

CULTURAL PRACTICES OPPRESS WOMEN

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*Culture may be defined as beliefs, traditions, habits and rituals practiced over a period of time in the society and are accepted as social norms by the society. Every society has its own common customs and behaviour. Some of the cultural practices according to are -. Leblouh or gavage, Devdasi, Chhaupadi, **Breast Ironing, amputation of finger as sign of mourning, lip plating, Sexual cleansing of widows, Genital Mutilation and neck rings. These are practiced all over the world. Mostly these things happen in developing and under developed countries. The paper brings awareness about such practices.***

Introduction

According to **sociologists**, **culture** consists of the values, beliefs, systems of language, communication, and practices that people share in common and that can be used to define them as a collective. **Culture** also includes the material objects that are common to that group or society. American Sociological association defines Culture ' as the languages, customs, believes rules, arts, knowledge, and collective identities and memories developed by members of all social groups that make their social environments meaningful. Some of the Cultural practices that are practiced specially in India, Nepal, Africa , Indonesia, Papua, Ethiopia and Thailand are greatly alarming as they cause pain agony and even death in some cases. All these are because of cultural oppression.

Oppression is both a cause and an effect of sexual violence. Sexual violence and other forms of violence can create psychological trauma, and make it more difficult for the members of the group subjected to the violence to experience autonomy, choice, respect, and safety¹

Culture of oppression

Women are oppressed all over the world in the name of Culture. Oppression of the women is a world phenomenon. Greece which is supposed to be the ancient in culture, a model of democracy and the women do not have the 3Rs –rights, representation and resources. They were not considered equal to men and were given no basic rights or equal rights to property or any position in political affairs. Rome and Greece do not have equality between women and men. Cultural oppression of women can take many forms, including shaming and ridiculing women to reinforce their supposed inferior "nature," or physical abuse, as well as the more commonly acknowledged means of oppression including fewer political, social and economic rights. Many of world's oppressing cultures are being eradicated however there remain a plethora of traditions that perpetuate misogyny and abuse. There are devastating and aghast cultural practices still oppress women . Shobha Rana Grovert a journalist brings out nine different oppressing cultural habits which need to be totally eradicated . Margot Wallström, Sweden's foreign minister, stated, 'Culture is not an excuse for oppressing women'.

a. Leblouh or gavage;

In North Africa –Marutania young girls are forced fed with milk and butter beyond their capacity eat/drink. Young

¹ <https://www.thoughtco.com> › ... › Women's History › History Of Feminism

girls are force-fed unhealthy, high-calorie diets to make them appealing to their prospective suitors in North Africa's Mauritania. The practice, called *leblouh* or *gavage*, has been in vogue for the past several centuries in the drought-prone country where obesity among women is celebrated and overweight girls score over their thin counterparts. Girls as young as six are sent to special "fattening" camps during their school holidays where they are force-fed 20 litres of milk, at least two kilograms of millet and two cups of butter every day. Girls who don't comply are punished and sometimes forced to ingest their vomit if they throw up. The daily intake is up to 16,000 calories. Although a change in attitude is evident in urban populations following an awareness campaign by the government, the cult of obesity continues to play havoc with the lives of young women in rural Mauritania. The practice, in many regions, has taken a horrid turn as girls are now taking drugs, steroids, and even animal growth hormones to fatten up.²

b. Devadasi:

It is yet another cultural practice in India. Especially in southern part of India young girls are dedicated to the temple as devotees who eventually become the temple prostitutes. A devadasi cannot marry any mortal. Originally they were celibate temple dancers at the temple but it got corrupt and became ritualized prostitution. Normally these are lower cast girls; when they attain puberty their virginity is auctioned and they become temple prostitutes. The this is banned yet it is prevalent in villages of south India

c. Menstrual period:

This is another cultural practices of the third world specially in Asian countries like Nepal, India etc. In Nepal this practice is known as ' *Chhaupadi* '. When women menstruate that period is consider as unclean. In Nepal they are made to live in the cowshed along with their cattle amidst the smell of the cow dung and the dirt of the animals. They are not even allowed to use the family toilets for their needs they are asked to defecate in the open air. The women are considered impure and those who touch are also considered ceremonially unclean and need to purify themselves. Even this practice is carried out in most parts of India especially in south India among the Brahmin community. During the menstrual period the women are to stay away from the family. They eat and live separately in a corner of the house ³

d. Breast Ironing:

Having breasts is shameful and attracts unwanted male attention. With this idea in mind, mothers in Cameroon and several other African countries pound the breasts of their young daughters with hot iron tools or even stones to stop them from growing. The extremely painful practice of 'breast ironing' is carried out on girls as young as ten to delay their first sexual encounters and avoid early pregnancies. The victims suffer various physical and psychological consequences and the scars remain for life. Some possible after-effects include formation of cysts, malformed breasts and inverted nipples. Some of the victims may find it impossible to breastfeed their children. The practice has also reportedly spread to African communities in the UK.

e. Finger Amputation To Mourn Death: Members of Dani tribe in Papua, Indonesia are known to cut off the top part of one of their fingers to mourn death in the family. Though death affects everyone equally, only women are subjected to this agonizing ritual. Half an hour before the top part of finger is cut off, it is allowed to go numb by tightly tying a string around it. After the amputation, the finger tips are cauterized. The mutilation is based on the belief that death, being a permanent loss, should be grieved in a way that the emotional pain manifests into visible physical distress. The practice has now been banned, and younger women refrain from this extreme version

² <https://www.huffpost.com › entry › nine-customs-that-oppress-women-acr...>

³ Ibid

of grieving

f. Lip Plating:

Women belonging to Mursi and Surma tribes in Ethiopia wear large circular wooden or clay discs on their lips as a mark of beauty and status. It is a form of body modification in which increasingly larger discs are inserted into the lower or upper lips of young girls. The first disc is generally inserted at puberty. A hole is cut into the lip along with the removal of two to four lower teeth. A small disc is inserted into the hole leading to the stretching of the lip. After a while, generally when the cut heals, a larger disc replaces the initial disc. As the lip is stretched more and more, increasingly larger plates are inserted. The final plate that is installed could be 12 centimeter in diameter or even bigger. It is said that bigger the disc, larger is the dowry the girl receives on her wedding. It is also said that the ritual originated not as a beauty enhancement technique but as a deliberate disfigurement meant to keep slave traders at bay.

g. Sexual Cleansing Of Widows:

Widows in parts of Tanzania and Kenya undergo the ritual of ‘sexual cleansing’ after which they are ‘inherited’ by their in-laws. The custom dictates that the widow has sex with one of her brothers-in-law to exorcise the spirit of her dead spouse. Women who oppose this tradition are chased out of their matrimonial homes and not given any share in their husband’s property or livestock. Worse, the community also ostracizes the women. The practice also exposes these women to the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Very often male relatives refuse to have sex with the widow owing to HIV epidemic. In such cases, professional cleansers are hired to do the job. Using condom is a taboo as it is only the cleanser’s sperm that has the power to ‘cleanse and purify’ the widow

h. Neck Rings:

A long and slender neck has long been considered the hallmark of beauty and grace in women. Ethnic Kayan women in Myanmar and Thailand undergo lifetime of excruciating pain to elongate their necks as they follow a centuries-old beauty custom. The collarbone and upper ribs are deformed slowly and steadily as a girl of five starts wearing a shiny brass coil around her neck. The length of the coil is increased as the girl grows up, and an adult wears a coil with 20-25 turns around her neck. The coils could weigh anywhere between two to ten kilograms. The elongated neck, however, is only an optical illusion. As the weight of the coil pushes the collarbone and ribs down, an illusion of an elongated neck is created. The women are allowed to remove the rings only once in their lifetime – on their wedding night. The removal of these spirals is painful and tedious and takes hours

I. Genital Mutilation:

Genital mutilation is the price young girls pay for their impending womanhood in parts of the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Female genital mutilation is the ritualistic removal – partial or complete – of the external genitalia, constituting an extreme form of discrimination against women. The custom, recognized as a gross violation of human rights, is known to reduce a woman’s libido and therefore keep her off sexual debauchery. The practice continues unabated despite being banned in many countries. A traditional circumciser cuts the genitalia often in unhygienic conditions, using razors, knives or even stones without anesthesia. However, some countries have ‘medicalized’ the custom meaning that trained health workers carry out the procedure. In some communities, the procedure involves partial closure of the vaginal opening, only leaving a small hole for urine and menstrual fluid passage. The woman undergoes a painful reversal of this procedure on her wedding to allow intercourse. The health consequences suffered due to the procedure could include infection, gangrene, excessive bleeding and even death

Conclusion:

Culture dominates amidst all prevention acts. People both literate and illiterate practices such customs . This needs to be stopped. Awareness is one of the way to empower the women. Women need to be respected , given the

autonomy and choice to overcome the cultural hurdles.

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