

Socio-cultural Practices of Medical Termination of Pregnancy in India

インドにおける人工妊娠中絶の社会文化的実践

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The purpose of this paper is to examine the way in which people understand and practice medical termination of pregnancy in their daily lives to understand wider socio-cultural context of child birth and its loss in contemporary India.

The birth of human beings in India is, as in the case of death, changing its meanings and practises enormously in recent decades. Childbirth, once embedded in a community and functioning as a reproduction of social members has been transformed to be more individualised and privatised under ongoing modernization in a neoliberal political economy system, with development of medical technologies and its invasion of human bodies, and diversified life strategies. Whether to have children, when, and how many cannot be separated from the desire, hope, and choice of each actor. But at the same time, this desire and choice of childbirth connects much wider bio-politics and socio-cultural politics in pronatalist societies such as India. Son preference, for example, is one of such phenomenon to be located in the intersection of various politics and intentions.

Growing imbalance between the numbers of boys and girls aged 0-6 years is one of the major social problems regarding gender and reproductive health in India and much attention has been focused on the increased prenatal sex determination test and the subsequent sex selective abortion as a background of the imbalanced child sex ratio (108.19 boys per 100 girls in 2011). Demographical studies based on National Family Health Survey (NFHS) pointed out that the sex ratio of second-order births when the firstborn is a girl, is much lower comparing with the case when the firstborn is a boy (Jha et al. 2011).

Artificial abortion has long been criminalised in India under the section 312-316 of Indian Penal Code 1860. When Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (MTP) was issued in 1971, it was considered as 'liberal' act, especially compare to neighbouring countries in South Asia as this act allows women to abort the foetus under a broad range of criteria of not only medical, but economic, social and personal reasons without husband's consent. The most commonly cited national estimates of abortion in India is 6.4 million in 2002, corresponding to

a rate of 26 abortions per 1,000 women of reproductive age (Singh et al. 2015). However, there is an estimate that unsafe abortions outside registered facilities (including medication and other methods) are about four times higher than abortions obtained at registered facilities, which leads to estimate a rate of 47.0 abortions (42.2-52.1) per 1000 women (Singh et al. 2018). Abortion can be said to have one of common women's reproductive practices in India.

At the same time, it is considered to be a difficult topic for empirical field work as it belongs to 'personal and sensitive' issues in society (Ramachandram and Duggal2007). Although fertility is praised as quasi-sacred in the tradition of Indian society, controversy regarding fertility and reproduction such as pregnancy loss, unintended pregnancies within and outside marriage, sex selective abortion, etc. are treated as something that cannot be told. How and why women choose artificial abortion is varied, but his paper tries to illustrate each women's experiences through the lens of cultural paradigm to structure and reconcile those choices.

References

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