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Neonatal mortality, breastfeeding practices and popular common sense

ABSTRACT

Despite a proven inverse relationship between breastfeeding within one hour of birth and neonatal mortality, breastfeeding in India is marked by delayed initiation and a limited period of exclusive breastfeeding. This appears to be 'popular common sense', but it is not good sense, as it normalises the delayed initiation of breastfeeding. Narratives in the form of popular common sense perceptions around breastfeeding practices, were collected from Muslim women living in three different urban centres and regions of India — Haldwani, Nainital, Uttarakhand (north); Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh (centre) and Hyderabad, Telangana (south). 'Popular common sense' is used as a theoretical lens to understand how breastfeeding rituals are sanctified as normal and natural in popular perceptions. The diversity, intricacies, and cultural embeddedness of breastfeeding practices are explored and elaborated. It is argued that for promoting early and exclusive breastfeeding, it is important that public health professionals understand and negotiate 'popular common sense' perceptions on breastfeeding practices.

Keywords: *Breastfeeding; colostrum; prelacteal feeds; Muslim women; common sense*

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INTRODUCTION

'First *Azaan* (Muslim's prayer call) is recited in the ear of newborn then honey is given and then only breastfeeding is initiated ... I don't know why it is given', told a young mother laughingly. They do not know 'why' but they perform these rituals without fail, before initiating breastfeeding. How are these popular common sense perceptions or popular knowledge perceptions so fundamental to breastfeeding? To understand this, we need to explore the dominant socio-cultural constructions around breastfeeding and their uncritical acceptance in society as normal and natural in the form of popular common sense perceptions. Here, we endeavour to understand breastfeeding as a social and cultural phenomenon and demystify the ways in which breastfeeding practices are negotiated and made operational.

Human milk directly contributes to the infant's innate immunity. New findings clarify the multifunctional nature of human milk bioactive components and the

potential effects of human milk on the infant that will never be possible with milk formulas (Cacho & Lawrence, 2017). The composition of human milk is dynamic with significant change from colostrum, transitional to mature milk. There is only a small volume of colostrum produced (from birth through the first 5 days of lactation), rich in leukocytes, protein, human milk oligosaccharides, bioactive factors, colony-stimulating growth factor and antioxidants (Ballard & Morrow, 2013). Early and exclusive breastfeeding play a vital role in protecting the infant against infections and providing a wide range of benefits for mothers, including the reduced risk of post-partum haemorrhage (UNICEF, 2018; WHO, 2018a; O'Brien, Myles & Pritchard, 2016). Epidemiological studies have shown that breastfeeding contributes to a significant reduction in mortality and morbidity, provides protection against intestinal and respiratory infections as well as malocclusion. It also increases in intelligence and there is probable reduction in overweight and diabetes (Edmond et al., 2006; Victora et al., 2016).

UNSAFE ABORTION PRACTICES AND POPULAR COMMON SENSE REPERTOIRE: REINVIGORATING METHODOLOGICAL AND INTERVENTION ISSUES FOR SOCIAL WORK PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

The unsafe abortions are still at large in India and more pathetic are the methods used for unsafe abortions. The ascribed stigma could be the reason for not utilizing the abortion services as also the non-disclosure of abortion experiences. But, popular common sense repertoire is full of the variety of unsafe abortions practices endangering the health and life of women. This calls for reinvigorating the methodological issues in understanding and mapping the abortion and abortion practices. The ontological, epistemological, and methodological issues in studying abortion are explored and explained in this study. It is argued that the framework of popular common sense repertoire on abortion could be helpful in not only mapping the unsafe abortion practices but also in planning

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Religion, Fertility and 'Common Sense' Making Sense of Demography in India

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The sectarian forces in India have kept politicising the population growth of Muslims not on the basis of demographic correlates but on the basis of a pernicious propaganda that stereotypes popular common sense perceptions. These ill-founded notions are so often repeated that these have become part of the popular common sense, normalising the falsification of "reality" created by sectarian forces of either religious affiliations. Why are these mythical constructions increasing despite the fact that the authentic empirical data sets—Census, National Family Health Surveys—negate the same?

The myth of Muslims outnumbering Hindus and the Hindus becoming a minority in India is not new. This propaganda has been used by sectarian forces since the dawn of the previous century. *The Hindus: A Dying Race*, a book written by U N Mukherji in 1909, is an ironic testimony. In consequence, these forces have had a long time for their ideas to become part of the social common sense (Puniyani 2004: 69). The rhetoric and slogans of sectarian forces generally move around Muslim population growth and in unison try to present an opaque picture of Muslim demography in order to sustain the latter's hegemonic constructions around religion and fertility. The sectarian forces have kept on politicising the population growth of Muslims not on the basis of demographic correlates but on the basis of a pernicious propaganda stereotyping popular common sense perceptions (Jeffery and Jeffery 2006: 1; Shahid 2014: 152). Valenta (2012) rightly noted that one of the crucial aspects of the debate about Muslims in India is the inverse relation between the intensity of the discussion and the paucity of the empirical facts (p 35).

In India, the seemingly common strategy is to use religious identity as a singular marker for constructing an "us" versus "them" debate (Sen 2006). Such a fictitious and highly perilous binary of "us-them," undoubtedly thrives on propagating the mythical population outgrowth of one group in contrast to another. It rests on creating the illusion of a "greater" destiny of one group against the other.¹ This is illustrated, for example, in the statement that the population of Hindus in India is declining while that of Muslims is increasing and that soon

the Muslim minority will become a majority and in the democratic game of numbers they would eventually rule over the then Hindu minority (Shahid 2015: 2). This is a chimerical thing that is hoped for but is in fact illusory and impossible to materialise. But these ill-founded notions are so often repeated that these have become part of popular common sense,² normalising the falsification of "reality" created by the sectarian forces of either religious affiliations.

There is a surfeit of quantitative studies and also limited qualitative studies negating the claims on Muslim fertility and their population growth (Shariff 1995; Basu 1997; Datta 1999; Rao 2004; Bhat and Xavier 2005; Bose 2006; GoI 2006; Jeffery and Jeffery 2006; Bhalotra, Valente and Soest 2010; Kulkarni 2010). The national-level data sets—Census of India; National Family Health Surveys (NFHS)—have amply proved the fallacy of Muslim outgrowth. Despite this, the popular perception of Muslim fertility, family planning, and population growth are inundated with various myths and misconceptions. Ironically, the quantum and severity of these myths and misconceptions are increasing rather than decreasing. The pertinent question is why are these mythical constructions increasing despite the fact that the authentic empirical data sets are negating the same? This calls for a serious analysis.

There is a need to demystify these popular perceptions by locating the stock narratives and the politics of common sense on Muslim population growth. It is in this context that this article aims to revisit the debate on Muslim population growth by making sense of the popular common sense perceptions and the stock narratives through the Gramscian lens of language, hegemony and common sense.

Methodology

There is no better way to gain an understanding of a society than through its stock of stories—myths, fables, parables, and the tales—thus further elevating the prestige of the narrative form (Kakar 1989: 3). No different is the manner in

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Disability and Popular Common Sense in India: Noun versus Adjective

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Reflecting through the Indian experiences, a brief attempt is made to explore how disability as a noun takes shape in popular common sense “call names” (adjectives) and how does the popular common sense legitimise and normalise the oppressive language and the oppressed reality of the persons with disabilities? In the Indian context, the contempt for persons with disabilities is writ large in the language used to address them. However, to be conscious of this contempt, one needs to be conscious of the hegemonic nature of the popular common sense which normalises an oppressive reality as a natural social reality. The discussion on disability and popular common sense in India through the framework of “noun vs. adjective” might be helpful in gauging the challenges to the disability rights movement and the socio-cultural specificities to be reckon with for any meaningful intervention in the field of disability.

Keywords: common sense; disability; India; language; noun; oppression; persons with disabilities

There is widespread myth about *physical perfection*, which is actually attained by no one but desired by all (Anonymous).

Introduction

Most discussions of disability begin with a laundry list of disabling conditions but while such a list is necessary for an understanding of disability, limiting ourselves to thinking in medical or quasi-medical terms limits our understanding: for disability is largely a social construct (Finger, 1983). In the mid-seventies, a new way of thinking about disability emerged from the disabled people’s civil rights movement called the social model of disability (Oliver, 1986). The social model redefined disability as pertaining to the disabling effect of society, rather than the functioning of people’s minds, bodies and senses (Barnes, 1991). It does not deny the problem of disability but locates it squarely within society (Oliver, 1996). Coles (2001) suggests an understanding of the social model in that it does not label unlike the individual and medical model wherein descriptions tend to emphasise deficits, incompetencies and the things which people cannot do (p. 506). To these scholars, disability is seen as inherently social phenomena, and in this “social constructionist” view, disability is the oppressive socialisation of given form of physiological difference (impairment) (Gleeson, 1996; Oliver, 1990).

Shapiro, Margolis, and Anderson (1990) questioned that in recent years much has been written about the educational implications of identifying and eliminating sexist

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Social Work in India Do We Love being at Crossroads?

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Teaching as well as practice in India has been more favourably inclined towards engaging with issues and domains which remain within its comfort zones. The profession is still undergoing the existential crisis and that is why the tag of being 'at the crossroads' is unrelentingly 'real' even now. Under the garb of the popularly held belief that 'social work has to be apolitical', schools of social work and practitioners have opted to carve out a convenient functional niche that singularly avoids any encounter with a discomfiting agenda, and prevents its constituents from taking a counter-hegemonic posture. Keeping in view the endemic nature of oppression, and its frequent manifestation in violence based on gender, caste, and religion, the schools of social work in India, need to review their thrust/objectives, courses and praxis. A Gramscian framework is used to make sense of the popular professional perceptions (common sense) on social work teaching and practice. Examining the value bases and world views which inform the teaching and practice of social work, this article argues for integrating the values of human rights and social justice. The article cautions the social workers from becoming what Gramsci calls the dominant group "duputies" exercising the subaltern functions of social hegemony.

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Whatever answer one accepts to the perennial question of 'remaining on the cross roads', there must be a cultivated, if not a natural agreement on the need to examine the value bases and world views which inform the teaching and practice of social work. In Europe and America, this 'need' was quite emphatically stressed upon, on the eve of the twenty-first century and the new millennium (Specht and Courtney, 1995; Chambon and Irvin, 1999; Ife, 2001; Powell, 2001; Ferguson, Lavalette and Mooney, 2002; Dominelli, 2004). For example, the need to stir debate about 'a new course

Manual Scavenging: Issues of Caste, Culture and Violence

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Abstract

Manual scavenging—a despised vocation of manually sweeping household dry latrines and carrying human excreta—still exists in many parts of India. This inhuman practice has traditionally been enforced on a specific group of people labelled manual scavengers. More painful is the audacity and the deliberate dereliction of duty by the state machinery that blatantly denies the existence of inhuman practice of manual scavenging. The position of the *Jajmans* (patrons), rather comfortable with the fact that fellow human beings clean their excreta, is not very different. While the worst are the cultural constructions that legitimise this inhuman practice by changing what Galtung called *moral colour* from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable. In the rural Indian social matrix, the task of manual scavenging has been mostly enforced on women. This article aims to map how the practice of manual scavenging sustains on the hegemonic relationship built around gender, caste and culture. Johan Galtung's typology of violence—direct, structural and cultural—is used to demystify the issues of violence in manual scavenging.

Keywords

Manual scavenging, Balmiki women, cultural violence, Johan Galtung

Manual Scavenging: Context and Quantum

The practice of manual scavenging negates anything remotely related with the ideas of freedom, justice or even of the humanity per se. Manual scavenging exists at many sites, including in railways and municipalities, but in this article, it exclusively refers to the cleaning of household dry latrines and carrying away

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