

Harmful Practices Across Culture and Child Rights' Violation

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Abstract

Harmful practices across the culture is not a new phenomenon. It has its roots in centuries ago. Many of the initiatives have been taken across the world to protect the children/ girls from these malpractices. UN General Assembly 1954 reflected on laws and practices related to family and Marriage. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights. While taking into consideration the health of the women, traditional practices affected their health were discussed in commission on human rights 1984. Along with this UN convention on child rights affirms the full development of the personality of the child and asserts to have healthy family environment, atmosphere of happiness and protection of children from all forms of violence across world. The aim of this conceptual endeavor is to reflect on harmful practices practiced across culture especially Asian and African countries with respect to violation of child rights. Data has been gathered from various governmental and non-governmental reports, research papers, articles and surveys. The analysis in the study is done on the basis of secondary sources of the data. Data with respect to harmful traditional practices across culture and violation of child rights is presented from the secondary sources. It has been found that many traditional harmful practices such as Corporal punishment, grotesque practice, branding of the child, Acid attack, binding of newborn and infants, bloodletting, Breast Ironing, genital mutilation., bleeding and cupping male circumcision, milk tooth extraction, tattooing. Cauterization, cupping and scarification, Use of cradle, Early and forced marriages, Dowry and bride prize are prevalent.

Keywords: Harmful Practices, Child Rights, Culture, Traditional practices

Introduction

Adopting child rights approach is the responsibility of the state to provide proper child care and protection. Promoting and respecting human dignity is very much essential especially the states where democratic form of government. Not only in democratic but around the world children's vulnerability requires transparent addressal to protect them from traditional and cultural practices across the world. It implies the principle of human rights, human dignity, human respect, child rights, child care and protection. The violation against children in the family neighborhood and other places based on harmful practices in cultures, traditions is being addressed by various international treaties committee and legislation to eradicate it from ground. Still the young children around the world perpetrated to violence and victim of harmful practices of culture, tradition and religion without the consent of the children. Sometimes parents force them to do some task against their capacity and capability. It is very much essential for parents to make a positive attitude towards the health and care and development of the children, corporal punishment and cruelty against children in family for the full development of the children. What is require to cope with violations against children is sound research in the field of child rights violation and revealed data will help the governmental agencies to frame laws and policies accordingly.

Harmful Traditional Practices against Children

Harmful practice against children based on tradition and culture is grotesque practice of branding children as witches. **The grotesque practice** prevails in Africa and other parts of the world. Another harmful practice based on culture and tradition is **branding of the child, birth order of the child** which should be considered as criminal offence. Corporal punishment, grotesque practice, branding of the child, Acid attack, binding of newborn and infants, bloodletting Breast Ironing, genital mutilation., bleeding and cupping, rectal ulceration, male circumcision, milk tooth extraction, tattooing. Cauterization, cupping and scarification, Use of cradle, Early and forced marriages, Dowry and bride prize etc. are prevalent across world. (International NGO Council on Violence against Children, 2006). **Acid attack** on girls is another trend across the world which is serious issue. The causes and reasons of acid attack may vary

region to region and country to country and culture to culture. You will be shocked by knowing about this cultural practice in south Asian communities. This practice could have implied on those transgress behavior norms, for instance deny for marriage proposal, refusal to sexual advance or other related disputes of within marriage or household. A study conducted in Bangladesh revealed that more than 60% of victims of the practice are found in between the age of 10 and 19. The aim of the practice is not to kill but to punish the girl by giving her physical and mental pain so that other girl would not do the same. The adverse effect of this practice is not just physical and mental pain but violation of human rights also. There is no such mean of ratifying treaties and framing legislations where large number of girls/ women suffering from these malpractices. It affects badly the growth of the children and also social, physical, mental and personal development.

In most of the countries such as Russia, turkey and CIS states, the practice of **binding of newborn and infants** and wrapping them in clothes to restrict their movement. You can imagine what are the risks the children would go through. The problem of hypothermia, respiratory problems, hip-dysphasia and low weight gain can be seen in children due to this harmful practice. Same type of practice is also followed in Tajikistan which can significantly delay development and cause physical impairment. Sometimes **birth order of the child** creates a problem for society and community. There are evils and superstitions in some cases of child birth.

The superstitions in these births.

1. Birth of twin and more than one child
2. Sex of the child
3. Birth of girl child is considering unlucky and evil. The birth of the boy child is considering matter of pride and prestige.
4. The other superstition in premature birth, abnormal child, and unusual birth position of the child is also believed to be unlucky in some Indian families and other parts of the world.

Most of the countries like Ethiopia and Tajikistan has tradition of **bloodletting** which purely based on wrong notions. This could believe by this practice that bloodletting is beneficial to cure

many diseases and promotes good health. But due to this practice the child has to go through severe pain. It results in severe bleeding anemia, infections, contraction and deaths too. Like bloodletting another superstition practice practiced in Tajikistan is **kolak** in which small cuts are made on the roof of the mouth, back, chest or stomach of newborn and infants in order to release bad or dirty blood.

Girls are no safer all around the world. The practice of **breast ironing** or breast massage in the region of west and central Africa is shocking one. This harmful practice is practiced to girls to remove the signs of puberty. This harmful practice is practiced by pressing the breasts, pounding or massaged with a heated object. This practice of breast ironing has many side effects which are long-term such as tissue damage, pain, burns, irritation, infections, scarring, depression and shame.

In Tajikistan the traditional practice of **use of cradle** for newborn is practiced from years ago. Process of use of cradle involves binding of the child tightly and wrapped swaddle and using a special apparatus to keep the infant dry. It has harmful effects reported in many studies. It harms the physic of the child as well it results in delay in physical development of the child. In eastern part of the Tajikistan the **practice of kolak** (use of blade to remove newborn child's blood) is influential where it is believed that when child cries his/her skin turns darker shade because of dirty blood is removed by cutting the back, chest, tummy, palate, with blade. In this practice child has to suffer the severe pain and can cause mental illness and skin infections (**save the children 2011**).

Early and forced marriages is a serious threat for the security of the girls and their rights. One in every three girls in developing world is the victim of this practice. This practice is most prevalent in some of the Asian and African countries. In India it is most prevalent in some parts of Rajasthan, Haryana, Odisha, Bihar. Tradition of **male circumcision** in south Africa is the root of many physical problems in males. It results in spreading of sexually transmitted diseases through unhygienic procedures and well qualified medical staff. It is the prime concern of the human rights activists to eradicate the malpractices from south Africa and to create healthy environment for the personal development of each and every individual. For this south Africa has ratified many international treaties to protect the children from cultural practices, CRC,

African charter on the rights and welfare of the child, CEDAW etc. (Roux, L. & Lucinda, 2006). **Early girl child marriage** inflicts emotional and mental stress as she has to leave her parent's home and has to go to in-laws without any understanding and knowledge of her personal, social, physical development. She has to spend life with the person who is having a lot of age differences which inflicts mutual Misunderstanding and clash in thoughts and without any emotional bonding she has to maintain the emotional and physical relation (OCHR). Along with this Dowry and bride prize is most common in Asian and African countries. India is no more far from this malpractice. Girls are treated as commercial objects and sometimes prize of the girls is decided on the basis of her virginity testing. Thus dowry demands are lower for girls who are younger and perceived to be great value. (International NGO Council on Violence against Children, 2006). In Uganda, South Africa and Mozambique have some traditional practice involves **cutting out organs**, often genital organs. These organs are used for sacrificial or traditional ceremonies. This sacrificial traditional practice in maximum of cases leads to death. Most often Vulnerable children or children with disabilities remains the victim of this practice.

(Fathiya L., Yemen) responded *"I was 12 years old when I got married. I was a child. They oppressed me by marrying me. All that I'm good for is to be a mother and a home maker... I'm illiterate. They didn't teach us anything. If they did, at least I would have benefited from something. I didn't know anything about marriage, how to be a mother... I wasn't thinking about anything. I get upset at myself. I get upset at my father. I get upset from my husband. I have constant headaches and I don't feel like even speaking. I feel like someone is choking me. There's so much heaviness on my chest."* (A report from the International NGO Council on Violence against Children, 2006)

The study conducted by address Jappson, Tesfu, M. & person, A. (2003) reveals some findings based on the study shows that many traditional practices are performed from centuries ago in Ethiopia such as genital mutilation., bleeding and cupping, rectal ulceration, male circumcision, milk tooth extraction, tattooing, Cauterization, cupping and scarification. These practices are considered beneficial to treat the harmful disease by Ethiopians. Incision of eye lid is known as the treatment of eye infections. This practice is carried out with a razor blade which results in skin infections and in excessive bleeding. A study conducted by Save the Children, a

non-governmental organization (2011). Harmful Traditional Practices in Tajikistan revealed that most newborn infants (70%) are placed in the cradle as early as 5 - 7 days after birth. The another finding revealed in the study that another practice of use of blade to remove newborn child's blood is practiced in the country. Ngunshi, R. (2011) conducted a study on Breast Ironing. A Harmful Practice That Has Been Silenced for Too Long revealed that breast ironing or breast massage, is practiced in West and Central Africa as a way to remove signs of puberty.

Key terms in the study

- **Traditional practices:** In this paper traditional practices refers to the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation across cultures which violates the child rights
- **Culture:** In this paper the culture refers to the ideas, customs and social behavior of a particular people, society or nation
- **Child rights:** Child rights refer here to all rights of the children below the age of eighteen years of age which are essential for harmonious development of the child. In this endeavour child rights are discussed with respect to their violation through traditional cultural practices.

Methodology

This paper is based on secondary sources. The data is referred from online and print sources. It contains governmental reports, non-governmental reports, conventions on child rights, research article, research papers and surveys. Reflections are made on harmful traditional practices against children and violation of their rights

Analysis

The data is referred from studies already been conducted on harmful traditional practices across culture. Analysis of the studies already been conducted is done with respect to harmful

traditional practices against children and violation of their rights across cultures due to these harmful practices

Discussion & Recommendations

The number of harmful practices against children based on tradition and culture is found. **The grotesque practice** prevails in Africa and other parts of the world. Another harmful practice based on culture and tradition is **branding of the child, birth order of the child** which is considered as criminal offence (International NGO Council on Violence against Children, 2006). It has been revealed from the analysis that Acid attack on girls is another trend across the world. The causes and reasons of acid attack may vary region to region and country to country and culture to culture. This practice is prevalent in south Asian communities if the girls could deny for marriage proposal, refusal to sexual advance or other related disputes of within marriage or household. Despite of many commissions, international treaties, conventions on child rights, violence against children due to traditional practices is still there. Due to these malpractices children has to suffer from many harmful diseases which can cause lifelong impairment may be physical and mental. Analysis can be supported by citing the study conducted in Bangladesh revealed that more than 60% of victims of the practice are found in between the age of 10 and 19. It can be discussed here that Asian and African countries are not yet capable of addressing all rights of individual. In Russia and turkey, the practice of **binding of newborn and infants** and wrapping them in clothes to restrict their movement is prevalent. It is evident to say that the problem of hypothermia, respiratory problems, hip-dysphasia and low weight gain can be seen in children due to this harmful practice. These harmful traditional practices violate the right of proper health and care of the children. The world where children are not safer cannot be a happy and prosperous world. Along with this Most of the countries like Ethiopia and Tajikistan has tradition of **bloodletting** which purely based on wrong notions. Practicing this harmful traditional practice results in severe bleeding, anemia, infections, contraction and deaths too. In this way it violates the right of liberty, right of health and care and protection and developmental rights. Like bloodletting another superstition practice practiced in Tajikistan is kolak in which small cuts are made on the roof of the mouth, back, chest or stomach of newborn and infants in order to release bad or dirty bloodinfections (save the children 2011). Early girl child marriage is

most prominent in African and Asian countries. It is a serious threat for the security of the girls and their rights. It can be discussed here that it inflicts emotional and mental stress as she has to leave her parent's home and has to go to in-laws without any understanding and knowledge of her personal, social, physical development. Even after legislation of Early Child Marriage Act, this practice is still prevalent in some Indian states of Bihar, Rajasthan, Odisha, and in Mewat area of Haryana etc. It has been reported in the study that One in every three girls in developing world is the victim of this practice. This practice is most prevalent in some of the Asian and African countries. (OCHR). Along with this Dowry and bride prize is most common in Asian and African countries. India is no more far from this malpractice. Girls are treated as commercial objects and sometimes prize of the girls is decided on the basis of her virginity testing. Thus dowry demands are lower for girls who are younger and perceived to be great value. (International NGO Council on Violence against Children, 2006).

Many of the studies have been conducted on harmful practices against children and women across the world. Many of the national and international treaties, conventions, conferences, seminars, committees and legislations have been made across the world to protect the children from harmful practices whether based on tradition or something else. We are progressing there little in the area. No policy, act and other legislation works unless the attitude of the people get change. Along with this policy framework, government require to implement these policies with quality inputs and by involving the masses. If we go deep to this phenomenon, we found that the root causes are different. In some countries poverty and illiteracy is basic reason. In some countries it roots in their cultural and traditional ethos. In such situations government of any country require to analyze the situation and awareness and literacy camps should be organized in the areas where these cases are reported maximum in numbers. Educated society, governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations can help people to make them aware of essential elements of culture and tradition and help them to eradicate the orthodoxy and harmful practices which affects the developmental, participant, personal and protection rights of the children. The principles laid in the UN Convention on the child rights 1989 and other national and international treaties should follow in the school curriculum to make children aware of it. Parents, teachers and community members should also make aware by campaigns and outreach programs. The acts for protection of child rights, child labour acts, child

marriage acts, prohibition of dowry acts, juvenile justice act etc. requires reformation and proper implementation. Government needs to invest in health and care of the children, Education, and congenial and health family environment, incentives to families, family planning, protection of rights etc. by global initiatives.

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