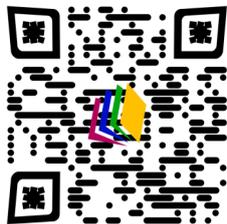




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Oral Traditions: Tuloni Biya and Some Other Practices

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ABSTRACT:

The practice of celebrating the phase of transition from being a girl into adulthood is Tuloni Biya. Tuloni Biya is a marriage ritual in Assam. Tuloni or Tula / Tuliluwa means to be lifted. It connotes an elevation of a girl from childhood to adulthood. It is also called Shanti Biya. Biya in Assamese language means marriage and the word Shanti denotes the relief of parents when their daughter menstruate which implies her capability of getting married and producing children. The girls after puberty are married to a banana tree (symbolizing the girl's mock husband) with all marriage rituals. After the ritualistic bath on the seventh day of her menstruation, the girl would be dressed like a bride and a big feast would be arranged for the family, friends, and neighbours. However, the practice of celebrating menstruation is not only confined to Assam. Various rituals and ceremonies marking the onset of first occurrence of menstruation is practice in different parts of India. G. Roheim highlights that such ceremonies and rituals were also performed in ancient Greece and Rome. In India this practice is visible in some parts of South India, Maharashtra and Orissa. At her first menarche, a girl in Karnataka is fed with dry coconut, milk, ghee, certain fruits and a mixture of jaggery and seeds. In Manipur, when a girl first bleeds, the cloth into which she bleeds is safely kept aside by her mother and gifted back to her when she gets married. This cloth is believed to be powerful that it will protect the girl and her family from poor health and other ills. Young girls of the Noctes and Wanchos of Tirap district tattooed their faces and parts of body such as the chest, naval, thighs and calfs with lines and dots after they attain puberty. Similarly, in Assam we find the prevalence of celebrating the first occurrence of menstruation.

KEY WORDS: Tuloni Biya, Assam History, Gender History, Women History, Childhood, Oral Tradition

Tuloni Biya in Assamese society is a marriage ritual which is mostly rooted in the oral tradition. There is no written ritualistic text on its performance but through oral tradition only it is transmitted from one generation to another. As Jan Vansina has put it, "Oral Traditions are verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation". In the present assignment an attempt will be made to look into the beginning of menstruation rituals or puberty ceremonies in India as recorded in the ancient sources and will try to see the extent of this practice in Assam in the form of Tuloni Biya. The performance of the ceremony informs the people within the kin group and the Jati that the girl has come to age. Thus the ritual is also