girl is accompanied by religious songs. The filing is done by a priest, and the mouth usually numbed before, but the process is considered painless.

Relevance of the study

There are many rituals celebrated in different stage in order to mark the importance of that day. Puberty ritual is one which celebrates the girl's first menses. In addition to it this ceremony declares that the girl becomes matured to enter in to married life. When the girl is kept in the hut she indirectly taught the need for taking nutritious food during menstruation, personal hygiene, responsibility of a girl after puberty, and also some psychological inputs by the relatives, friends and peer group. She enjoys the love, care and support given by the family members, relatives and friends. She develops confidence forgetting confusion because of puberty. With the light of the above discussed points the present study has been conducted.

Research methodology

The study has been conducted to analyse the importance of puberty rituals which is still celebrated in a big way in rural India. In urban area people celebrate it simply by the family members and it is end with bathing and new dresses. Kamandappatti a village in Omalur taluk, Salem district is the study area. 128 out of 607 families which were celebrated the rituals within five years of period were included in the sample list. The respondents were purposively selected and they were interviewed with a small schedule.

Table No.1 Reason for celebrating puberty

Sl. No	Reason for celebrating puberty ceremony	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1.	Our culture	12	9.38
3.	To collect moi (gifts)	37	28.91
3.	To propagate that girl is ready to marry	14	10.94
4.	Social gathering	8	6.25
5.	Maternal uncle's duty	11	8.59
6.	To recognise the girl as a matured person	46	35.94
7.	Total	128	100

Out of 607 families 128 were told that they have celebrated their puberty within last five years. Hence the 128 girls were identified as respondents for the research. They were enquired by the researcher about the reason for celebrating the puberty. About 36 per cent of the respondents told that they are celebrating the puberty because the girls should be recognised as a matured person. They should understand that they are ready to take the social responsibility like marriage, child bearing, home management and taking care of the family members. About 30 per cent of the respondents told that it is to collect the moi(gifts) from the relatives, neighbours and friends. In Tamil Nadu the gifts received from the people during the celebrations like marriage, puberty, house warming, valaikappu , naming ceremony of a new born and birth day celebration should be offered back in any one of the occasions to the people who already given the gift.

Table No.2 Attitude about the Celebration

Sl. No	Attitude	No. of Respondents				
		EL .	E .	N .	NB.	H
1.	Decoration of the house	89 (69.53)	29 (22.66)	10 (7.81)	--	--
2.	Isolated from home for more than one week	56 (43.75)	26 (20.31)	18 (14.06)	17 (13.28)	11 (8.59)
3.	No men were allowed to enter in to the cab	97 (75.78)	21 (16.41)	6 (4.69)	4 (3.13)	--
4.	Relaxation from normal work	128 (100)	--	--	--	--
5.	Special food	121 (94.53)	7 (5.46)	--	--	--
6.	Every day sweets and eatables	76 (59.37)	52 (40.63)	--	--	--
7.	New cloths	128 (100)	--	--	--	--
8.	Total	128				

EL: Enjoyed Lot E: Enjoyed N: Neutral NB: Not Bad H: Hatred

To measure the attitude of the respondents regarding the function a great majority of the respondents enjoyed or enjoyed a lot. Only less than 14 per cent of the respondents expressed not bad and hatred for the opinions like isolation, not allowing the men to visit her.

Table No.3 Persons Visited Before Sadangu at the Hut

Sl. No.	Persons visited	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Relatives	128	100
2.	Neighbours	73	57.03
3.	Classmates	54	42.19
4.	Senior Students	46	35.93
5.	Girl friends	98	76.56
6.	Total	128	100

The persons visited the respondents when they were placed at the pachai olai gudisai(A temporary hut made with green coconut leaves) for seven days or more than that. Hundred per cent of the respondents were visited by the relatives followed by girl friends (76.56 per cent), Neighbours (57 per cent) classmates and senior students. The visitors with reproductive health experience used to advice the girls with a limitation. Girl friends and class mates who were recently celebrated the puberty ceremony used to give some tips and discuss freely since they are in the same age groups and having similar experience.

Table No.4 Matters Discussed During the Meeting with the Visitors

Sl. No	What did they talk	No. of Respondents	
			%
1.	Reason for menses	25	19.53
2.	Reason for only among girls	38	29.69
3.	Reason for uneasiness	41	32.03
5.	Personal cleanliness	97	75.78
6.	Importance of bating during menses cycle	104	84.75
7.	Nutritional food	75	58.59
8.	Supplementary food	75	58.59
9.	Physical rest during menstruation	116	90.63
10.	Mental peace during menstruation	73	53.13

Sl. No	What did they talk	No. of Respondents
11.	Restriction in Social relationship with boys	91 71.09
12.	About marriage	86 67.18
13.	About child bearing	81 63.28
14.	About child rearing	88 68.75
15.	Total	128 100

When the visitors are meeting the respondents, they are sharing their experience with the visitors about age attainment, physical and mental health conditions, fear and unawareness on the first menses etc.,. The above table reveals the matters discussed the visit the respondents at the specially constructed coconut leaves hut. More than 90 per cent of the respondents were advised about the need of physical rest, bathing and personal cleanliness. Limited social relationships with boys were discussed with 71 per cent respondents. Discussion about marriage, child bearing & child rearing and importance of nutritional food were also discussed by more than half of the respondents.

Findings and conclusions

Out of 607 families 128 were told that they have celebrated their puberty within last five years. When the researcher enquired about the reason for celebrating the puberty 36 per cent of the respondents told that they are celebrating the puberty because the girls should be recognised as a matured person. They should understand that they are ready to take the family and social responsibility like marriage, child bearing, home management and taking care of the family members. These are possible only by celebrating the puberty in the traditional way.

The girls who celebrated the rituals may develop an attitude towards the experience of rituals. A great majority of the respondents enjoyed the celebration very well because, they expected from normal works, offered good foods and eatables, sharing of thoughts and experience of relatives and friends, and opportunity to develop confidence by removing confusion and fear at the first menstruation.

The persons visited the respondents when they were placed at the pachai olai gudisai (A temporary hut made with green coconut leaves by the maternal uncle) for seven days or more than that. Hundred per cent of the respondents were visited by the relatives followed by girl friends (76.56 per cent), Neighbours (57 per cent) classmates and senior students. The visitors with reproductive health experience used to advice the girls with a limitation. Girl friends and class mates who were recently celebrated the puberty ceremony used to give some tips and discuss freely since they are in the same age groups and having similar experience.

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To conclude, first menstruation causes a confusion and fear among the children since it appears at the age of 11 or more or sometimes even before the age of 11. Decoration of house, buying new cloths and jewels, special foods and eatables, love care and concentration, opportunity to clear the doubts from the easily approachable persons are all giving confidence among the girls and it will be useful to empower the small girls or young women at present which may be a stepping stone for achieving empowerment when the girl becomes a responsible women.