

Birth Control Practices Among the Bhatra Women

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Bastar district has the largest tribal population of the newly formed Chhattisgarh State. Bastar is situated on the southern part of Chhattisgarh. The whole of Bastar district is a scheduled area, and is covered under special tribal development schemes. For the present study data have been collected from Five villages of Jagdalpur tahsil of Bastar district. Methods adopted by the Bhatra women for birth control have been discussed in the present paper.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

For the present investigation 5 villages of Jagdalpur tahsil were selected viz. Nengiguda, Bhataguda, Titiragaon, Chokawada and Dhanpunjee. The data related to birth control practices have been collected from Bhatra women. The respondents were interviewed personally by one of the investigators through an interpreter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Today conception control is commonly known as birth control. There is indeed great need and necessity for family planning particularly among the less developed and developing nations. If less children are born then both the child as well as mother will be in a position to maintain good health and as such the family does not become a liability on the nation. In other words birth control is most essentially needed on account of economic, social, political and health reasons. With this view in mind the present investigation was undertaken to learn the methods adopted by the Bhatra women for birth control.

The earliest references to the use of herbs in the Indian system of medicine is available in Rigveda. Detailed accounts are available in Atharveda. But at that time magico-religious therapy was the chief form of treatment. After the vedic period, Indian system of medicines were recorded in Charak Samhita and Susruta Samhita. In India, ethnobotanical informations were mainly given by Guha, 1986 a, b; Gelfand, 1970; Lamba and Mehta, 1995; Marine-Bettolo, 1980; Tarafdar,

1983 a, b).

Bhatra are a primitive tribe of Bastar and are akin to the Gonds. Nothing is known about their origin except that they have come from Warangal twentythree generations ago. They are employed as village watchmen and as household or domestic servants. They have the usual set of exogamous septs named after plants and animals.

The "Gunia or Sirha" acts as a medicine man among the Bhatras. He takes care of the health of the villagers. At least one Gunia resides in each village. His office is neither hereditary nor is this his only profession. Any person conversant with the art may act as Gunia. They do not tell these secrets to any village people and as a result they receive honour and recognition. It was quite a difficult task to make the Gunia understand that the facts told by him would not be misused. After repeated trials he agreed to tell some of them.

The plants used in relation to the birth control practice among the Bhatra women is put forward in the succeeding lines.

1. About 100 gms of fresh lime (obtained from black smith) and equal quantity of old gud when heated together and given to eat to a pregnant women after second month and before sixth month of pregnancy, causes abortion. However, in the delayed cases of pregnancy this method is extremely painful. It is commonly practised among the Bhatras.
2. *Leaf of Michelia Champaca* (Champa) is also used for female sterility. The doses are as follows -
 - i. One macerated leaf 3-4 days before menstrual period gives sterility for 1 year.
 - ii. Two macerated leaves for two years.
 - iii. Three macerated leaves for three years.

In case of death of one or more children a family Gunia gives 'antidote' to break the effect of sterility. The method is common.

3. Equal quantity of the following four items macerated and given with honey during the third or fourth month of conception causes abortion. After fifth month it becomes painful.
 - i. Black rice root (Root of black rice).
 - ii. Munga bark (Inner bark of *Moringa olifera*).
 - iii. Tewas bark (Inner bark of *Tinsa Oogenia oogenesisis*)
 - iv. Laung (Clove).
4. Half seed of 'white ratti' (*Abrus Preeatorius*) is given to swallow to a lady with two to three months of pregnancy causing abortion. This seed is given with caution, as slight excess of the seed may cause death to the female. Red seeded Ratti is not used for the purpose.
5. Oil of the white 'Ratti' (*Abrus preeatorius*) is also used as abortifacient. A cotton dipped in this oil is inserted in the female genital organ in such a way so that it reaches the developing embryo. Since it is very dangerous and may take the life of the woman it is rarely practised among the Bhatras.
6. The macerated root of Kheksi (fam. Cucurbitaceae) is used as a precaution before conception.
7. The bark of Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), milk of pipal (*Ficus religiosa*), Khokha (local name) and Kali mirch (piper nigrum) are mixed together and boiled until it becomes paste. Four tablets made out of this paste when given to a pregnant woman causes abortion. This procedure is commonly used in the birth control practice of the Bhatras. In addition to the above mentioned herbal practices, two other methods were also reported.
8. 4-5 gms of elephant excreta is also used

for abortion. The elephant excreta is obtained by Gunia from Circus or Orissa where elephants are kept as domestic animals.

9. Sona-geru is a soil obtained from market is also used as precaution before conception. This has been used by some allopathic physicians also.

KEY WORDS Bhatra. Chhattisgarh. Bastar. Birth Control Practices

ABSTRACT Bhatra are a primitive tribe of Bastar and are akin to the Gonds. Bastar is the largest district of Chhattisgarh state. The data have been collected from Jagdalpur tahsil of Bastar district. The methods adopted by the Bhatra women for birth control have been discussed in the present paper. The results reveal that the Bhatras depend on the imperial or rational use of herbs even today inspite of tremendous influence of modern thought and ideas.

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