

CHAPTER XIII

PATTERNS OF ADULT BEHAVIOUR, OLD AGE AND DEATH

I. ADULT LIFE

By marriage the individual gains the status of the head of an independent family. He becomes an important member of the house as well as of the society. His responsibilities increase, for he has to maintain his wife and the children to be born. If he lives separately from his father he has to look after his land and cattle personally and fulfil social obligations. Marriage and its consequence parenthood are the roles which make new demands on the individual.

First few months of the married life are important for it is a period of adjustment between the spouses. It is a period of 'astibility'. For, if the girl cannot adjust to the new people and environment it creates difficulties in relation with the husband.

The first child is usually expected within two years of marriage. Once the child is born it can be said that the couple has settled in life. The average age of the mother when the first child is born is 16 years and that of the father is 20 years. The Dangi woman is very fertile. The children are born at the interval of even less than two years. The number of children born in a family varies from one to fourteen. A survey of 320 families shows :

Total No. of Members	No. of Families	Persons
3 or less	95	252
4 to 6	162	810
7 to 9	51	399
10 and above	18	<u>198</u>
		1659

The average number of children born in a family is 5. But the child mortality is also very high. The birth death ratio is 7.3 : 2.7. The reasons of high death rate are, insanitary conditions, absence of medical care, lack of personal hygiene by the expectant mother, improper or lack of nourishment and the typical attitude towards life and children.

The period of adult life is occupied mainly with building a family, giving birth to children, bringing them up, marrying them. One's duty as a parent is over when the son is married and given a separate house hold, or a daughter is married and sent to her in-laws.

The adults in the Dangi ^{ci}society as in any society are a very important section. For they are the agents who transmit the patterns of culture to their children. Through them the cultural activities find expression and expansion. The parents teach the children the typical ways of life and the customs of society. And hence when the children become grown up they become the part and parcel of the social structure. Thus the adults play a very

important role in the spread of culture. Society lives and expands through them. They maintain the traditions and the cultural and social life flows on continuously.

II. ROLE AND STATUS OF AN ADULT

The father, mother and the children form a family, a unit of social and cultural life of the Dangi society. There can be no doubt that the family is of the greatest importance in the development of personality. The family is a great socialising agent.

An adult Dangi who marries and establishes a family takes up a new role of a husband. If he does not live with his parents he also becomes a head of the family. As a married adult and a head of the family he has some status in his village social group. An adult married woman takes up new duties as a house wife and is an active helper of the bread earner. The husband and wife as a family have to fulfill many social and religious obligations,

attend social functions and religious ceremonies. At the adult level there is no tendency of mixed groups at all. The adult men form their own group. They sit, talk and smoke together or go on hunting and fishing also. The membership of the adult women group is drawn only from the neighbourhood. Occasionally when they find time two, three or four women form a group, sit and talk.

Inter-personal relations between the two persons or two families are hardly deep and emotional. I never heard one Dangi man referring about the other persons^s and private matters in very emotional terms. In the personal and private matters there is no tendency to interfere. "I saw at Galkund that a husband was beating his wife on the road and dragging her to his house. I asked my host's wife, who was looking at the event from the window, why do you not interfere and stop that man? She replied "It is a personal matter between the two. Nobody interferes in it". Even if the neighbour and his children are starving nobody would go there on his own accord and give the children food unless asked for."

In face of difficulties a Dangi cannot sustain, he regresses and retires. He is a ^{ss}passive helpless observer. For example, in days of scarcity if there is no corn and children are crying he says, "What can I do ? and what can be done ?" Children are given something to keep them silent. The parents retire and sleep. This attitude is reflected in other spheres of life also.

III. OLD AGE

Old persons like adults and children are an important section of the Dangi society. As the expectation of life is much shorter in the Dangs than in other parts of India, a Dangi begins to feel old comparatively earlier. The old persons, that is persons of the age of 45 and above form 6.6 per cent of the total population. The sample survey shows the following age groups classifications:

Age Group 1 to 4	973
5 to 14	1273
15 to 34	717
35 to 44	584
45 and above	310
	<u>4715</u>

A Dangi's life from birth to death is a struggle for existence. He has to work hard to get a square meal. Therefore the stamina and vitality, the life force is spent up soon. By age of 40 - 45 a Dangi feels that he is 'old'. "The signs of old age", Bhangubhai of Kirli told me, "are fatigue and quick exhaustion by work. If one feels that he is getting loose, and cannot do sustained hard work he is getting 'old'. The apparent physiological signs are that the skin becomes loose, the limbs look thinner, wrinkles begin to form on cheeks, foreheads and around the eyes. Teeth begin to fall, vision becomes blurred, auditory acuity becomes less and other senses also lose their sharpness. These signs become more prominent as the individual advances in age".

IV. OLD AGE AND RETIREMENT

Old age and retirement from work do not go together. If there is a grown up son who can feed them, the parents take the work easy. They may work as much as they can, and relax when tired.

A Dangi does not retire from life so far as he is physically able to do something. But he expects his son to feed him in old age. If there is no son and only a daughter he would think of keeping a 'Khandhadia' who can help and feed him.

Old age is respected. An old man is addressed as 'Davar' and an old woman as 'Dosi'. The old man in the house as well as in the village is not looked down upon as a parasite or an idle man but treated with sympathy and respect. The old man is a wise man, a man of knowledge and experience. He often becomes a public man. His advice and guidance are solicited in difficulties and in matters of dispute. His word is obeyed by the members of the family and they work according to his instructions. Ramubhai of Paherpada, an old man of more than 70 years, told me, "I am a happy man. I have two sons. Both are well-settled. Now I live a retired life. I have this skin disease of eczema. I sit and sleep all the while under this tree. My sons and grand-children attend to me. During my active life I did some business

and earned money. So I have built up this big house." The old mother also enjoys a respectable position in the house. She looks after the household and gives instructions to the daughters and daughters-in-law. She takes the care of the grandchildren and attends to them in absence of the daughter-in-law. Her wishes are respected and carried out by the sons. If the father has expired the widow mother does not remain unattended. Devaji of Sajupada spoke to me in very respectful way about his old mother. "She is my mother. She is old. I do not allow her to work. She takes care of my children. I am very glad that you have snapped her photo".

Death :

'Death' said Kolgyabhai, 'is a natural consequence of life. One who is born is sure to die. Nobody can prevent the death. To some it comes earlier, to some it comes later. The life cycle that begins by birth ends by death. When a man is dead the 'Atma' leaves the body. On the event of death the respiratory system stops functioning, hands

legs, and other limbs begin to become cool, and there is no movement. Movement and life are synonymous".

If the fever does not become normal for a long time the patient's condition is thought serious. The disfunctioning of senses, loss of consciousness, body becoming blacker or pale, bleeding in spitting and vomitting etc. are considered serious and incurable symptoms leading towards death. When the limbs and nerves often contract, eyes begin to dilate, there is difficulty in breathing, the spit comes out of ^{the} mouth in form of foam, and ^{the} limbs get cooler, it is understood that all hopes of life are lost and the death is nearer.

If a child does not play, does not smile, does not take food or milk or cannot control its bowels it is sick. Measels, disease, small-pox, expansion of lever, and pancreas are common diseases among children. The Dangis as such are also not healthy people. They are underfed and ill-fed. The common diseases they suffer from are lever and intenstine diseases, skin diseases, anemia etc.

Every year a few cases of death are due to snake-bite, a prey to animals and accidents like falling from trees.

Minor sickness and complaints are generally neglected, for a Dangi cannot afford to take leave from work. If the complaints and sickness become serious they are treated locally by making use of some medicinal roots and leaves. If the condition does not improve in the normal course an evil eye or the influence of a witch is suspected and the Bhagat is invited to find out the remedy. When all remedies fail as the last resort the case is hospitalised. ^{The} Dangis look upon the medical treatment with a suspicious eye. If the case does not improve within a few days after hospitalisation he doubts about the efficacy, he insists on taking the patient back to home and submit to the power of witch. He says, "What can we do ? We are helpless. It is a matter of God's disfavour".

Nausubhai of Sildmal, with tears in his eyes said, "My young son died last year. In the beginning he had temperature. I gave him some roots.

But the fever was not down. The Bhagat was called. But the pain did not decrease. I took him to the hospital at Ahwa, and kept him for ten days. There were no signs of cure, so I brought him back here. How can medicine cure the 'evil eye?' and my son leaving behind his widow and two children left us. What can be done? It was God's desire. I had left this village. I came back here only before a few days. The young widow remarried, took with her the small child. The other child is with me. How can I prevent her from remarriage?"

V. SICKNESS AND SOCIAL VISITS

The news of sickness in any family at once spread out in the village. If there is epidemic the elders and the panch set out on thinking how to propitiate the gods. The Dangis do pay social visits on the occasion of sickness. The evening is the ideal time for chit-chatting and paying such visits. The sick man or the head of the family is addressed in words of consolation and treated sympathetically. The visitor encourages him to keep up and endure

this difficulty. 'It is the desire of god that one is sick'. Thus sickness is an occasion for the exhibition of genuine sympathy and good will on the part of the neighbours and relations. Visitors become more frequent and greater sympathy is shown specially when the sickness becomes more serious.

VI. THE LAST MOMENTS OF THE PATIENT

When the symptoms of the last moments are discovered the members of the family struck by grief and anxiety stop the daily work and sit around the dying man. All the relatives come and sit there. The near relatives staying away from the locality in other villages are called. The children are sent outside and made to sit in a corner. If the patient is young the atmosphere is still more serious and full with grief.

As soon as the pulse slows down and the patient is presumed to be breathing his last, his body is taken out from the bed and put on the ground specially prepared by giving a wash of cowdung and water.

When the patient dies the persons struck with grief weep and shed tears. Some elderly friends and neighbours help in making arrangements for the funeral. A message is sent to all the persons in the village and relatives staying in the near villages. The dead body is to be removed from the house in a very short time. Sometimes if the nearest relation is out there is delay, but in no case it is kept for the next day. If the death occurs during night, the funeral takes place next morning.

VII. RITUALS AFTER DEATH

The dead body is first bathed with water, ~~an~~ the yellow turmeric is applied on it and ^{it is} adorned with new clothes. If the man is rich some ornaments are placed on the proper parts of the body. If the dead individual is man, the body is covered with white cloth; if it is woman, red cloth is used. If the woman dies in the life time of her husband a line of red lead powder is drawn in the parting of her hair, 'kumkum' is applied on the forehead and flowers are strewn in hair.

On the one side the corpse is made ready for removal while on the other hand a bier is being prepared outside. A bier called 'thathadi' is made of bamboo sticks and strips. The bamboos about seven feet long are put horizontally and parallel at a distance of a feet and half. With them the bamboo strips are tied with fibres of the vegetation plants. It becomes a stair-case like structure. The corpse is put on it and tied tightly so that it does not loosen and move while being carried.

The bier is carried by four persons - one on each corner. The first four persons are generally the near relatives of the dead. Other persons relieve them. As soon as the bier is taken out of the house the women wail, cry bitterly and ~~crying~~ go to a short distance. Some elderly women try to soothe and console the most affected women. The burial ground is a fixed area not far from the village, generally near a stream. While going, the head of the corpse is kept in the direction of the house. The bier is brought to the place and put on the ground keeping the head in the North.

The corpse is burried or burnt. If the departed individual is from a well-to-do family, it is burnt on a funeral pyre. Mostly the corpse is buried. A three feet wide, seven feet long and three and a half feet deep pit is made. One morsel of 'khichadi' (a preparation of rice and tur dal) is put in the mouth of the dead man by every son. One rupee and four anna coins are also put on the mouth. If the dead has no son, his cousin, or nephew or any other relative can perform these rites. Then the chief mourner takes five ceremonial rounds of the corpse and a pot full of water is broken. The corpse is put into the pit and covered with earth. For the purpose of protection and identification, thorny weeds and a big stone are put on the place.

If the body is to be burnt a rectangular big pyre of wood is prepared. The chief mourner applies fire to it. When the body is burnt to ashes, people return.

Then all the persons take a bath and go to the home of the deceased. They console the members

or the affected family and sympathise with them. Then all are given 'khichadi' or 'Bhagar' preparation and disperse.

If the ^{de}ceased is a pregnant woman running last days she is operated especially by a Bhil on the cremation ground and the child is taken out. The child is buried separately along with the mother. The Dangis believe that a seven month old embryo is a 'life' and its existence must be recognised. If it is not buried separately there is a fear of its being a spirit and harassing the children of the village.

After nine days, if the corpse has been buried, or after three days if it has been burnt, some rituals are performed on the burial spot under the instruction of the Bhagat. They are performed by the chief mourner. Seven cups of the Peppal leaves are prepared and milk is poured in them. Seven cups are filled with the urine of a cow and in seven others, balls of floor are put, one in each. The Bhagat conducts the ceremony and speaks, "The deceased is no more in this world. He becomes a resident of the upper world. After taking bath in

the river Vaitarni, he takes bath in a 'kund' a water reservoir, which washes out all his sins. Then he goes on and takes a plunge in another water reservoir on the way, Satwari Kund, which has a quality of truth. Then he may go to the court of god". The Bhagat makes the performer repeat this. During the performance of these rites, the performer is asked to remember in his mind the names of all those dead in the family and speak that, 'this one is separated from the group of the living ones and now joins the group of the dead'. Without this after-death ceremony the dead does not feel at peace and is not freed from this world. Then in the end a jug full of water is poured so that the ashes are washed away.

After removing the dead body from the house the area on which the body was placed is purified by giving a wash of cowdung and water. On that day or night the floor of nagli is spread on that place and it is covered with an overturned basket. It is believed that when next day the basket is removed, some marks will be seen on the floor indicating the life of rebirth of the deceased.

For example, if there are signs of footsteps of a man or of an animal, of a bird or of a snake, it indicates the form in the rebirth adopted by the deceased.

The completion of the obituary rites bring an end of the worldly relations between the deceased and his people. The deceased with its soul and body now is gone to the other world. Now, the relatives from outside begin to go back to their respective places. The daily work should no more be paralysed. Hence, all the members of the house join their daily duties. A temporary lull is created by the departure of a loving soul, the agony is forgotten by the passage of time and life resumes the routine form.

VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The adult life is a life of active work and social participation. It is confined mainly in building up a family, bringing up children and marrying them. Because of hard and undernourished life a Dangi begins to feel old comparatively earlier. Even if in old age, if there is nobody to feed ^{him,} he has still to work to earn his bread. Old age is respected and old mother and father are not looked upon as parasites.

The death brings an end to the hard and active life of a Dangi and he is at peace now. The dead body generally is buried. The Dangi believes in life after death and rebirth, secondly, in the spirit also. A dead man goes to the heaven or hell according to one's own deeds. The obituary rites are necessary. They bring an end to the worldly relations between the dead and the living. This attitude towards death helps in maintaining the composure for the bereaved persons. After a short lull the active life of the house and village begins again.

The ideal of duty in life, the belief and philosophy about death and rebirth, the belief behind the obituary rites etc. are important factors which influence the personality of the Dangis. For example, the rites after death keep the bereaved individual away from breaking down after the loss of a dear one, and make him feel that the departed individual is no longer related to us, he has become a member of another world. It lessens the grief of the persons. The attitude that "What can we do against God's desire?" expedites the process of readjustment.