

In the Conundrum between Tradition and Modernity: A Socio-Cultural Study to Understand Crib Death in Malda, West Bengal

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Abstract : The twentieth century has seen the world getting divided into three distinct blocks, created by the proponents of the mainstream developmental discourse. India, which has now gained the label of being a 'developing nation', stands in between these three groups, as it constantly tries to 'catch up' and emulate the developmental standards of the 'west'. In this endeavour, we find our country trying really hard to blindly replicate the health care infrastructures of the 'first worlds', without realizing the needs of evaluating the ground reality. In such a situation, the sudden outbreak of child death in the district of Malda, WB, poses an obvious questions towards the kind of development that our country has been engaging in, ever since its Post Colonial inception. Through this paper we thus try to understand the harsh veracity of the health care facility that exists in rural Bengal, and thereby challenge the conventional notion of 'health-care' as is normally discussed in the mainstream developmental discourse. Grounding our research work on detailed ethnography and through the help of questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussions with the local government officials(BDOs), health workers (ICDS, ASHA workers, ANHM and BMOHs) and members of families with experiences of child deaths, we have tried to find out the real and humane factors behind the sudden rise of reported infant deaths in the district, issues which are normally neglected and left out while discussing and evaluating IMR in the mainstream studies on health care and planning in our nation. Therefore the main aim of this paper is to try and look at child death from a 'wider perspective', where it is seen from an eye not bounded by the common registers of caste, class and religion. This paper, would thus be an eye opener in some sense, bringing in stories from the rural belt of the country; where the people are regularly torn between the binaries of the developing and shining modernity of 'India' which now gets ready to run the last lap and gain the status of becoming a 'developed nation' by 2020, and the staggering, dark traditional ' Bharat, which lags behind.

Keywords : child mortality, development discourse, health care, tradition and modernity

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