

# Harmful Practices Affecting Child Rights Across Cultures: Reflections over Asian and African Countries

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## ABSTRACT

Harmful practices across the culture are not a new phenomenon. It has its roots in centuries ago. Many initiatives have been taken across the world to protect 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 that affected their health was discussed in the commission on human rights 1984. This UN convention on child rights affirms the full development of the personality of the child and asserts to have a healthy family environment, an atmosphere of happiness and protection of children from all forms of violence across the world. The aim of this conceptual endeavour is to reflect on harmful practices practised across cultures, especially in Asian and African countries with respect to violation of child rights. Data has been gathered from various governmental and nongovernmental 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 cultures and violation of child rights is presented from 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 newborns and infants, bloodletting, Breast Ironing, and genital mutilation. Bleeding and cupping, male circumcision, milk tooth extraction, tattooing. Cauterization, cupping and scarification, Use of the cradle, Early and forced marriages, and Dowry and bride prizes are prevalent.

**Keywords:** Child Rights, Culture, Asian and African Countries, Harmful Practices

Adopting the 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 in the states where the democratic form of government is. Not only in democratic but around the world children's vulnerability requires the transparent address 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 neighbourhood and other places based on harmful practices in cultures, and traditions are being addressed by various international treaties committees and legislation

to eradicate it from the ground. Still, the young children around the world perpetrated violence and victim 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 the family for the full development

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of the children. What is required to cope with violations against children is sound research in the field of child rights violations 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 the 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 the branding of the child and the birth order of the child which should be considered a 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 the cradle, Early and forced marriages, Dowry and bride prize etc. are prevalent across the world. (International NGO Council on Violence against Children, 2006).

Acid attack on girls is another trend across the world which is a serious issue. The causes and reasons for the acid attacks may vary from 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 those transgressing behaviour norms, for instance, denial of a 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 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 girls would not do the same. The adverse effect of this practice is not just physical and mental pain but a violation of human rights also. There is no such means of ratifying treaties and framing legislations where a large number of girls/ women suffer from these malpractices. It affects badly the growth of the children and also social, physical, mental and personal development.

In most countries such as Russia, Turkey and CIS states, the practice of binding newborns and infants and wrapping them in clothes restrict their movement.

You can imagine what the risks the children would go through are. The problem of hypothermia, respiratory problems, hip dysphasia and low weight gain can be seen in children due to this harmful practice. The 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 the community. There are evils and superstitions in some cases of childbirth. The superstitions in these births. (1) Birth of twin and more than one child (2) Sex of the child (3) The birth of a girl child is considered unlucky and evil. The birth of the boy child is considered a 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 countries like Ethiopia and Tajikistan have traditions of bloodletting which is purely based on wrong notions. This could believe by practice that bloodletting is beneficial to curing many diseases and promotes good health. But due to this practice, the child has to go through severe pain. It results in severe bleeding, anaemia, infections, contraction and deaths too. Like bloodletting, another superstition practice practised in Tajikistan is *kolak* in which small cuts are made on the roof of the mouth, back, chest or stomach of newborns and infants in order to release bad or dirty blood. Girls are no safer all around the world. The practise of breast ironing or breast massage in the region of west and central Africa is shocking. This harmful practice is practised on girls to remove the signs of puberty.

This harmful practice is practised by pressing the breasts, pounding or massaging 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 using the cradle for newborns is practised from years ago. The process of use of the cradle involves binding the child tightly and wrapping the 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 a delay in the physical development of the child. In the eastern part of Tajikistan, the practice of *kolak* (use of a blade to remove a newborn child's blood)

is influential where it is believed that when a child cries his/her skin turns a darker shade because dirty blood is removed by cutting the back, chest, tummy, palate, with the blade. In this practice, the child has to suffer severe pain which can cause mental illness and skin infections (save the children 2011). Early and forced marriages are a serious threat to the security of the girls and their rights. One in every three girls in the developing world is the victim of this practice. This practice is most prevalent in some Asian and African countries.

In India, it is most prevalent in some parts of Rajasthan, Haryana, Odisha, and Bihar. The tradition of male circumcision in South Africa is the root of many physical problems in males. It results in the 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 a 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, or physical development. She has to spend life with a 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 their virginity testing. Thus dowry demands are lower for girls who are younger and perceived to be of great value. (International NGO Council on Violence against Children, 2006).

Uganda, South Africa and Mozambique have some traditional practices involving cutting out organs, often genital organs. These organs are used for sacrificial or traditional ceremonies. This sacrificial traditional practice in a maximum of cases leads to death. Most often vulnerable children or children

with disabilities remain the victim of this practice. 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 being a mother and a homemaker... 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 with 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 & person (2003) reveals some findings based on the study shows that many traditional practices are performed 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 harmful diseases in Ethiopians. Incision of eyelids 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 finding revealed in the study that another practice of using of the blade to remove a newborn child's blood is practised in the country. Ngunshi (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 practised in West and Central Africa as a way to remove signs of puberty.

### Definitions of Key Terms

1. **Traditional practices:** In this paper, traditional practices refer to the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation across cultures which violates the child's rights.
2. **Culture:** In this paper, the culture refers to the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular people, society or nation.

3. **Child rights:** Child rights refer here to all rights of the children below the age of eighteen years of age which are essential for the 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 articles, research papers and surveys. Reflections are made on harmful traditional practices against children and violations of their rights. Analysis The data is referred from studies already been conducted on harmful traditional practices across cultures. 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 & CONCLUSION**

The number of harmful practices against children based on tradition and cultures found. The grotesque practice prevails in Africa and other parts of the world. Another harmful practice based on culture and tradition is the branding of the child, the birth order of the child which is considered a 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 for acid attacks may vary from region to region and country to country and culture to culture. This practice is prevalent in South Asian communities if the girls could deny a marriage proposal, refuse sexual advances or other related disputes within the marriage or household. Despite many commissions, international treaties, and conventions on child rights, violence against children due to traditional practices is still there. Due to these malpractices, children have 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 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 individuals. In Russia and Turkey, the practice of binding newborns 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 to proper health and care for children. A world where children are not safer cannot be a happy and prosperous world. Along with this Most countries like Ethiopia and Tajikistan has a tradition of bloodletting which is purely based on wrong notions. Practising this harmful traditional practice results in severe bleeding, anaemia, infections, contraction and death too. In this way, it violates the right to liberty, right to health and care and protection and developmental rights. Like bloodletting another superstition practice practised in Tajikistan is kolak in which small cuts are made on the roof of the mouth, back, chest or stomach of newborns and infants in order to release bad or dirty blood infections (save the children 2011). Early girl child marriage is most prominent in African and Asian countries. It is a serious threat to 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, or physical development. Even after legislation of the Early Child marriage Act, this practice is still prevalent in some Indian states of Bihar, Rajasthan, Odisha, and in the Mewat area of Haryana etc.

It has been reported in the study that one in every three girls in the developing world is the victim of this practice. This practice is most prevalent in some 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 of great value. (International NGO Council on Violence against Children, 2006). Many studies have been conducted on harmful practices against children and women across the

world. Many national and international treaties, conventions, conferences, seminars, committees and legislation 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 or other legislation works unless the attitude of the people gets changed. Along with this policy framework, government require to implement these policies with quality inputs and by involving the masses. If we go deep into this phenomenon, we found that the root causes are different. In some countries, poverty and illiteracy is the basic reason. In some countries, it is rooted 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, and 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 of campaigns and outreach programs. The acts for the protection of child rights, child labour acts, child marriage acts, prohibition of dowry acts, juvenile justice act etc. require reformation and proper implementation. The government needs to invest in the health and care of the children, Education, congenial and healthy family environment, incentives to families, family planning, protection of rights etc. through global initiatives.

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