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**STIGMA OF MOTHERHOOD: TRAUMA OF MOTHERING AN AUTISTIC CHILD
IN INDIA**

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Abstract:

Beatific aura around motherhood the patriarchal fetters attached to it. The institutionalization of motherhood as an apparatus to ingrain servitude in women. The gestation parturition, puerperal and postpartum the trauma each woman live through-good mother construct-rearing an offspring is a mother's task- mothering a disabled child and its stigma. What is autism? Its special features. Why it is traumatic experience in the true sense of the word. Challenges faced by an Indian woman -the social ostracism- physical mental -economical struggles-the burned out exhausted life they live.

Keywords: *Autism Spectrum Diseases, Motherhood Concepts, Features of autism, Caregiving Struggles, etc.*

The beatification of motherhood is one of the celebrated aspects of the patriarchal society which lavishly uses hollow euphoric terms in connection with motherhood. "The use of term motherhood refers to the institution of motherhood that can be seen to regulate and shape women's experience, perceptions and sense of self" (Rich, 28). Mothering is most adulated experience in literature and also in the real life. Mother is the female parent of child. Mothering a child includes the gestation period, accouchement and the real process of rearing child and making him socialize i.e..Growth of embryo in to a grownup human being depends upon purely a person called mother

The defined role of a mother may vary according to the social, political religious milieu but it definitely ensures the venom of patriarchal control over the half of its population. Though maternity or maternal care, are inspiring concepts that incorporate most of the euphemistic terms with it, for a woman it is a traumatic experience which follows her till death. The most atrocious part is that every woman is going through this. The weight of motherhood is thrust upon her and she is trained even as toddler for this purpose. The society ensures instilling the motherhood qualities in a girl child from the very beginning of her life when she is presented with a toy child and other homemaking things to play with. Whether she chooses to be a mother or not, the mothering qualities are counted as the most desirable quality of a woman.

The 'Good Mother' Concept

The 'good mother' is the social construction to keep the women in its alley. Hallow of a good mother restricting all activities and keeping her inert is the agenda of the patriarchic structure. This construct, physically and psychologically generated a culture which kept the heavy burden of child rearing completely on the shoulders of weaker sex. For a normal woman who gives birth to a healthy child, maternal thinking and emotional labour is a strenuous task. The



child birth and child caring burns out the true personalities of a woman and she has to keep herself away from almost all the other activities due to this. Her personal life and social life are all restricted to a large extent due to her motherhood duties. It is more hazardous when it comes to parenting a disabled child. Motherhood duties remain even harder or impossible when it comes to the case of mothering an autistic child. To get a clear picture of the mother's dilemma a basic knowledge of autistic spectrum disease is a must. The rigorous apprehension of the life of an autistic child's mother in Indian society and how this concept of 'good mother' become a silent killer of her inner self should be studied in detail.

This paper is a humble attempt to look in to the life of autistic child's mother who has to exist in the periphery of public consciousness, the stigma these mothers have been going through and the eternal trauma of their being. Their true selves are almost forgotten and their full vigor and vitality is fully utilized to look after these children with special needs. Most of them burn out in these struggles and often have a death like existence. They are destined to live till death as their children needs to be cared their whole life time. Autism Spectrum Disease (ASD) is a kind of new generation disease which was found and named in 1940s. The prevalence is very high. Lifelong incurable conditions of brain development are the main trouble.

Autism Spectrum Diseases (ASD).

The primary knowledge of autism and its differences from other disabilities is a must to explicate Motherhood in this case. The first case recorded in 1747 is Hugh Blair of Borgue where the brother petitioned against Blairs' marrying his wife to get Blairs inheritance. Another case reported is that of a wild boy of Aveyon who like Mougli lived in the wild for 7 years and found out and brought back in to the civilised society in 1798. This boy also showed the autism characteristics. Autism started to take on modern meaning in the second half of the 20th century especially after the various traumas related to autism were studied. The term autism has been used for a little over 100 years now. It was first used by Swiss psychiatrist Eugene Bleuer when he found out children with some symptoms of schizophrenia. Autism or 'autismus' the term came from Greek word 'autos' which means self. It was meant to describe the isolated self that he saw in those with schizophrenia.

It is a brain disorder that begins at a very early age in a baby's life but typically starts to show major symptoms around the age of 2 to 3 years of age. Autism remains as the most researched of the child psychological disorders in the West. The Autism Society of America relies on the following definition of autism by Leo Kanner: "Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life." "The result of neurological disorder that affects the functioning of the brain' autism and its associated behaviours have been estimated to occur in as many as 2 to 6 in 100 individuals" (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention 2023). "Autism is four times more prevalent in boys than girls and knows no racial, ethnic or social boundaries. Family, income, lifestyle and educational levels do not affect the chance of autism's occurrence." (Autism Society America, 2023).

Autism is a complex neurobehavioral condition that includes impairments in social interaction and developmental language and communication skills combined with rigid, repetitive behaviours. Because of the range of symptoms, this condition is now called Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A child with ASD is extremely sensitive to sounds, smells, sights or touches which seem normal to others but highly disturbing or painful for them. For instance, a child who is disturbed by the sound of ceiling fan may become restless and sometimes may behave violently. A child who was sitting peacefully in the class went out as if in a trance and the smell of pineapple



which was cut there in a neighbourhood house which was some yards away was the true cause of his absent-minded truancy.

Children with autism have trouble in their communication and understanding. They don't have the capacities to think in abstract or sometimes even in concrete. They cannot understand what other people think and feel. So, they find it very difficult to express their feelings. They have a persistent deficit in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts as manifested in their behaviour. Autism is biological condition as it is primarily concerned with genetic and brain deformation. Psychoanalysts and psychotherapists concluded this one as neurotic condition caused by mother child relationships; on the other hand, Child Psychiatrists and Psychologists conceived autism as a psychotic condition with biological cause.

They have deficit in social and emotional life, in nonverbal communication, in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships. The repetitive stereotyped movements, use of objects may irritate a normal person. No speech condition or echolalia, the insistence on sameness inflexible adherence to routine, or ritual makes the child rearing a difficult task. They are highly restricted by fixated interest. They often show hyper- or hypo- activity and reactivity to sensory aspect of environment, aggressive or self-injurious behavior and indifference to pain. These symptoms may vary individually as it is a spectrum disease, the various shades of these symptoms bought under the same umbrella. The deficit of their brainy qualities, the lack of or hesitation to communication and socialization make it thoroughly impossible for the care givers to do their duty properly.

Causes of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):

No simple answer response is possible as there are a number of speculations regarding the causative factors of ASD. A varied range of answers, ranging from the genetic and environmental to the differences in brain chemistry, are put forward by the scientific world. The combination of risk factor varies in each child.

- Family history of autism.
- Advanced parent age.
- Genetic mutation.
- Sex of the child (as the boys are more likely to get autism than girls) Almost 4 times
- Prenatal birth.
- Comorbid diagnosis fragile x
- Potential risk of drug/toxic/heavy metals.
- The MMR vaccine as the cause of autism.
- Refrigerator mother theory.

Autism is biological condition primarily concerned with genetic and brain deformation
Prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder: Global and Indian Context. Autism had been found out or named in the early half of twentieth century. It is reported that in USA one in 46 children is born with autism. While in India it is coming to the ratio of 1 to five hundred. Even though there has been a vast increase in number of cases being detected, majority of people with autism in India still remain undiagnosed.

Whenever a child is identified with a physical or mental impairment whether in the West or East, educated or uneducated, there starts a blame game. The stigma and shame they have to bear



comes in to their mind. The religious, explore the reason or curse behind this mishap in their family. The social discrimination and contempt start from the very beginning. “Where did this curse came from? Was it genetic? Had it been caused by an illness during pregnancy? I felt guilty and so did your father...” (Laborit, 6). Emmanuelle Laborit recalls her mother's utterance on her being deaf and she muses over it in her autobiography *The Cry of a Gull*, “...parents of deaf children always want to assign guilt. They are always looking for the guilty party. But blaming one parent or the other for a child is horrible for child's deafness is horrible for the child (Laborit, 7).

The question is reverberating in each and every moment of their life. If it is prevalent in Western countries and Europe, the superstitious India cannot be stay far behind. The question among the parents will be taken by the society and they will be added colour with the curse of countless gods Goddesses. The parents of autistic children, especially, the mother are targeted on every social situation. They are the target of discussions and their children are frowned upon each and every minute.

The Dilemma of Mothering an Autistic Child in India:

The staunch adherence to the patriarchal structure, conformism and superstitions make Indian culture different from Western culture. India, a country of age-old beliefs and traditions, most of its traditional beliefs are deep rooted in the clan life. Traditional Indian culture is marked by its social hierarchy based on patriarchy which considers women under thralldom. Indian society with its beliefs in Karma and rebirth had a prejudiced notion and repugnance towards the disabled and their mothers. Mothers are almost always blamed for the deformity of their children. Indian society glorifies the mother calling her as God. There is a dictum *Mata-Pita- Guru-Daivam*. Mother, Father and Teacher are Gods. When Indian society exalts something then the resultant effect is exploitation of the very same thing. It is a culture that believes womanhood is for mother hood and to contrive it, a girl child is trained from her cradle. Each and every toy she was presented and the plays and her hobbies were manipulated to ensure that she was instilled with patriarchal ideal of Motherhood. Her connubial blessing even comes with a wish that she should give birth to 'a huge lot of sons'. Indian society always counts on women's abilities with her motherhood abilities. A healthy offspring, especially a boy, is a mother's pride otherwise she would be looked down upon by the society.

When a woman is involved in rearing an autistic child, she is destined to face a number of problems. This multifaceted crisis includes a huge lot of complications in her life. Her personal mental physical social and financial aspirations are marred with this one problem. If she had a good marriage, she might have got some solace but in most of the cases disgusted husbands leave them for a better life Thus, these women are left alone with their insecurities

Most of these mothers under the shock of their fate and never got a respite from that. But some others bravely accept the truth and adopt a life style accordingly. Most of them personally secluded themselves from the society due to various reasons. They were engaged in a whole day long task of nursing their children as most of the time these children are in want of surveillance. Sometimes, the shame and shun they had to face in front of a society make them hide themselves. They are completely involved themselves in the task of making their child a social being. As the child is bereft of communication abilities, mothers are the only persons to support and connect them with the society. The sudden raptures or seizures of these children make people despise them.



These mothers are unable find solace in anything other than this struggle. They are physically burned out due to the child care in addition to the daily household chores. ASD children need care during each and every minute and twenty-four hours. They need constant attention in their nutrition their various physical activities. They need special training in their routine activities which the normal children pick up with ease. They had to be looked after just like an infant even in their adulthood. The child who grows up with extra rage may show convulsions and in an outbreak of emotions they may attack the caregivers most probably mothers. Mothers as the care givers may be unable to take rest even as they have to keep constant vigil of their child.

The mothers with the rejection from the society become desperate in their endeavour to help their children to cope up with the society, and strive under constant pressure. They are the persons always being criticised for the child's misbehaviour. The futility of their toil leads them to eternal despair. The rest of the society rears children in the hope that there will be their children to attend to them in their old age misery. These mothers are in an eternal inferno worrying about the life of their children after their demise. The unrelenting question reverberates in their mind 'Who will look after my child after my death?' They are desolate and depressed too.

Conclusion:

It is a crusade for a mother to look after the child with autism in a very conventional type of society like India. The developed countries like England, Canada, USA and Japan came up with policies to tackle the issue of Autism and Autism parenting together and they appendix it with new innovations in the field. Though India is not far behind contributing the population of the ASD spectrum, it is in an infantile state in making an appropriate policy. In this huge country it is a difficult but at the same time an urgent task to ease the burden from the hands of fragile destitute mothers. Though this paper is meant to discuss the struggles of motherhood undergone by the mothers of autistic children, it cannot be devoid of the duty to remind the need of a proper vision in making an apt policy on this.

When there is a fight the weaker section is almost always the guilty party and thus the mother will be reproached. Whether they are from the highest social strata or working class, they try to lock up the child due to social ostracization. The tantrum and echolalia make the parents embarrassed and they are forced to lead a life devoid of social contact which is a necessary premise for their development. Most of the normal schools are reluctant to admit even mildly autistic children in their premises making their condition worse than ever.

Mothers are blinded in often severely draining relationships by the confusion of love with 'care,' which can only be resolved by human political system that prioritizes the needs of its most vulnerable members, including those with disabilities. Mothers must deal with these issues mostly alone because there is a dearth of institutional support, leaving them without the tools necessary to successfully balance their two responsibilities. Although there are organizations and advocacy groups devoted to helping families with children with autism, the scope and influence Mothers are left to handle these difficulties mostly alone, without the tools necessary to successfully balance their two responsibilities, due to the absence of institutional support. Although there are organisations and associations that serve families with children who have autism, their effect and reach may be constrained. Mothers' difficulties may be exacerbated by the fact that they don't always have the time or energy to locate and use these resources. The situation is extremely difficult for a woman who has to work and care for her autistic child on her own. These mothers



face daily challenges such as managing financial strain, juggling work and childcare, and overcoming emotional and psychological stress. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates flexible work arrangements is needed to address these issues with tremendous difficulties. These mothers face daily challenges such as managing financial strain, juggling work and childcare, and overcoming emotional and psychological stress. A comprehensive strategy that incorporates strong mental health services, more institutional and financial support, and flexible work rules is needed to address these issues. Society can more effectively assist these moms in their dual duties and advance both their and their kids wellness by acknowledging and fixing the particular challenges they encounter.

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