



HeritageFest
S I N G A P O R E

RIGHT AFTER BIRTH

**An Exhibition Specially Commissioned for
Singapore HeritageFest 2005**

SUMMARY SHEET

For more detailed information, please refer to the exhibition



NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

Copyright © 2005 Public Education Division, National Heritage Board

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be produced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

RIGHT AFTER BIRTH – BIRTH RITES AND CUSTOMS

HAVING A BABY

In the months leading to the birth of the baby, many rites and customs are observed to ensure a successful delivery. Two major pre-birth customs still practised today are the 'Lenggang Perut' by the Malays and the 'Valai Kappu' by the Hindus in Singapore.

'Lenggang Perut' or 'Rocking the Womb'

In the seventh month of pregnancy, the Malays perform the 'Lenggang Perut' or 'rocking the womb' to ensure a safe and easy delivery. Grasping two ends of the sarong, the 'bidan' or midwife rocks the expectant mother's body gently a few times. 'Lenggang Perut' is still observed by many Malays in Singapore for its symbolic significance.

'Valai Kappu' or Bangles Ceremony

The 'Bangles' ceremony or 'Valai Kappu' is a Hindu ceremony usually held on the seventh month of a Hindu woman's first pregnancy. Held at the woman's parents' home, it is celebrated by the womenfolk. The mother-to-be is blessed by the elderly women, especially those who have borne children. The elderly women adorn the mother-to-be's forearms with various coloured glass bangles.

MIRACLE OF BIRTH

People of different races and cultures around the world celebrate the birth of a baby in their own special ways. In multiracial Singapore, while the ethnic communities have their own unique birth rites and customs, these different traditions share the common hope of lifelong blessings, health, vitality and longevity for the child.

rites AFTER BIRTH

Right after the birth of a baby, common among all the ethnic communities in Singapore, are rites and ceremonies performed to ensure the health and well-being of the newborn child.

Third Day Bath

Among traditional Chinese, the baby is given a ceremonial bath on the morning of the third day after birth. The baby is bathed in warm water boiled with locust branches and artemis plants as it is believed these herbs help remove 'wind' and impurities. A red silk and a string of cash are fastened around the tub for blessings of wealth.

'Padinaru'

The Hindus in Singapore celebrate the 'Padinaru' or 'sixteenth day' of the baby's birth with a special thanksgiving ceremony at home where prayers are offered to the goddess 'Periachi' for the baby's safe delivery. Some Hindu families also celebrate the Naming and Cradle ceremonies on this same day. The baby is placed on the lap of the father or maternal uncle who whispers the baby's name three times in the right ear. The baby is then put in a cradle decked with flowers for the Cradle ceremony.

rites AFTER BIRTH

Believing that newborns are vulnerable to physical and spirit harm, cleansing from impurities and protection from evil forces are some of the universal principles behind the rites and traditions practised by the various ethnic communities for protection and blessings for the child.

'Azan' Ceremony

For the Malays in Singapore, soon after a baby is born, the father or a male relative whispers the 'Azan' or call to prayer into the baby's ears with the hope that the child will grow up to be a pious Muslim.

Christening

For Eurasians, the majority of whom are Roman Catholics, the christening or baptism of the child usually takes place about two weeks after the birth of the child. The baby is dressed in a white christening robe, a symbol of purity, joy and new life.

Protection and Blessings

To the **Straits Chinese**, baby boys are especially precious. They believe in evil spirits that specifically target baby boys. It is therefore very common to see Straits Chinese baby boys dressed in pink clothing. Parents also give girls' names to their baby boys hoping to fool the evil spirits.

Some **Indians** have a tradition of putting a chain around the baby's waist to help ward off evil spirits. Usually given by the maternal uncle on the baby's twenty-eighth day, the waist chain is also used to ensure that the child grows up with a nice waistline.

On the one-hundredth day, the Chinese child will be given a 'long life lock'. It is also called 'Qi Lin' (or unicorn) lock because this mystical creature is a symbol of good luck and fortune. The child will wear this lock until he is two or three years old.

THANKSGIVING

Between the fortieth and forty-fourth day of the child's birth, the Malays throw a Thanksgiving feast for friends and relatives to express their gratitude to Allah for keeping mother and child safe during the critical period of delivery.

'Kenduri Doa Selamat'

The 'Kenduri Doa Selamat' is a Thanksgiving feast and it is also a feast to mark the end of the confinement period for the new mother.

'Cukur Rambut'

The 'Cukur Rambut' or Hair Shaving ceremony is usually held on the same day as the 'Kenduri Doa Selamat'. Hair shaving is not peculiar to the Malays. The Chinese and Hindus also carry out Hair Shaving as a symbol of cleansing.

THANKSGIVING

For the Chinese, the first month celebration is an important event. This is when they spread news of the baby's arrival to friends and relatives with the distribution of gifts. This occasion of the baby's first month is also an important celebration among the Straits Chinese.

'Man Yue'

This celebration signals the end of the confinement period for the new mother. It is a Thanksgiving celebration on the baby's attainment of a full month in good health. Modern Chinese families in Singapore usually distribute cakes, red eggs and 'Ang Gu Kueh' (red dumplings) to friends and relatives, who in turn reciprocate by giving an 'Ang Pow' (a gift of cash in a red paper packet) to the baby.

Straits Chinese usually give the following to friends and relatives. The red eggs (which must be given in pairs) symbolise completeness and fullness; 'Nasi Kuning' or yellow rice and the chicken curry are symbols of prosperity and fortune; the 'Ang Gu Kueh', also given in pairs, symbolise sweetness and happiness. 'Gu' which means 'Turtle', is also a symbol of longevity.

Straits Chinese grandparents would give their new grandchild gifts of 'Ang Pow', jewellery, baby clothes and shoes. Vermicelli (for longevity), Rock Sugar (for happiness) and Rice Grains (for prosperity) are also presented to the grandchild.

A GOOD NAME

Among all the ethnic communities, great importance is placed on giving the child a right and a good name. The name not only indicates the sex of a child, it must also sound good. It is also commonly believed that the chosen name will have a strong influence on the child's personality and future.

The **Chinese** use different methods when choosing a name. Traditionally, a name follows a poem chosen by the ancestors. Children of the same generation will have a common character from the poem. In another naming custom, parents choose a name by matching their child's horoscope to the Five Elements making up the universe – Metal, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth.

Eurasians usually have Christian names followed by their surnames. Most also take on a middle name which is usually taken from the child's parents, grandparents, a favourite relative or a patron saint.

The **Hindus** hold the 'Namkaran' or naming ceremony between the eleventh and the forty-first day. The priest or an astrologer chooses a name by studying the horoscope of the child in relation to the lunar or the ruling deity's constellation.

For traditional **Malays**, 'Tanggal Pusat' or when the umbilical cord falls off, is the time to name the child. Nowadays this is usually held together with the Thanksgiving ceremony on the fortieth day. Apart from choosing names that bear good virtues of patience, kindness and nobility, it is also popular for Muslim parents to name their children after prophets, hoping the child would lead a pious life.

LET'S CELEBRATE

The first year of a child's life is special and unique. The child does more things for the first time than at any other stage of his/her life: the first smile, the first giggle, the first teeth, the first step and the first meaningful word. It is a record year for firsts.

First Teeth

Hindus celebrate the eruption of the child's first teeth with a rite called 'Annaprashana'. This rite is performed to give the child the first taste of solid food. Instead of celebrating at home, some Hindu families would choose an auspicious date to go to the temple. They will bring with them milk pudding made with rice, milk, and sugar. Prayers are first offered, after which the maternal uncle (or the father) dips a gold ring into the milk pudding and touches the child's tongue, signalling the start of the child's diet of solid food, especially rice.

First Step

The child's taking his/her first step is always a milestone event recorded in the minds and memory of all parents. The day the child walks, the Malays carry out the 'Turun Tanah' or 'coming down to earth' ceremony. The child will step on a ladder made with sugar cane. This is symbolic of a child coming down the steps or ladder from the kampong house to the ground.

With modernisation, most Malays no longer live in kampongs. Instead of coming down the steps and landing on 'earth', the child lands on a plate of Bubor Merah Bubor Puteh, a sweet rice pudding, symbolising a sweet and happy journey in life for the child.

Baby's First Birthday

Since the first year is a very distinctive and important phase in a child's life, it is little wonder that all around the world, the First Birthday is always the most special of all birthday celebrations.

This is an unusual rite that is still carried out among some Chinese and Straits Chinese on the child's first birthday. The maternal grandmother will bring a cooked chicken for the child. In the case of the Straits Chinese, the grandmother must enter the home from the backdoor. The grandmother will, with her bare hands, tear off two parts of the chicken, the thighs or drumsticks. Straits Chinese also observe this strict rule of not using a knife for this purpose because it is a happy occasion.

The place where the child is to consume the drumsticks has special significance. Traditionally, the child will be made to put one foot inside the house and the other foot outside. Eating the drumsticks in this position signifies that the child will grow up to be prosperous, never going hungry wherever he/she goes.

COMING OF AGE

Rites and traditions that mark the 'coming of age' of a child's journey to adulthood are important ceremonial events in which members of the family and the community formally acknowledge that the child has become a young man or woman.

Circumcision

Circumcision, or 'berkhatan', is one of the most important ceremonies in the Malay society, apart from those related to marriage and death. Traditionally performed by the 'tok mudin' or meaning circumciser (who is also a Muslim doctor), Muslim boys are usually circumcised between six and ten years of age to signify their passage from boyhood to manhood. Nowadays, Malay parents usually opt to send their children to a clinic or hospital for circumcision. After the circumcision at the clinic, a feast is held for friends and relatives to announce the boy's rite of passage.

Ear Lobe Piercing

Ear lobe piercing is a ritual carried out universally by most ethnic communities as a rite of puberty. For the **Malays**, this ceremony, called the 'Bertindik Telinga', is done when the girl is between seven and ten years old. For the **Hindus**, ear lobe piercing is done on the first, third, fifth or seventh year of the child's life, regardless of gender.

'Vidyarambam'

Education occupies a very important place in the Hindu society. Vidyarambam is a ceremony that signifies the beginning of a child's formal education in a kindergarten or a primary school. In this rite, the child would write his/her first alphabet on a tray of unbroken, uncooked and unpolished rice grains. This small ceremony normally takes place at home on the ninth day of 'Navarathi' (a ten-day ceremony in September/October dedicated to Saraswathi, the Goddess of Learning).

'Upanayanam'

In the traditional Brahmin families, when a child reaches school-going age at seven or nine, three sacred threads are strung together over the left shoulder and across the torso. These threads depict the three vows that the child makes - to respect knowledge, to respect his parents and to respect society.

COMING OF AGE

Among the Hindu community, '**Sadangu**' is celebrated to mark a girl's attainment of puberty with the onset of menstruation. This ceremony is usually held one month from the last day of the girl's menstruation. The girl's maternal uncle will bring trays of gifts consisting of saris, flowers, jewellery, fruits, sweets and garland and a bouquet of flowers. Upon the arrival of all the relatives and friends, the girl is led out of her room to be seated on a dais prepared for her. She

will be dressed in her first new sari. Her relatives and friends take turns to bless her by sprinkling fragrant water and putting flowers on her head.

CONCLUSION

A child is like the cement that glues the family network together. Across all the ethnic communities, birth rites and customs are celebrated with the participation and support of grandparents, close relations, relatives and friends. Recognising the common bond they have through the child, they join in marking the many development milestones in the journey of the child's life and they rejoice in watching the child grow to make his/her many transitions into adulthood.

RIGHT AFTER BIRTH – SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN SINGAPORE'S HISTORY

9 August 1965 is Singapore's birthday!

Like any newborn child, when Singapore was born an infant nation forty years ago, she was fragile and very vulnerable. Singapore's sudden separation from Malaysia and the loss of a hinterland had left her with a very slim chance of survival. Singapore did not give up fighting for her survival. Since our first National Day celebrations in 1966, Singapore has grown from strength to strength. It is the collective will of the people of Singapore to press on despite the odds that has made this small island a great nation. At 'Right after Birth', we invite you to join special Singaporeans with special birth dates in celebrating our rights as Singaporeans to enjoy the fruits of our nation's success.

9 August 1965

Singapore became an independent nation on 9 August 1965.

21 September 1965

The United Nations admitted newly independent Singapore as a member nation.

22 December 1965

Encik Yusof bin Ishak became the Republic of Singapore's first President.

1966

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr S Rajaratnam, penned the Singapore Pledge with the hope that Singaporeans would overcome differences to build "a Singapore we are proud of".

14 February 1966

The Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute (SAFTI) was first established.

9 August 1966

Singaporeans celebrated their first National Day Parade at the Padang.

12 June 1967

Singapore's very own currency went into public circulation.

17 July 1967

The first batch of 900 National Service men were enlisted into 3 Singapore Infantry Regiment (3 SIR) and 4 SIR at Taman Jurong Camp.

1968

The Central Provident Fund Housing Scheme was introduced to enable more Singaporeans to own a home.

1 June 1968

JTC Corporation was formally incorporated.

1 October 1968

The "Keep Singapore Clean" campaign, the first large-scale public education exercise, was launched.

14 May 1970

Singapore's first Junior College, the National Junior College was established.

2 January 1971

Dr Benjamin Henry Sheares was elected as the Republic of Singapore's second President.

October 1972

Malaysia Singapore Airlines ceased operations and Singapore Airlines, our national carrier, took to the sky for the first time from Paya Lebar airport.

31 July 1973

Singapore's ultra modern and new sports facility, the National Stadium, was officially opened in conjunction with Singapore's hosting of the VII SEAP (Southeast Asian Peninsular) Games for the first time. In 1977, the SEAP Games was renamed SEA (Southeast Asian) Games at its ninth meet in Malaysia.

24 January 1979

Singapore's first professional orchestra, the Singapore Symphony Orchestra (SSO) was founded.

8 August 1980

The National University of Singapore was formed through a merger between the University of Singapore and Nanyang University.

15 April 1981

Vanda Miss Joaquim was declared Singapore's national flower by then Minister for Culture, Mr S Dhanabalan.

29 December 1981

Singapore Changi Airport was officially opened. The towering 80-metre high Control Tower is iconic of the airport's longstanding reputation as one of the best in the world.

18 to 26 September 1983

The Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) organised its first Civil Defence week with the aim of reinforcing the message that all Singaporeans have a part to play in the nation's civil defence.

30 August 1985

Mr Wee Kim Wee was elected by Parliament as the Republic of Singapore's fourth President. He succeeded Mr Devan Nair who was the Republic's third President.

2 October 1987

The Institute of Molecular and Cell Biology was officially opened.

7 November 1987

Singapore's first Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) trains commenced operation for the first MRT section, running between five stations from Toa Payoh to Yio Chu Kang.

1988

Our Shared Values were conceived by then First Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Goh Chok Tong. Meant to be a blueprint for the development of a national ideology, the "Shared Values" incorporate elements of Singapore's cultural heritage attitudes and values that have helped it survive as a nation.

31 December 1989

The Singapore Indoor Stadium was officially opened by then Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

28 November 1990

Mr Goh Chok Tong became the Republic of Singapore's second Prime Minister.

1 July 1991

The Institute of Education and the College of Physical Education merged to form the National Institute of Education.

1993

The first Great Singapore Workout was held. More than 26,000 people from all walks of life gathered at the Padang. This event made it to the Guinness Book of Records for the largest mass aerobics held at one location.

1 September 1993

Mr Ong Teng Cheong became the Republic of Singapore's fifth President and the first President to be popularly elected by the people.

1994

For the first time, the Port of Singapore Authority's annual throughput hit 10 million TEUs (Twenty-foot Equivalent Unit), reinforcing Singapore's reputation as a premier port.

14 April 1996

Professional football league – the S League was officially launched by then Prime Minister, Mr Goh Chok Tong at the National Stadium.

10 October 1997

The new KK Women's and Children's Hospital was officially opened.

1 September 1999

Mr S R Nathan was sworn in as the Republic of Singapore's sixth President and the second popularly elected President.

4 October 1999

The new Singapore Parliament House was officially opened.

20 April 2001

Initiated by Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports and Singapore Sports Council, Team Singapore was first launched by Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Tony Tan.

June 2002

'ElderShield' was introduced as an affordable severe disability insurance scheme.

11 April 2003

The Courage Fund was set up as a fund-raising effort to provide relief to SARS victims and healthcare workers.

12 October 2003

The Esplanade-Theatres on the Bay officially opened. The opening of this new and major venue for the arts is a reflection of Singapore's aim and vision of becoming a global city for the arts.

29 October 2003

The 'Biopolis' at Buona Vista was launched. This 185,000 square metre state-of-the-art biomedical research hub reflects Singapore's commitment and vision to be a focal point for scientific talent and research.

12 August 2004

Brigadier General (Ret) Lee Hsien Loong was sworn in as the Republic of Singapore's third Prime Minister.

CONCLUSION

At forty, Singapore is still a young nation with many goals to achieve, many new grounds to break, and many more milestones to make. To realise our aspiration of becoming a premier and distinctive global city, a land of opportunities, Singaporeans must draw on the wisdom and experience of our forefathers and pioneering leaders. The bigger our dreams, the bigger will be the challenges. What will keep Singaporeans working together as a team as we forge ahead? It must be and it will have to be, the bond of a shared history, a common destiny and a collective instinct for excellence to make Singapore the best place in the world to live, to work and to play.



NATIONAL HERITAGE BOARD

Copyright © 2005 Public Education Division, National Heritage Board

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be produced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.