

Culture specific diet in birth and child care practices among exile Tibetans in contemporary Dharamsala

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The study explores the concept of culture specific diet in Tibetan health care practices to exhibit different interpretations and its importance in contemporary world. Tibetans profess a variety of beliefs in health care practices. A sample of 92 Tibetan women of child bearing age group and above were interviewed from different socio economic strata at Dharamsala (India) between January-June 2002 following random sampling method, in-depth interview schedule. Findings suggest despite exposure to modern media, Tibetan & Allopathic medical facilities 58% Tibetan women opted for home delivery. *Tsampa* is considered as 'hot' food in the traditional Tibetan medical system. A strong cultural belief underlies its common application together with warm butter on the naval area to quicken the process of delivery. The application of *tsampa* in birth practices among exile Tibetans, as first feed to the new born babies and its importance in health care practices is governed by traditional beliefs as were practised in Tibet. It is also introduced to babies with an intent to prevent any imbalance in normal harmonic state of bodily elements. Encouragement from elders, and the belief in and application of Tibetan notion of 'hot' and 'cold' food appear to contribute to a successful preservation of the Tibetan humoral system in contemporary Tibetan health culture.

I argue that the preferential use of *tsampa* acts as a kind of placebo substance in Tibetan health care practice and is part of the social importance to actively uphold its existence and perseverance of Tibetan cultural tradition in exile.