

Birthing Rites of Australian Aborigines in Olden Times

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Brief Backdrop

The Aborigines migrated to Australia from other parts of the world very long time ago. More than 30,000 years from now, around the last great Ice Age, Australia was joined to New Guinea and the islands like Java were larger than today. The sea passages between these lands were narrow, by virtue of which the ancestors of the Aborigines could reach Australia, perhaps over rafts.¹

However amongst the three archaeological sites discovered, the one in Penrith is speculated to date back to 47,000 years ago.¹ Therefore by speculation over 18,500 generations of Australian Aborigines have gone by.

Their life Style — Belief in Creation — Social System

To understand their life style is a very complex system,^{1,2} totally out of place here. Their belief in creation was also a complicated mythology, based mostly on dreams, according to which a spirit child only initiated into life by being born through a mother.³

Referring to women, they generally did not hold much of social status. They were hardy women, who would do a lot of hard work, in heat, under the blazing sun, like pounding grass for seeds and cooking food etc.^{2,3}

Birthing Rites of Australean Aborigines Women

Birth was women's own business. For giving birth to their babies, they basically used to cling to the sites; where they were born or their elder children were born; located within their own territories.⁴

The births took place with all the rituals and traditions by squatting over a hole prepared in the ground, covered with soft grass and leaves, as well as soft red sand. The female midwives like the grand mothers and other designated women, present at the birthing place, provided physical and emotional support to the labouring woman by holding and massaging her to relieve the discomfort of labour and its apprehension, which was considered to help in avoiding complication. A small "cry" was made by the helping women, present in the birthing camp, at the birth of the child.⁴ The Child was taken care of and the placenta was buried.

Birthing Belief Relationships with Uluru (Ayer's Rock) ⁵

At the time of birth, the Kunia minma (married women), moved towards a split boulder on the Southeast of Uluru, to give birth to a child. This boulder had a small hollowed out cave about 9 feet long, with a small inner entrance leading to a large cave, considered to be replicas of vagina and womb. On the east of the Bulari stone there is another shallow cave with

quite a few Aborigines paintings. A number of Bulari women sat on the ground there, along with the newly delivered woman, who had the baby resting between her knees. Bulari snake women supposed to be helpers or saviors, were also there.⁵

If however Liru men (carrying spears) approached the newly delivered woman, it was a bad omen leading to disease or death.⁵

The Delivered Women and Their Infants

It was amazing to find out how tough those aborigine women were. They could walk a mile or two immediately after child birth to their abodes and rarely if ever suffered from any ill effect.⁶

The babies when newly born were of light copper colour, but after a few hours they were covered with grease and charcoal to maintain the skin softness, as well as to avoid exposure. The babies were then covered with Cajeput bark.⁶

After Birth Rituals

After childbirth, the neighbours paid a visit, as soon as the tidings reached them and brought gifts of seeds or whatever else they had.⁶

The Parent Child Relation

The parents were very fond of their children who were nursed till 4 years and they grew very fast.

The boys played with birds. The girls when 5 years were promised by their parents to some men as future wives, after budding.⁶

The Remaining few Aborigines and their Women till Present Times

They shun the western style of birthing atmosphere and like to stick to their traditions and those too in their home lands, where birth is still considered as a spiritual and not an obstetric (scientific) event.⁷

Acknowledgement

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