Children are a medium of wealth flows. Caldwell (1982) emphasized that such flows are not purely economic but emotional and psychic as well. Childlessness has been such a deep rooted social stigma that even to this day one of the foremost aim of any married women is to become a mother. Such an aim is also seen among the Kayastha and the Kaibarta married women of the present study. When a women conceives she reports it to her husband and gradually the good news spreads among the family members, friends, near by relatives and neighbours.

In a nuclear family the husband takes the full care of his wife and in case of a joint family all the family members take care of the pregnant woman. If the mother-in-law is old enough she goes to the doctor for check up with her son and if her mother-in-law is young she prefers to see the doctor without being accompanied by her son. The pregnant woman follows the doctor’s advice. Sometimes she goes with her husband or with her mother-in-law to take tetanus toxoid injection in the hospital. Her husband reminds her to take vitamins and folic acid tablets regularly. If the mother-in-law is alive she teaches her daughter-in-law all the precautions to be taken during pregnancy. She advises her not to take too spicy foods, hot foods like meat, egg, pumpkin etc. and also some cold foods like stale rice, curd, ice cream, citrus fruits, papaya etc. She is advised to take curry of spinach. They reported that spinach has high value of vitamin and iron; and it gives strength to a new mother. The family members never allow a pregnant woman to fast. For safe delivery they perform "Narayan Puja" and "Naam Prasanga" (A kind of religious rituals) at home to get blessings from deities.
Sometime they perform puja at temples to get blessings of gods. They never allow the pregnant woman to go alone to a deserted place, near the river or to the house of a mourning family. She is also not allowed to go out alone too early in the morning, at noon and at late night. They believe that as North Guwahati has so many temples, the deities of these temples come out of the temples and take rest under big trees. She is not allowed to put high heel footwear, not allowed to walk on slippery surfaces and do not allow her to mop floors and to do other strenuous household duties. But some of the families allow her to do her normal household duties till her health permits. The mother of the pregnant woman uses to give her talisman and amulets (jap) to tie on her wrist or neck or waist as the priest of the temple or 'Ojha' (medicine man) prescribes. The talismans are given to the pregnant women to protect them and their babies in the womb from evil spirits. On the fifth month of pregnancy the mother of the pregnant woman gives her five sweet products like milk, curd, honey, ghee and sugar to eat. Some give "payash" (rice cooked in cow's milk and sugar). This ceremony is known as the 'panchamrit Khowa'.

Members of the family including the husband help as attendant in cases of hospital deliveries. The husband, parents and the in-laws offer her food or fruits in the hospital. Both the families never see the new born baby with empty hand; they gift gold ornaments like chain, ear ring, ring or some others. If the baby is born at home then a dai is called immediately and the elderly female members of the family and neighbours help the dai by providing her hot water, towels, new razor blades, soap etc. The baby is cleaned by the dai and the mother is also allowed to have a bath with luke warm water. At first honey is applied on the lips of the baby and after that the baby is allowed to breast fed and it is continued until the baby is six months old. The mother is given to eat light food like dry chappati or bread, light tea, biscuit etc. on the first day. From the second day soft rice and curry of some
indigenous medicinal herbs like "narasingha", "bhedailata", "manimuni" etc. are given. These are given in small quantities three to four times a day. Fish like "koi" (Anabrs soandence), "Goroi" fish (Canna punctatus) etc. are prepared with black pepper and is given to the mother to eat. They believe that these foods give strength and vigour to the new mother. The placenta and the umbilical cord are buried at the back side of the courtyard by the dai. On the seventh day after the birth of the baby "Ganak" (Village astrologer) is invited. He calculates the stars and finds out the zodiac sign and number of the newborn and with the zodiac the astrologer names the child and sometimes ask the parents to give a good name. Guests are not invited. The ceremony is completed by the family members. After the ceremony light refreshment is served to all. The birth hair is thought to be impure and is shaved on eleventh or thirteenth day after birth. For this a barbar is called to the house. In every Kayastha family the birth hair is shaved but the Kaibartas do not shave the child's birth hair while some of them simply cut a bit of hair. The hair is cut by the mother herself or by the father or by the grandmother. The reason behind it is that the baby might get hurt on the head or on the brain. The seclusion period is observed by both the castes for one month, which is known as 'akoshiya'. After giving the ceremonial bath both on one month, the baby and the mother are taken out. Naam Prasanga (prayer) is performed at the house. Elderly people give blessings to the mother and the new born baby. Guests are invited and refreshment is served. Among the Kayasthas just after birth the mother and the baby sleep on the floor on a bed laid and continues for ten days. On the eleventh or thirteenth day the mother and the baby after having purificatory bath come out of the room. The whole family is purified. From the next day the baby could be held by everyone and the mother and the baby are now allowed to sleep on usual beds. Every day the floor of the room is mopped with antiseptic water. For good smell incense sticks are used.
The baby is given breast milk for six months. During summer season, a little water is also given to the baby to drink. Night feedings are also given on demand. Generally a baby is breast fed until it is one or one and a half years old. If the milk dries out or the mother does not have sufficient milk then cow milk or goat milk is fed. It has been found that weaning of breast milk starts after one year.

Generally the mother cleans the baby everyday. If she is busy in her household works the mother-in-law and sister-in-law jointly cleans the baby. In some nuclear families the maternal grandmothers come to help their daughters. Sometimes the expectant mother used to go to her mother's house. Some keep a maid servant and take help from her till the baby is young enough. During summer season the baby is given bath with water that is kept in sunlight. Use of soap is regular. But during winter or rainy season the baby is bathed invariably with warm water. During sickness only the hands and feet are cleaned with warm water. The mother and the grandmother generally massages the baby with mustard oil. In some cases of Kayasthas, woman from nearby villages or dai come during the first month and massages the baby with mustard oil or with modern commercial baby oil or cod liver oil. The head hair is washed with baby soap from time to time. The informants report of applying coconut oil or mustard oil on the baby's head. If any infection is seen on the body of the baby, use of soap is totally avoided and the baby is given herbal treatment. Neem leaves are boiled in water. The baby is given a bath with that water cooled down. The nails of too young babies are not cut by razor blades or nail cutters. They are rubbed by the baby's cloth wet with its urine. The ear is generally cleaned with wet cloths when the baby is asleep. While cleaning the nose some mothers use cloths but some mothers have the bad habit of cleaning the nose with hands and rub their hands on their own dress. The cloths that the baby wear are changed regularly and they are washed with soap or detergents dipped in
disinfected water and sun dry. Every household does not use disinfected water regularly. If the baby wet the bed, the clothes are washed either by the mother or by the father of the baby and the mattress is sun dried. The dress of the baby if somehow torn are stitched by the mother.

After six months the baby needs additional food. Then the baby is given milk of cows or goats, biscuit, middle portion of bread, and tin food like Cerelac, Nestum etc. Majority of both the castes serve 'luthuri'. (It is prepared by rice flour, pulp of seeded banana and cow milk) to the babies. The first rice giving ceremony is performed on 9th month or 11th month for female child and 6th month or 8th month for a male child. The maternal uncle gives first ceremonial rice to the child in this ceremony and this ceremony is called "Annaprasana". Guests are invited. Both the Kayasthas and the Kaibartas celebrate this ceremony. The child is given regularly soft rice, dal, vegetables soup, chira with milk etc. to eat after this ceremony. Before the food is served the utensils of the baby are sterilized and the mothers also wash her hands with soap. But some mothers out of laziness do not use soap to wash her hands and do not sterilized the utensils. They simply wash them with plain water. Generally the baby is fed by the mother. Among Kayasthas before serving, the mother chew betel nut and leaf (pan). They do this to protect the baby from her own evil eye. If the mother is busy the grandmother or paternal aunt or the father serves food to the baby. In case of nuclear families the mother of the girl (new mother) or her husband feeds the baby.

Generally the mother holds the baby and console it if it cries. If she is busy in her work her mother-in law or father-in law or sister-in law or her husband holds the baby and console. In a nuclear family the neighbours also help the new mother. During sickness the parents of the baby take the baby to the doctor, but if a baby suffers from measles, "Ai Sakam" (a religious performance) is performed. On this occasion eight to ten women are invited and they perform naam prasanga or pray to "Goddess Sitala" and later
prasad is distributed. The prasad includes raw rice flour, milk, banana, sugar and other fruits.

If the baby suffers from cold and cough the body of the baby is massaged with garlic oil. In the evening, every house hold puts dry red chilli and mustard seeds on fire. They do this to protect the baby from evil eyes. To protect the baby from mosquitos, they never use insecticides but use "dhuna" (resin).

The bed of the baby is found to be made separate in some cases. But mostly the baby shares his or her mother's bed. The pillow of the baby is made of mustard seeds. The reason behind it is if a baby sleeps in such pillow the baby's head shape will be round. In some baby's bed toys are found hanging over the bed. This is done to present a pleasing feeling to the baby that stops him crying and sleep soon. Neighbour's children also join playing with the child. The mother sing lullabies that make the baby sleep at night.

The mother's role is thus found to be big. Though the same work is to be done regularly she never feels tired; rather she feels good and proud. And this shows the love and affection the mother has towards her own child.

**BATHING AND CLOTHING**

Daily bath of the baby is necessary. It keeps the body and mind fresh and healthy. The new born should be given bath with soap and warm water (Park: 2000).

In both the castes under study it is found that a new born is given bath immediately after birth with luke warm water. Use of soap starts after a week for the Kaibartas whereas the Kayasthas start using soap to clean the baby after two days. To clean the greasy and sticky materials they rub the body of the baby very gently. In case of home deliveries the birth attendants help the dai by giving her the required things like warm water, soap, towels, razor
blades etc. The attendants are mostly the husbands and elderly women of the house and sometimes the neighbours also help in the process of delivery among the Kaibartas. But in case of the Kayasthas the husbands are not allowed to enter the delivery room. The mother is cleaned and given bath with warm water and then allowed to take the baby for breast feeding. In both the castes the new born is usually wrapped up immediately after birth with a piece of cloth, old but soft and clean. Specially mother's old and clean chadar (a part of women's dress) is used. According to them the reason behind it is its softness and cleanliness compared to the newly purchased cloth. Mothers of both the castes of the present study give bath to their young ones till the age of seven years. During the sickness of the child the other family members also take proper care. But here too the mothers use to take special care and observe the child quite frequently. Some of the respondents mentioned that during summer besides the daily morning bath the mothers wash the hands, face and feets of the children with soap and water and change their used clothings; and during winter they use warm water. In case of any infection found on the child's skin use of soap is totally stopped and indigenous treatment is started. For example, boiling water with neem leaves (Azadirachta indica) are allowed to cool down replaces use of soap. Most of the children of both the castes are given bath by the mother.

**CLEANING OF TEETH AND TREATMENT OF HEAD HAIR, SKIN**

Children brush their own teeth but those who are too young the mothers clean their teeth. Generally when a child becomes three years old the mothers apply tooth-paste on the brush and teaches him how to brush. Gradually the child tries to follow and learn.

Hair is washed with baby soap or by general toilet soap occasionally. In infancy the hair is trimmed either by the mother herself or by a barber, to get rid of lice. They apply coconut oil or mustard oil and comb the hair of the
babies. They believe that coconut oil helps the hair grow and mustard oil keeps the hair healthy, dense and black. Generally mothers oil the hair of their children. Some girls of about three or four years of age were noticed using designed and colourful hair bands, ribbons, clips etc.

The skin of the children is clean and healthy. Mothers of both the castes massage their children regularly with baby oil or mustard oil. A massage improves the weight, length, mid-arm and mid-leg circumference (Agarwal: 2000). During the winter season and when the child suffers from cold and cough the mothers massage their children's chest, back and limbs with garlic fried in mustard oil. The reason is that the garlic (Allium sativum) oil keeps the body warm. It is an indigenous treatment. Children were seen to be mostly suffering from cold and cough. At the time of survey, many of the children were found with running noses. Mothers clean their noses and rub their hands on their own dresses which was found to be a bad habit. Some mothers out of laziness do not wash their hands before serving food; the finger nails were also found unclean.

Ears and eyes of the children are cleaned by the mother with wet cloth. Dresses of the children are also found clean and mostly readymade. However in a few of them the tidiness in dresses is not visible. Unbuttoned loose frock and shorts etc. is a common scene. Almost all the mothers wash their children's garments daily with detergents or washing soaps and sun dry the clothes nicely. In some families infants garments are dipped in dettol water after washing. Besides, all these, few young girls aged between 2.5 to 3 years were noticed wearing plastic and metal bangles in their wrists. During summer seasons mothers dress up their children with shorts and cotton clothes and give "Chappals" as footwear. During winter children are dressed up with woollen clothes, woollen caps, shocks and shoes. The mothers wrap their too young babies with their own shawl and this shows mother's affection, love and care for the child.
BEDS OF THE BABIES

Mothers of lower income group of both the castes use old cloth for making the bed and the quilt of the babies. "Oil cloth" is used by all the mothers. The mothers of both the castes not use swing to make the baby sleep unlike in many places elsewhere. Few mothers prepared separate beds for their babies both during day time and night. The rest of the mothers prepare the baby’s beds on their own beds. Nearly all the informants mention about making pillows stuffed with mustard seeds. They believed that mustard pillows gave a round shape to the head of the babies. Baby’s used cloths are washed properly and dry up in the sunshine. Even the mother’s beds and babies’ beds are equally sun dried; which show mother’s alertness about the hygiene of the baby’s bedding. In some houses puppets are also found hanging over the bed of young ones. They try to keep their young ones happy.

TOILET TRAINING

Toilet training refers to the habit of controlling bladder and bowel. Harsh measures used for toilet training have detrimental consequences on children’s personality (Bhuyan; 1993). The mother takes the baby out if the baby wants to go to toilet but a three-year old child or of higher age could go itself to open space. Some have good habit of going to toilet. For infants mother hold the child, and make a sound like sshh...... to pass out urine. If the child wets the bed sometimes the mother scold or tease the child. By that way the mothers try to make the habit of the child to control his bladder and bowel. In some households of Kaibartas it has come to notice that the mother allows the child to pass faece inside living room later on the mother herself clean it with paper; and some mothers give paper to pass out the faece on the paper and later the mother throw the paper and wash her hand with plain water and sometime with soap. Among those households no
mother reports of washing the floor with detergent or antiseptic water. The reason behind allowing their infants to pass out faeces inside living room during day time or at night is that the mother could keep a watch on the child when she is busy in her household duties. Some mothers do that as they do not have sanitary latrine. During night the child might get scared of evil spirits and darkness to go out. These mothers, in fact, do not take hygiene seriously.

PLAY

Play gives the child joy and satisfaction. The period from birth to two years is known as the sensory motor stage. The child learns about its environment through motor actions co-ordinated with its perceptions (Goonesinghe: 1984).

Play activities include running, catching one another, and too young babies are found playing with their mothers mainly. Infants are also found playing with variety of dolls symbolizing animals, boys or girls, cars etc. Parents also join their infants for sometime while playing for giving them company and support. At the same time, the parents notice their children while playing because small children have the habit of putting anything directly to mouth. No children are allowed to play with coins and marbles etc. Children are found playing with friends of the same age group and with elders too. In a very few houses iron swing are found, and the children love swinging. Some play materials include small plastic or rubber balls, balloons and small bicycle etc. also.

SINGING LULLABIES AND TEACHING SONGS

The mothers loiter holding the baby in hands or shoulders singing lullabies to make the baby sleep. Some mothers report of singing lullabies at night to make the baby sleep. When the child learns to speak the mother gradually teaches the baby the assamese alphabets like 'AU' 'AA' (অ, আ)
and 'Ka', 'Kha' (ক, খ) and English alphabets A, B, C, D etc. in her own musical style and ask the child to follow her. Some mothers also teach first few lines of Hindi film songs or Assamese Bihu songs. Tell them stories of animals, birds, kings, princes, angels etc. to entertain them. The mothers sometimes do some antics also to make the child laugh. And all these help developing love and attachment between the mother and the child.

Here are two lullabies sung by the Kayastha and the Kaibarta mothers

\[ Siwaliye nahibi rati \]
\[ Tore kaan kati lagamae bati \]

**Meaning**

Oh fox, don't come at night else your ear will be cut and (with the blood) lamps will be lighted.

\[ Amare maina suba ye \]
\[ Barite bagari ruba ye \]
\[ Barire bagari paki sari jabo \]
\[ Mainai butali butali khaba \]

In the courtyard we will plant a tree of Indian plum,

When the fruits of Indian plum tree will get ripen and fall down

Our baby will collect and eat them up.