

REDBRIDGE FAITH FORUM

Births: - Ceremony, Custom & Tradition

Report from Workshop held 2 October 2018

Jacquie Grieve extended a warm welcome to the large group of women who had assembled in the Hindu Community Centre to learn about “Births – Ceremony, Custom and Tradition” from a Hindu and Buddhist faith perspective.

The first speaker was Vinaya Sharma who invited anyone who wished to stay on after the workshop to visit the adjoining Temple.



Vinaya explained that Hindus believe in reincarnation – souls leave the body, take stock of life and decide how to resolve issues of their previous life and decide where and when they will be reborn. Hindus believe in the cycle of life and death and as such welcome new family members. Therefore after a couple are married and are expecting a child, when the conception is confirmed a prayer called Garbhadana (conception) is recited to fulfil this obligation. During the 3rd month of the pregnancy a ceremony of protection takes place called the Punsavana to help the mother have a healthier pregnancy. During the 7th month the Simantonnyana ceremony is performed which is equivalent to a baby shower when prayers are offered for both mother and child as Hindus believe that the mental state of the mother affects the unborn child. The mother is encouraged to read Scriptures, especially the Ramayana, to chant it to understand their duties and responsibilities. It is noted that the baby in the womb will often react to the chanting from 3rd month onwards.

Once child is born Jatakarma is performed to welcome the child with honey placed in the baby’s mouth and the name of a Deity whispered in the ear. Often a precious ornament is used and the Deity’s name is written on the tongue with honey.

The naming of the baby is known as Namkaran and takes place after consultation with astrologers giving them the exact time of birth to enable the Astrologer to draw up a birth chart and tells the parents the initial letter of the baby’s name. (This astrological chart is not aligned with the western zodiac system.) The child has to be named within 11 days of birth.

It is usual for the birth to take place at the mother's parents' house, so both mother and baby are cared for. The naming ceremony which takes about an hour also takes place there.

Within the first year the baby's first hair will be shaved and offered to deities. This encourages healthier regrowth. A new Hindu mother is well cared for – for the first 10 days she is not allowed to do any work but is given full rest. For 40 days following the birth no heavy work is allowed and the mother does not go out but after a ceremony on the 40th day normal household duties can restart.

Special food is prepared for the new mother to nourish her and encourage repairs to the womb. In North India a sweet made with almonds, jaggery, ginger and ghee will be offered which is rich in iron and other nutrients,

It was explained that in South India the naming of a child includes a given name which indicates place of birth. On marriage there may be a name change to the husband's name and family so it is easy to identify the child's parents from the names.

Hindu Dharma states that to every action there is an equal reaction. Therefore, your Karma (action) determines what rewards you will reap.

Another ceremony called Janeu ceremony, where acceptance of the student by a Guru takes place at age 10-12 years – called second birth as the Guru initiates the students into Spiritual life.

Buddhist

Ranuka then spoke from the Buddhist perspective but commenced her talk by saying that



there were many similarities with Hindu practice.

In Sri Lanka expectant mothers are encouraged to concentrate on wholesome rituals, visit the temple and remain calm, be pleasant during pregnancy and listen to elders. When the mother is close to the expected date of childbirth, she will attend the first birthing ceremony called chanting of Angulimala Piritha (a suttha for the uncomplicated birth for the mother and child.)

The time of birth is recorded and given to astrologer to determine initial letter of name and to prophesy the child's future. Ancient tradition dictates these life events are written on a scroll made out of some leaf. This is done periodically during various stages of the child's life eg to

find the auspicious time before cutting the hair, before eating solid food, before starting to read or write, during puberty for a girl, during marriage.

Buddhist babies are viewed as a promise of hope and the child should be kind loving wise and blessed with good fortune.

Buddhists don't shave babies heads but often a lock of a child's hair is taken before the child starts talking as superstitions say this may prevent a stammer forming. Some parents may drop this lock of hair into flowing water in the hope of the child having long hair.

A baby blessing takes place a month after birth usually on a full moon day. The first journey would be to the temple where monks chant 3 sutras, Mangala, Rathana and Meththa Sutta. which combine to bless the new born and parents. A ball of thread is presented which has been used in the temple for many years and therefore contains many good vibrations – this can be tied around a child's wrist or waist to bless them –sometimes a large black dot is put on the forehead or a black bead is put on string around the child to ward off the evil eye. Baby girls may have their ears pierced at auspicious times as checked by the priest.

A scholar or father is requested to teach the child the alphabet (around 3-5 years of age) they will be taught to follow the 5 precepts of Buddhism – no killing, no stealing, no sexual misconduct, no lies/gossip, no intoxication and to follow the noble 8 fold path (sign of a wheel with 8 divisions).

The 8 fold path –

Having wisdom with (1) right view (2) right intention

Ethical Conduct– (3) right speech (4) right action (5) right livelihood

Mental development (6) right effort (7) right mindfulness (8) right concentration.



Both boys and girls will have ears pierced within 6 months of birth and these have special significance of energy circle

Sri Lankan children do also have very long names as these indicate both family names and the village of their fathers.

The women then broke into groups of 3 to discuss what they had learnt and share how it related to their own experiences.