

Dimensions of Child Care Practice: the Case of the Deoris of Assam

Arifur Zaman¹, Nabanita Dey²

Author Affiliation: ¹Assistant Professor ²Research Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam 786004, India.

Reprint Request: Arifur Zaman, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam 786004, India.
E-mail: arifurzaman@gmail.com

Received on 13.05.2017, Accepted on 13.06.2017

Abstract

Child care is one of the most significant social events that have been in human society since time immemorial. It is the process by which a child gets extreme protection in to the culture of human being. The process starts at the family itself and it is through the mother and other family members that the child gets the protection accordance with the customs and norms of the society. In the tender years the child need extreme care and affection and gradually when it grows up certain measures has to be adopted by the fellow members to make the child adjust with the social environment. Feeding practices, weaning, toilet training, bathing practices, sleeping, etc., are some of the criteria which are of utmost importance in upbringing of the child. In this present endeavour an attempt has been made to delineate about the early measures in relation with child care and upbringing among the Deoris of two homogenous villages of Upper Assam. The empirical data for the present study has been collected at regular interval during the month of January to April, 2017.

Keywords: Child Care; Deori; Breast Feeding; Weaning; Lullaby.

Introduction

Child care and training practices are embedded in the culture and determine, to a large extent, the behaviours and expectations surrounding a child's birth and infancy. While the mother remains the primary person responsible for the safety, care and feeding of the child, it is during the toddler period that the child moves out from the mother.

Over time others in the family and community plays an increasingly important role in the care of the child. In the early years of an individual's life, it is largely a matter of conditioning to fundamentals – habit of eating, sleeping, speaking, personal cleanliness, etc. Elaborate ethnographic study of a

particular community regarding the care of the newborn and the mother, customs, rituals, taboos, etc., related with pregnancy and birth were carried out by different scholars like Mead (1963), Hurlock (1970), Arya (1972), Engle (1992), Medhi (1980), Pool (1986), Bhargava (1987), Mcneal and Amato (1998), Park (2000), Zaman (2011), et. al., and they also focus on the correlation of beliefs and practices with birth and social life.

In matter of discipline a Deori child is always under the watchful eye of their mother, grandmother and other immediate members of the family. During early childhood limited attention alone is given for maintaining hygiene. According to their view, helping a child learn positive behaviours and values requires years of parental effort and teaching.

Micro Field and People

The intended study is based on some aspects of child care practices of the two Tengapania Deori villages of Sivasagar District, Assam, viz., Kokilamari and Kotiyori Deori Gaon. In this present study data has been gathered from mothers who have at least one child within 4 years of age. In Kotiyori Deori Village there are 92 households and a population of 560 and Kokilamari Deori Village with 202 households and a population of 1274 respectively. These villages are situated about 22 km from Demow town of Sivasagar District. All the above mentioned villages fall under Bamrajabari post office and Nitai out post. Sivasagar District formerly known as Sibsagar is one of the 32 districts of Assam. Situated in the eastern part of Assam, Sivasagar stands high and tall with its rich aesthetic appeal. The main communities living in the district are Ahoms, Tea Garden Workers, Sonowal Kacharis, Mishings and Deoris.

The Deoris are one of the scheduled tribes of Assam. The origin of the Deoris has been exhaustively dealt by different scholars. But still only a little is known about their origin and migration. Although earlier it was generally accepted that the Deoris were a section of the Chutiyas, an ethnic group of Assam, yet presently the Deoris consider and claimed that they migrated to north eastern region much before the arrival of the Chutiyas. A legend prevalent among the Deoris says that they entered north eastern India and settled here after coming from 'Himgiri' (The Himalayas). They now became one of the distinctive and major scheduled tribe inhabiting the plains of Upper Assam on both Southern and Northern Bank of Brahmaputra river.

Objectives

The present study tries to examine-

- i. The patterns and measures of feeding and weaning practices associated with the child;
- ii. Role of the family members incorporated in toilet training of the child;
- iii. The measures taken by the parents and other members with regards to bathing practices, sleeping and so forth.

Methodology

The primary data for this study has been gathered with the help of standard anthropological field methods viz., non-participant observation,

structured and unstructured interview, concrete case study method, etc. With observation method, information regarding behavior patterns of children, their day to day activities and their interaction with fellow family members were recorded. Interview method was applied to collect empirical information about pristine methods of child care along with measures applied for toilet training, sleeping, bathing practices, weaning, personal hygiene / cleanliness and feeding of the child. The data gathered by one method is cross checked by another method as and when situation demands.

Findings

Food is one of the major necessities for proper growth and nutrition of the child. Mother's milk is the nature's most precious gift to the neonate. The most essential and highly nutritious food for the newborn baby is the mother's milk. Breast feeding is not only important for the growth of the infant but also helps the enlarged uterus to contract easily and revert back to its normal position. Breast feeding is emotionally satisfying, bringing mother and child together.

Initiation of Breast Feeding

Ways of feeding also varies from community to community. Among Deoris, breast feeding is a common practice. Initiation of breast feeding mostly starts immediately after birth. Some reported that they initiated breast feeding within one hour due to less milk secretion in the initial stage. Mothers who delayed in breast feeding mentioned the reason that, they did not have milk soon after delivery.

This may be due to the ignorance about the fact of early initiation of breast feeding stimulates milk secretion. There is generally no scheduled time for feeding. Most of the mothers were of the opinion that they fed their child whenever they cry and feels hungry. However, in the initial days they fed their baby in every 2 to 3 hours. Sometimes in order to increase breast milk, they consume black pepper, garlic, raw turmeric mixed with rice beer once in a day.

The Deoris mostly rely on mother's milk atleast for the first 6 months of age of the baby. However, the common reason for stopping it is due to another pregnancy. The Deoris stop breast feeding only when the mother comes with another pregnancy. Further reasons like less secretion of milk, baby's refusal to suckle breast milk, and so forth are not so common among the Deoris.

Pre-lacteal Feeds

The term pre-lacteal feed represents the food introduced to the baby before giving mother’s milk. These pre-lacteal feeds are mostly given to the babies if mother’s milk is delayed. But among Deoris, it is also given even though breast feeding is not delayed. In such cases babies are provided with cow’s milk until the mother’s milk is initiated. During the first time, they provide cow’s milk by diluting it with water, as it can make the baby’s stomach upset. However, after initiating breast milk, they have never given any other foods except breast milk. They mostly use bowl and spoon to feed the baby. Use of feeding bottle is not so common among the people of those villages. It is further observed that the trend of breast feeding is quite impressive among the Deoris. Apart from mother’s milk, it is seen that they also provide honey and warm water with the belief that it cleans the mouth of the child and remove the sticky materials

present inside the baby’s mouth, so that the newborn child would not face any difficulty in sucking the breast.

Weaning

Weaning refers to the transition from breast feeding to adult diet. It refers to the process in which the baby is changed from milky diet to solid diet. Deoris also starts at about 6 to 9 months mostly. Weaning implies an introduction to solid food. The term denotes to the process in which the baby is gradually separated from the breast and its dependence on breast milk. Weaning plays a very vital role in the formation of personality of the child. So, it must be handled with utmost care and precaution. According to some psychologists, weaning causes great frustration. In case of the Deoris, constant crying, loss of appetite, biting the mother and thumb sucking are seen as some of the reaction of weaning.

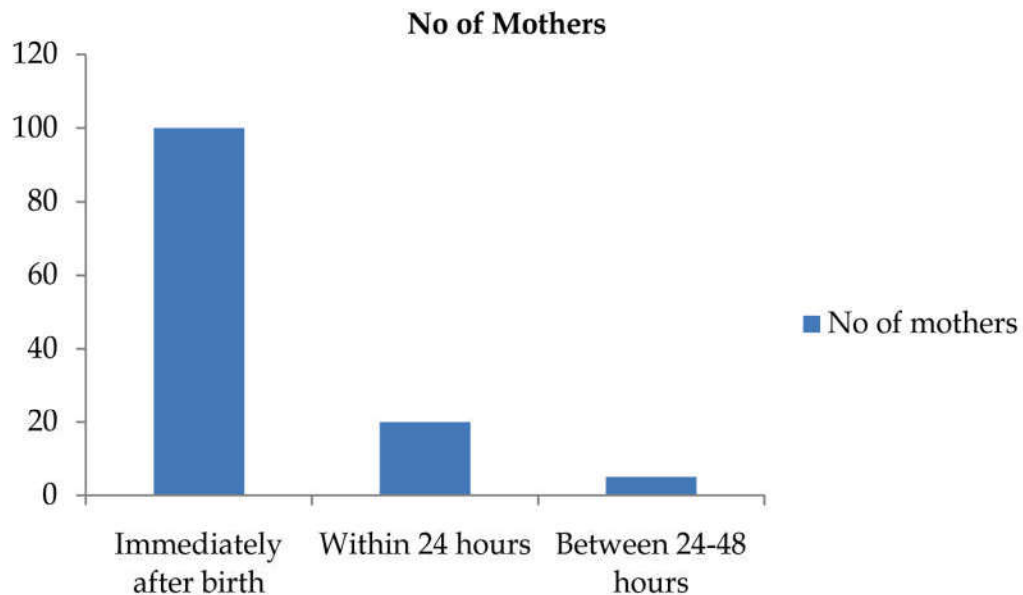
Table 1: Distribution of mothers according to time of initiation of breast feeding

Time of initiation	No of mothers	Total (%)
Immediately after birth	100	80.00
Within 24 hours	20	16.00
Between 24-48 hours	5	4.00
Total	125	100

Table 2: Distribution of mothers according to type of pre-lacteal feeds given to the newborn

Type of Food	No of Mothers	Total (%)
No food	75	60.00
Cow’s milk and water	18	14.40
Honey and warm water	32	25.60
Total	125	100

Fig. 1:



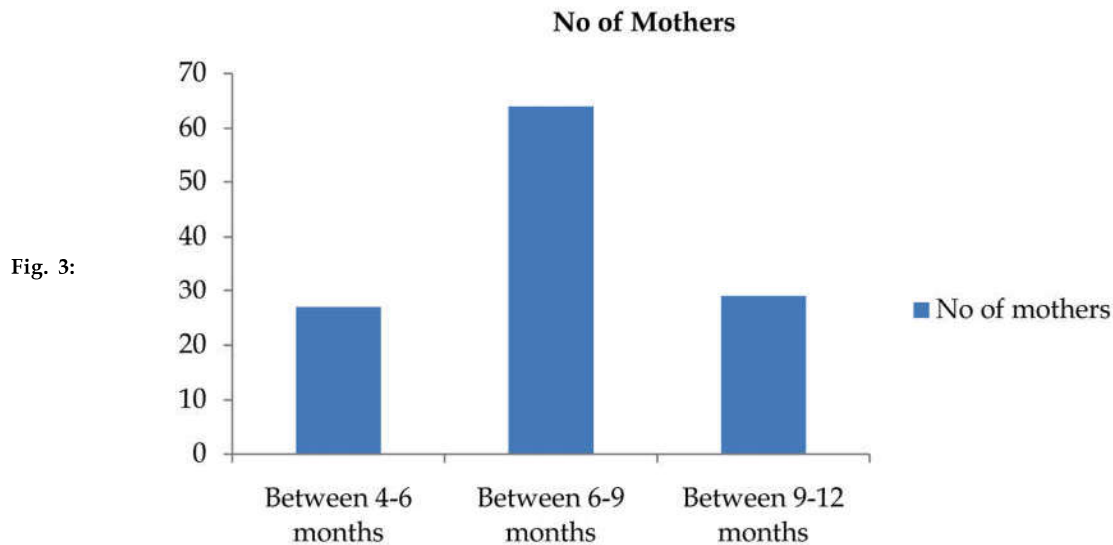
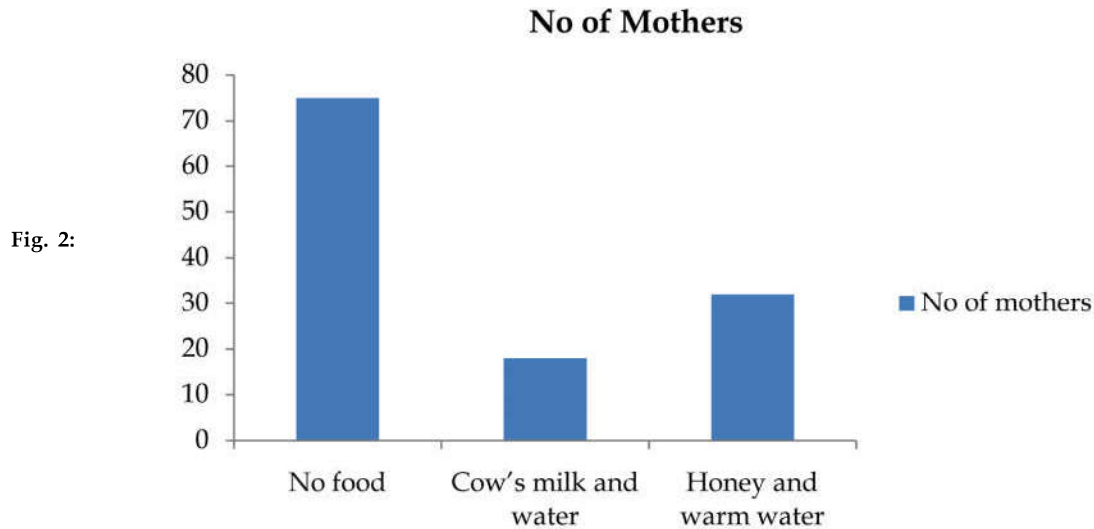


Table 3: Distribution of mothers according to time of weaning

Time of Weaning	No of Mothers	Total (%)
Between 4-6 months	27	22.50
Between 6-9 months	64	53.33
Between 9-12 months	29	24.17
Total	120	100

The Deoris mostly answered that they do not use any specific measure to wean away their children. In such cases, children themselves gradually refuse to suckle mother's breast. The reason may be pregnancy of the mother or birth of the younger one. When the mother becomes pregnant again, their milk becomes watery and the babies are not fond of it and stops taking it. However, some of the mothers, they mentioned of applying some materials to the nipple to wean away their children. The mother applies

bitter substance like *Titbhekuri* (*Coptis tita*) in the nipples so that the baby if sucks gets certain bitter taste and refuses it. *Neem pat* (leaf of *Azadirachata indica*) is sometimes dabbed in the mother's breast for weaning purposes. Apart from these materials like mud, black pepper and so forth are also applied to wean the child. Two of the mother also reported that as her child fears blood she used nail polish in the nipples as form of blood so that the child gets scared and stops sucking milk. Among the people

under study, weaning is a smooth and gradual process and does not possess any strict rule. Weaning, among them, takes place in a natural way

so that it does not show any adverse effect in the personality formation of the children in due course of time.

Table 4: Distribution of mothers according to measures initiated to stop breast feeding

Measures used	No of mothers	Total (%)
No measures	58	48.33
Use of bitter substance	34	28.33
Use of mud	12	10.00
Use of black pepper	15	12.50
Use of nail polish	1	0.84
Total	120	100.00

Table 5: Distribution of mothers according to type of complementary foods initiated

Type of food	No of Mothers	Total (%)
Rice	53	44.17
Smashed potato and leafy vegetable soup	26	21.67
Roasted rice flour and <i>bhimkol</i> (<i>Musa gigantea</i> Duthie)	20	16.66
Biscuit soaked in water or milk	21	17.50
Total	120	100

Fig. 4:

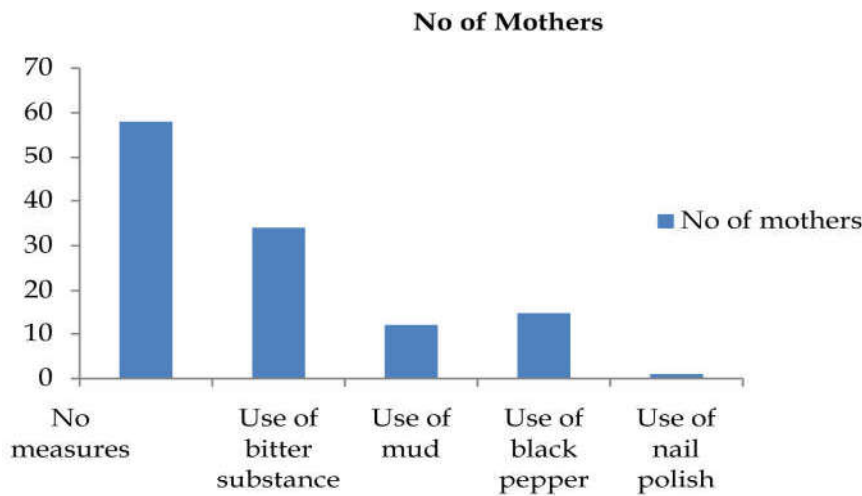
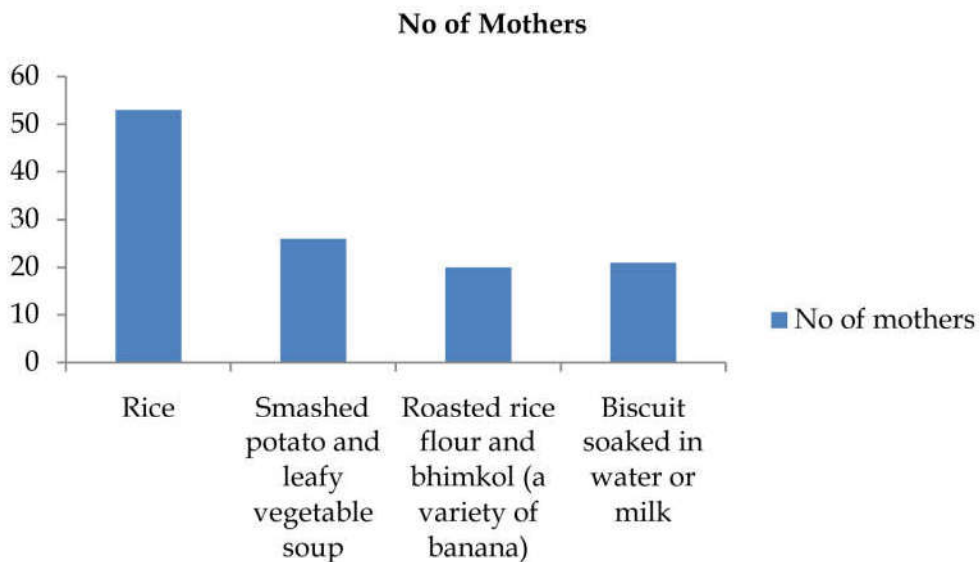


Fig. 5:



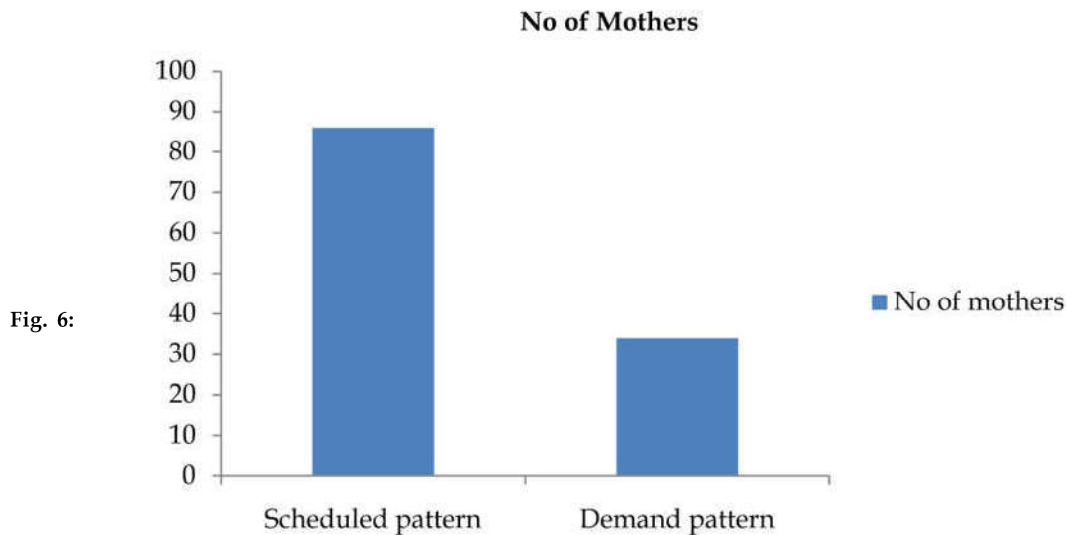
Rice is the common practice in Deoris, which is used as first solid food. In most of the cases, it is smashed with potato, leafy vegetables, diluted *dal*, etc. Cerelac is not so common food among them. Deori mothers mentioned of giving roasted rice flour and *bhimkol* (a variety of banana; *Musa gigantea*) mixture. They even provide biscuit soaked either in milk or in hot water. They never add oil or ghee in their baby's food. They mostly prefer boiled foods. Feeding children from a separate utensil is a good practice among most of the Deori mothers (72.27%), so that they can measure how much amount of food the baby

has taken. Children are mostly fed by their mothers. The other family members also take part as well. Among the Deoris, children are also encouraged to eat by their own.

Nearly 71.67 percent of the studied mothers followed scheduled pattern of complementary pattern of feeding and rest (28.33%) mentioned of demand pattern. Mothers who provide solid food to their child along with breast milk followed scheduled feeding in respect of solids and demand pattern for mother's milk.

Table 6: Distribution of mothers according to pattern of feeding of complementary food

Pattern of Feeding	No of Mothers	Total (%)
Scheduled pattern	86	71.67
Demand pattern	34	28.33
Total	120	100



Mothers who provide solid food to their child along with breast milk followed scheduled feeding in respect of solids and demand pattern for mother's milk.

Toilet training is a very important aspect of child rearing. There is no specific ways of such training among the Deoris. Bed wetting is a natural process for which every child is been scolded. In initial days, a child is not forced for such habits and they do whenever they want to release their tension. Infants cannot exercise control over their bowel and bladder until they are about two years old and complete control may not be achieved until the third or fourth year of life. Among the Deoris, the babies are trained by their parents to associate toilet training with a sound the parent makes. When the baby hears the

sound, it comes to know it is the time to urinate or have a bowel movement. In most of the cases, the mothers answered that they could recognize the facial expression of their child when they want to urinate or defecate. It was found that the mother takes the baby out and holding it under her two arms uttering "shi shi" indicates the infant to pass urine. There are also mothers who reported that occasionally or quite often, their children release their bowel and bladder on the whole of the bamboo floor on the platform-type house (*chang ghar*). They also used to utter certain sounds from their mouth which the child on hearing does the function. However, many children by the age of three to four years developed full control of their urination and bowel movements.

Sleeping

Sleeping is also a very necessary action for proper growth of a baby. It is equally important for the baby for proper rest. Deori mothers are also concerned for their baby's good and sound health. They reported that in the first three months the baby sleeps most of the times and gets up only at the time of feeding or when he is disturbed. As the age of the baby increases his sleeping tendency becomes less and less and he wakes up more frequently to play with his own hands and feet. They further said by the end of one year of age, the baby is gradually adjusted to two naps a day. They also highlighted that while putting the baby to sleep in a cradle, they make them sleep in both sides to give proper shape to the head. Among the Deoris, the cradle should be completed in a day; otherwise the baby may suffer from restlessness and may cry. They further make a pillow made of mustard seeds for making the head of the newborn round in shape as and when he sleeps. The bed of the newborn should usually be soft, comfortable and clean. Most

of the mothers reported the use of old cloths for making the bed for the baby by spreading the cloth on the same bed of the mother. Few mothers used quilt made with old cloths. Use of plastic sheets was also informed by some mothers. However, they maintain minimum cleanliness in connection with the baby's bedding.

Lullaby

Lullaby plays a very important part in child rearing practices in every society. A baby in every society is lulled by their initial family members and especially the mother in order to get a comfort sleep. It is also present in the Deori society. As the Deori women are very hard working both at home and in the field so they usually do not get enough time to sing lullaby for their baby. At that time they leave their babies in charge of tender-aged girls and aged female members of the family. Some of the lullabies common among the Deoris are as follows:

Da uga babu pisa
 Yoyo yang ja
 Yoyo kirari sechhe nikonoi
 Konoy son sarum
 Niyo yoyo sechhe nimoh
 Nadan monoh kuduri
 Niyo yoyo nonamai
 De sachhe larehan
 Goy da uga
 Kachhi yaha moh yoyo nolsat laheri
 Erake laheri dee dee doo doo
 Gaya da uga

Meaning:

Don't cry, baby
 Mom has gone for fishing
 It's time to return
 Don't cry baby
 Mom is remembering you
 She will bring big size fish for you
 She will also bring *nal tenga pat* (a kind of plant) and
Tara gajali (offshoot of a kind of plant) of big size
 Don't cry, baby.

Siyaliye nahibi rati,
Ture kaan kati logame bati

Meaning:

Jackel! don t come at night,
I will cut your ears and make lamps

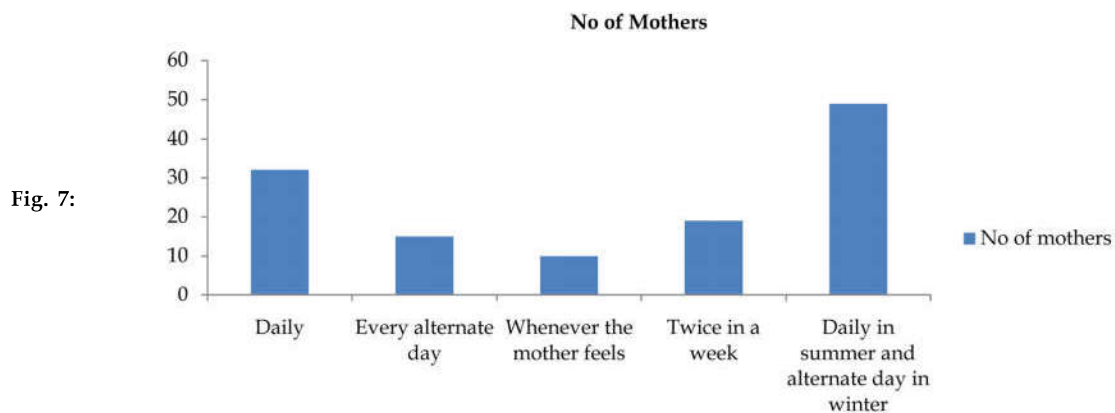
Aamare maina su le
Barite bogori ru le
Barite bogori pokibo khoribo
Aamar maina butoli khabo

Meaning:

My baby has slept
The plum has been sown at kitchen garden
The plum will ripe and fall
My baby will pick them up and eat.

Table 7: Distribution of mothers according to frequency of giving bath to their children

Frequency	No of Mothers	Total (%)
Daily	32	25.60
Every alternate day	15	12.00
Whenever the mother feels	10	8.00
Twice in a week	19	15.20
Daily in summer and alternate day in winter	49	39.20
Total	125	100

**Bathing Practices**

Bathing is very closely and intimately related to our culture and climate. There are variations seen regarding bathing practices among the Deori children.

However information regarding first bath of the child was collected from the cases of home deliveries.

Majority of mothers use warm water for their child. In all the cases the birth attendants cleaned and bathed the newborns. Bathing also depends on season. During winter the mothers consider that regular bathing may make their child more prone to diseases. The materials used for bathing also differ from mother to mother. They use oil, soap, turmeric and so forth. Some informed the use of neem leaves

and water to prevent the child from skin allergy. The newborn is usually wrapped up in a soft clean cloth immediately after birth. Such type of cloth is a clean piece of mother's *chadar* (a part of women's dress of the Deori) or a *gamocha* (hand-woven towel). The main reason of giving old, used, cotton cloth to the newborn is because of its cleanliness and hygiene. However, no any custom was found among them while providing the first piece of cloth to the neonate. It was informed in each of the Deori household there was an arrangement of fire in one corner of the room where the mother and the child was kept after bathing. They further sprinkled mustard seeds in that fire to keep the evil spirits away. They also tied red chillies on the beam of the door.

Teething

Teething is marked between sixth to eight months. However, the first three years of a child's life is very important for his teeth. But the eruption depends on the health, heredity, nutrition before and after birth, diet of the mother during pregnancy, race, sex and other factors. Certain beliefs in respect of eruption of tooth do exist in all cultural groups, but among the Deoris, it is found that in most of the cases the mothers are unaware of such belief. But some of the elderly women could explain that if the tooth first erupts in the upper jaw, then the child may become very intelligent and expert in climbing, whereas eruption of tooth in the lower jaw is considered as normal. Some of them believe, that for a boy eruption of tooth of upper jaw and for a girl, eruption of tooth in a lower jaw is good. Some babies even suffer from fever, cold and diarrhoea at the time of teething. It is due to sleeplessness during the teething process. This process of teething continues up to two and half to three years of age. They reported that these teeth are smaller in size and not so strong.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is found that, duration of breast feeding is quite impressive and most of the mothers fed their child for a longer duration. Time of introduction of solids food along

with breast milk is satisfactory. Absence of food taboos is observed both for the mothers and their children. In early days, rice beer was given to children below 4 years of age. But now-a-days mothers show restrictions in regard to feeding children with rice beer. Nevertheless, it can be stated that although the mothers shows a positive figure in case of feeding practices of the child, personal cleanliness is still a matter of great concern among the Tengapania Deoris under study.

References

1. Arya, S.C. *Infant and Child Care*. Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi. 1972.
2. Bhargava, Y.S. Diet of pregnant mother, in *Maternal and Child Health*, Bikaner, Alfa Publishers and Distributors. 1987;67-74.
3. Engle, P. Care and Child Nutrition: Theme Paper for the International Nutrition Conference (ICN). 1992.
4. Hurlock, E.B. *Child Growth and Development*. McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York. 1970.
5. Mcneal, C. and R. P. Amato. Parents' marital violence, long-term consequences for children. *Journal of Family Issues*, 1998;19(2):123-139.
6. Mead, M. *Coming of Age in Samoa*. New York. Penguin Books. 1963.
7. Medhi, Birinchi K. Beliefs, rituals and ceremonies connected with principal events of the life of the Pati Rabhas of Assam. *The Bulletin of the Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University*, 1980;1:40-53.
8. Park, K. Preventive medicine in obstetrics, pediatrics, and geriatrics, in *Textbook of Social and Preventive Medicine, 16th Edition*, Bhanot Publisher, Jabalpur. 2000.
9. Pool, R. Belief concerning the avoidance of food during pregnancy and immediate post-partum period in a tribal area of rural Gujrata, India. *The Eastern Anthropologist*, 1986;39(3):251-257.
10. Zaman, A. A study on birth and associated aspects among the Tengapania Deoris in a village of Upper Assam. *Bulletin of the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University*, 2011;12:56-66.