



GOVERNMENT OF ORISSA

A SHORT ACCOUNT OF THE DANDASI

(A Scheduled Caste Community of Orissa)

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FOREWORD

In Orissa, as many as 93 Scheduled Caste communities reside and their population according to 1981 census is 38,65,543. They constitute 14.66 per cent of the total population of the State. Until recent times, no systematic attempt has been made to record the ethnographic account of any one of these communities, except some stray articles which have been published in different journals and magazines.

As one of the major research undertakings the Tribal and Harijan Research-cum-Training Institute, Bhubaneswar had taken up an ethnographic study on Dandasi, an untouchable Scheduled Caste of the State. Four villages (1) Kumarbegapalli, (2) Sitarampur, (3) Baliachatrapur and (4) Satrusola located in Ganjam district were selected for study, Shri A. Mallik, Research Officer of this Institute was entrusted to take up this research project.

The field work was carried out in different phase. A set of questionnaire was prepared to collect data on different aspects of the community. Besides, the day to day activities of the Dandasis were recorded by observation. In course of the field work very warm co-operation and help was extended to us to make our study successful.

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Since, the field work was limited to a very short period due to paucity of time, it was not possible to give a detailed account of this community. However, this book presents a fairly comprehensive idea about the community. This is just a humble beginning, more of such attempts are on the anvil.

N. PATNAIK

INTRODUCTION

The Dandasis are declared as a denotified Scheduled Caste community in Orissa. They are considered as an ex-criminal tribe and are tagged under vulnerable groups among the Scheduled Castes. Predominately they live in South Orissa and are highly concentrated in Ganjam district. They are faced with many and diverse problems which are of social, political and economic nature.

In Ganjam Manual Dandasis are summed up as being village watchmen, many of whom are great thieves. "It is curious" Mr. S. P. Rice writes, "to find that the word Naiko (meaning leader or chief), which is corrupted into Telugu Naidu, is the caste distinction of the lowest class, the village watcher and professional thief. This man, for all that his cognomen is so lofty, goes by the generic name of Dandasi. This word means worthy of punishment and assuredly no application ever fitted its owner more completely than does this. He is the village policeman and the village thief, a curious mixture of callings". According to the etymological meaning of the community, the nomenclature Dandasi symbolises the insignia of their office *danda*, a stout stick and *asi*, a sword.

As per the other version it is called *dandapasi*, meaning a stick and a rope which is the insignia of the Dandasi's office.

It is understood that they were using stick and sword or stick and rope as insignia of their office to combat unnatural happening while guarding the village at night.

According to the informants their ancestors were employed in King's court to punish the culprit. For this activities they were known as *Ghataka* or Butcher. In some parts, they were engaged by Zamindars and landlords as servant to realise the payment from the subjects. As they were characterised as cruel by nature and at the same time untouchable, the non-payers of tax or toll make immediate payment by very approach of Dandasi at his door step. Thus, the role of Dandasi was very much significant in the past days.

Besides this they were also engaged as village watchman and were guarding the village at night. For this they were held responsible for any mishap like robbery or theft that is committed in the village at night. For this type of service they were provided a piece of land in the village for construction of house to live in. In addition to this food clothing, etc. were provided by the villagers. Thus, they were completely depending upon the villagers to maintain their livelihood. At that time land was less important for them as they were getting sufficient remuneration in shape of cash or kind from the villagers as token of their service. With this social and historical background Dandasis have never dreamt of indulging themselves in stealing activities.

As the time passed on things changed and the social life of Dandasi appeared in a different colour and shape. In course of time, when imperialism came to an end on account of British invasion Dandasis lost their importance as servants of king's court but continued to serve as village watchman. Gradually, the British administration did not pay much attention towards their police activities in watching the village at night which resulted in upsetting the Dandasi

economy. In other word as the police activities of Dandasi ceased, they were not able to get food and clothing sufficiently from the villagers which they were getting previously for their service. This was a tremendous blow for the Dandasi community. The economic life of Dandasi community suffered much. Earlier they had no hunger for acquiring land which is considered as the basic resource asset. They were contended with the benefits given by the villagers towards their service. When the benefits given by the villagers were curtailed it was very much difficult on their part to keep body and soul together. Thus an air of frustration and discontentment grew among them. Their social life took different turn. Out of hunger they were bound to commit theft at night whenever possible and in course of time they professed it as their caste tradition. Ultimately in 1923, the British Government declared them as the ex-criminal tribes. At present they have given up the habit of stealing as a caste tradition and are living as cultivators and daily wage earners.

Legend

As regards origin of the Dandasi community nothing is known except two interesting legends which are prevalent among them.

According to a legend their ancestors were created by Lord Krishna to save Pandavas while they were imprisoned by Kauravas in Lac Fort or "Jatugruha". They helped in digging a sub-terranean passage through which Pandavas could manage to escape and save their life.

The second legend describes that their first ancestors were created from the body dust or dirt of Radhika to serve as a clandestine armour between Radhika and Krishna

for union. They are also described as the illegal off-spring of Radhika and known as *Radha-Banshi*.

Whatever may be the legends regarding their origin, historically speaking in ancient time they had no distinctive caste occupation. Dandasi appeared in the social stratification order as a caste of untouchable engaged in watching the village during night. Dandasi is described as a caste of Talasiyari—a village watchman.

Distribution

According to 1971 Census, the Scheduled Caste population is estimated to be 3,310,854 out of which 3,103,244 live in rural areas and 2,07,610 in urban areas. The statement below shows the distribution of Scheduled Caste form-F- 'Talasiyari'—a village watchman.

STATEMENT I

Distribution of Scheduled Castes

		Total	Male	Female
Total	..	3,310,854	1,661,038	1,649,816
Rural	.	3,103,244	1,554,851	1,548,393
Urban	..	207,610	106,187	101,423

The above statement reveals that rural population constitutes 93.73 per cent while urban population 6.27 per cent.

As per the Census, 1971, the total Dandasi population is figured as 47,048 of which 44,309 are rural and 2,739 are urban population. The statement II below shows the distribution of Dandasi population—

STATEMENT II

Distribution of Dandasi population

		Total	Male	Female
Total	..	47,048	22,282	24,766
Rural	..	44,309	20,975	23,334
Urban	..	2,739	1,307	1,432

The above statement indicates that about 94.18 per cent of population live in rural area while about 5.02 per cent belong to urban area. Further the sex-ratio is worked out as 1,111 females for every 1,000 males.

STATEMENT III

District-wise distribution of Dandasi Community

District		Total	Male	Female
1. Ganjam	.. Total	45,245	21,396	23,849
	Rural	42,785	20,209	22,576
	Urban	2,460	1,187	1,273
2. Koraput	.. Total	1,056	505	551
	Rural	844	414	430
	Urban	212	91	121

3. Puri	..	Total	392	210	182
		Rural	368	198	170
		Urban	24	12	12
4. Mayurbhanj...	..	Total	280	138	142
		Rural	280	138	142
		Urban	..	..	..
5. Balasore	..	Total	6	3	3
		Rural	1	1	..
		Urban	5	2	3
6. Cuttack	..	Total	29	10	19
		Rural	..	..	..
		Urban	29	10	19
7. Dhenkanal	..	Total	1	1	..
		Rural	1	1	..
		Urban	..	..	..
8. Boudh-Khandamal.	..	Total	32	15	17
		Rural	24	11	13
		Urban	8	4	4

Districts		Total	Male	Female
9. Balangir	Total	6	3	3
	Rural	6	3	3
	Urban	..	..	..
10. Kalahandi	Total	1	1	..
	Rural	..	..	..
	Urban	1	1	..

From the above statement it is found that about 96.17 per cent belong to Ganjam district and about 2.14 per cent to Koraput. The rest 1.69 per cent are scattered in other districts which is very negligible.

The Caste Status of Dandasi

The caste system is one kind of stratification based on inequality among human beings in matter of social interaction. The caste system in India is very much complex and it is difficult to trace out its origin. Caste is continued on the basis of status and role based on birth, thus ascribed to the individual. The caste domination in Hindu cult is observed in all walks of life.

It is believed that the practice of untouchability rooted in Indian society over two thousand years back. The notion of purity and pollution keeps certain caste group of people at a distance from the other groups. Definition of untouchability depends upon several factors. But there is common premise that untouchability is a stigma attached to some

group of people considering their ritual impureness and pollution. It is a common belief that untouchables are born outside the pole of four varnas, viz. Brahmin, Kshyatriya, Vaisya and Sudra as described in Rigvedic hymn.

It is found that Dandasis are untouchable and the social stigma of discrimination is attached to them. They occupy lowest position in caste hierarchical order. The notion of purity and pollution by higher caste people keeps them at a distance from other castes. They are not only socially discriminated but also handicapped in every respect.

It is a common fact that Dandasis are not allowed to draw water from a public well in the village where upper caste people use the water. It is also observed that they have no free access to the religious and sacred places where village deities are placed. In the past, entering into common bathing ghat was strictly forbidden for them. Although this practice is not strictly and directly visualised at present yet, some sort of distance is maintained in remote villages in this respect. Such type of social discrimination is not confined to only religious or conventional places like entering into houses of villagers but also extended to public utility places like hotels, tea shops, grocery shops, etc. Though the practice of untouchability is not directly observed at present in the above spheres yet the manner of sitting and eating determines the social disability of Dandasi people. For example, a Dandasi would not venture to enter into a hotel freely and sit along with others in the same bench or chair, very reluctantly he would enter into the hotel and

sit in a corner place. Apart from this, separate arrangements are made in respect of using utensils. They are not allowed to use the same glass or utensil which are used by the upper caste people. Even, after drinking tea or taking food, glasses and dishes are washed by themselves. In spite of such caste restriction in remote villages certain relaxations are allowed in urban places, where young and educated Dandasis are free to enter into hotels and restaurants along with the other persons.

In Hindu society the rituals and the rites are performed by the priest as he is an expert in offering prayers to God and considered as via media between human beings and God. Thus, the institution of priesthood is an accepted one and socially sanctioned. Dandasi being an inferior caste, in social status, the service of priest is denied to them during auspicious days. On the other hand they do not have priests in their own caste to perform ceremonies. But a knowledgeable and well versed elderly person performs ceremonies and festivals in their society.

In Hindu caste system certain castes are associated with traditional occupations such as cutting of hair, washing of clothes, carpentry and blacksmithy, etc. They have their own skill, style and orientation in following their practice and their services are utilised by upper caste people when occasion arises. But Dandasi belonging to a low, inferior caste do not have the opportunity to utilise the essential services of these professional castes. The barber refuses to serve a Dandasi as the

stigma of untouchability is attached to him. Practically, a person belonging to their own caste do this job at the time of need. Whereas in urban centres a Pandasi is served in a saloon where no caste identity is questioned. A similar trend is observed in case of service of a washerman. The service of a washerman is not available to a Dandasi as he is considered inferior to a washerman. In fact, upper caste people have imposed such restrictions as they utilise the service of barber and washerman.

While such restrictions are observed in case of service of barber and washerman, the service of carpenter and blacksmith is available to them traditionally. For wood-work and iron-work no impurity is attached. It is observed that the service of tailor is not denied to them as it is a modern trade and no pollution and impurity is attached for stitching of new clothes. But complicity arises while re-stitching the old clothes. The tailor hesitates to accept the old clothes for re-stitching.

In government concern like departmental shops, co-operative societies, etc., caste discrimination is not observed. As such, these institutions are fully utilised by them without caste barrier. In hospitals, doctors and nurses treat them without any caste prejudice and belief. In schools, a Dandasi student does not face any caste problem in matter of reading and writing. The teacher teaches them without any caste feeling. The Dandasi children sit together with other students. They are allowed to draw water from school wells. During festive occasions no separate arrangements are made for them to

worship image. But in early times such relaxations were not granted to them. They were completely segregated from others in sitting. Physical touch by teachers was totally restricted. However the same atmosphere is not prevailing at present in school premises.

The magnitude of the problem of caste prejudice and discrimination can be well visualised from the locational situation of Dandasi hamlets. The residential houses of this community is located outside the main village. Conventionally, they are not allowed to build their dwelling houses in the middle of the village. In those days when untouchability was practised in intense form even the shadow of these people were not tolerated by upper caste people. No doubt, at present due to several legislations and protective measures, the rigidity of caste prejudice is lessened. Yet, Dandasis are looked down upon by the neighbours.

Inter-caste relationship

In village India Caste, as an institution, plays a dominant role in every matter. It exercises all control over inter-caste relationship. By and large it is manifested through the feeling of superiority and inferiority.

In caste-hierarchical order Dandasi occupies lowest social rank. They are considered polluted and impure by other upper caste people. So no close relationship is maintained in the village with Dandasi households. They are not allowed to enter into dwelling houses of others.

such works his participation is confined to some manual and menial works. In the event of village communal works everybody is conscious of their status and prestige. The higher caste people are cordially welcomed and take their seats in the places where meeting is likely to take place. Dandasi as a villager does not command any respect in such occasions. Here, he comes unnoticed and sits innocently away from the general platform to avoid pollution. His words pertaining to any village affairs are not recognised. Thus no dignified inter-caste relationship is maintained among Dandasis and other caste people relating to village affairs.

Another important factor which regulates the interaction is the food habit. Food like the flesh of certain birds and animals are considered ritually impure and totally forbidden in the society by the upper caste people. Dandasis take flesh of such animals. Besides this, some of the Dandasis are engaged in skinning the dead animals which is considered as an act of degradation. So Dandasis from the point of view of their food habit, etc., are considered very low and no direct relationship is maintained with them by the villagers.

On festival days a Dandasi is not directly associated with other caste groups. He is not allowed to sit in a close proximity with others in common places where function takes place. In communal dining places he never sits along with other upper caste people. He sits usually in a distant place to avoid pollution.

Besides, it is observed that cooked food and boiled water are not accepted by the upper caste Hindu people from them. On the other hand, raw vegetables and uncooked materials which are washable and not considered polluted are accepted from them. The inter-caste relationship is well marked during marriage occasions of other caste people where the villagers of different caste groups are invited. Here no doubt, Dandasi as a villagers is invited but his participation is very much restricted in the function. Except doing some menial job he has no major contribution for the function.

Village friendship is the most striking feature of inter-caste relationship. It is seen that in everyday life the villagers after a day's hard work meet in a common place. There, they spend their time by discussion, gossiping and merry-making. In such gathering Dandasis are not allowed to take part as their friendship with other is not very close.

Similarly during children's play much differences are noticed. Generally, in every evening boys and girls of different communities meet in a open place for playing. In such gatherings the Dandasi children are not allowed to mix with others.

In the matter of disposal of dead bodies certain restrictions are observed in the cremation ground. The cremation ground meant for the upper caste people is totally forbidden for Dandasis. No, corpse belonging to the Dandasi community is allowed to be buried or burnt in cremation ground reserved for other castes.

Beli It is a well known fact that a clear gradation is maintain, even among the untouchables in matter of social status. One untouchable caste group thinks superior than the other untouchable group. Though Dandasi belong to a untouchable group they maintain certain dignity while they deal with other untouchables. A Dandasi thinks other untouchables as low graded people. As such, he never accepts cooked food and boiled water from the communities like Kandara, Bauri, Dhobi, Pom, Pano, Hadi and Mehantar in their neighbourhood. He thinks himself superior in castes than the above castes. Physical touch with them is strictly forbidden by the Dandasi people.

Thus, on the whole it is observed that in the broad-frame work of social sartificattion Dandasi is placed in very lower strata, though they think themselves superior than neighbouring scheduled castes.

LIVING CONDITIONS

Environmental Conditions

It is found that the Dandasi habitations are situated in the out-skirt of the village. The habination is well marked from very approch by its unclean and unhygienic condition. All sides of the houses are surrounded by dirty leaves and animal excreta. Children pass stool and urine here and there and care is not taken to clean all these dir's. During rainy season the habitation is flooded with water due to lak of proper drainage system. Mud also make lanes unapprochable. The houses are not regularly cleaned.

Food habit :

Like any other rural people their staple diet is rice and pulses. Vegetables and green leaves are taken to supplement their diet. Occasionally they take egg, fish and meat. The land owning households cultivate paddy, mung and vegetables. But landless households purchase these from the local market. Due to paucity of funds they are not able to purchase nutritious food regularly. They usually take meat of the domesticated animals and birds. Sometimes they do fishing for consumption. Usually adult members take food twice a day. But children eat as many times as the food supply permits.

Drink :

Drinking of liquor is not a regular habit of Dandasi people. During festive occasions they drink country liquor as a matter of rejoice. During market days on way back home they use to drink.

ECONOMIC LIFE

The economy of rural India basically depends on agriculture. A man having more agricultural land is regarded economically sound in the society. Thus land is considered as a basic asset for all classes of people in the rural society.

The economic life of Dandasi community mainly depends on daily wage-earning. A majority of them are found to be landless. A socio-economic survey, was conducted by this Institute during March, 1985 on this community in Chatrapur Block area for formulation of an

Action Plan. 491 Dandasi families were covered during the study. Different aspects such as the amount of land possessed, sources of income and annual income of household were taken into account to determine their economic position.

Table-1 below gives an account of cultivating and landless households and the size of land holdings of the surveyed population.

TABLE-I

Classification of households by size of landholding

Sl. No.	Size of landholding	No. of household	Average size of landholding (in acres)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1	Landless	.. 451 (91.86%)	..
2	Marginal farmers (within 2.5 acres).	39 (7.94%)	0.98
3	Small farmers (between 2.6 to 5.00 acres).	1 (0.20%)	2.80
4	Big farmers (above 5.00 acres).	..	..
Total		.. 491 (100.00)	..

The above table shows that about 91.86 per cent of households are found to be landless and 7.94 per cent of households possess agricultural land with an average size of 0.98 acres only. Further, it is found that only one household possesses 2.80 acres of land which is maximum.

It is revealed during study that the underlying fact of their landlessness is very much socio-historical. As said earlier, they were following their traditional occupation as watchman of the village and in return they were getting food and clothing from the villagers. Therefore they had no hunger for acquiring land and they continued to remain as landless.

Being landless, wage-earning is the main source of their livelihood. Occupational distribution of workers basing on the findings of the socio-economic study is given in Table-II below.

TABLE-II
Occupational distribution of workers

Serial No.	Category of workers	No. of persons engaged	Percentage
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1.	Agricultural labourers ..	921	87.38
2.	Cultivators ..	40	3.80
3.	Service holders (Government & Private Farms).	32	3.04

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
4 Rickshaw pullers	..	29	2.75
5 Wage earners	..	13	1.23
6 Smal business	..	12	1.14
7 Goat rearers	..	6	0.57
8 Pig rearers	..	1	0.09
Total		1054	100.00

It is found from the above table that about 90.00 per cent of workers depend on agriculture of which agricultural labourers alone constitute 87.36 per cent.

Though majority of them are employed in agricultural field as wage-earners, income from this source is not encouraging. Because, employment opportunity on daily wage basis is not available throughout the year. Further, wage rate also varies from place to place depending upon the nature of job, age, sex and season.

The remaining 10.00 per cent workers derive their income from other sources which is negligible.

The approximate annual income of each family from all sources were recorded during field investigation. It was calculated that the *per capita* annual income of these people stood at Rs. 632.00. The classification of families on the basis of annual income is given in Table-III.

TABLE-III

Classification of households on the basis of annual income

Sl. No.	Range of annual income	No. of families	Percentage to the total families
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1	Below Rs. 500·00	21	4·28
2	Between Rs. 501·00 to Rs. 1,000.	39	7·94
3	Between Rs. 1,001·00 to Rs. 1,500·00.	50	10·18
4	Between Rs. 1,501·00 to Rs. 2,000·00.	109	22·20
5	Between Rs. 2,001·00 to Rs. 2,500·00.	99	20·16
6	Between Rs. 2,501·00 to Rs. 3,000·00.	66	13·45
7	Between Rs. 3,001·00 to Rs. 3,599.	37	7·53
8	Between Rs. 3,600·00 to Rs. 4,000·00.	25	5·09
9	Rs. 4,001·00 and above ..	45	9·17
Total ..		491	100·00

It is revealed from the above table that about 85.74 per cent have annual income within Rs. 3,599 while 14.26 per cent have above Rs. 3,600. In other words, Rs. 3,600.00 has been fixed as the income level to determine the poverty line for rural areas. Taking this into consideration, it is estimated that nearly 86.00 per cent of Dandasi families live below the poverty line. Therefore, an urgent scheme for economic development of these people is a basic need which should be attempted by the administrators.

MATERIAL CULTURE

Housing

Due to low social status of Dandasi, their habitations are segregated from the main village. The house of a Dandasi is rectangular in ground plan. The construction of house does not conform to any pattern. The roof of the house is made up of bamboo and sloped in front and backside. The walls of the house is made up of mud and the roof is thatched with straw. The average size of the house is 14 ft. in length and 12 ft. in breadth. The height of the house is very low and there is no provision for good ventilation. The house consisting of one or two rooms with verandah in front. The living room serves as granary. Foodgrains and other household articles are kept inside this room. The other adjacent room is used as kitchen-cum-dining. In front verandah, a space is provided for poultry birds. The verandah is used for sitting and gossiping at leisure time. The outsiders are entertained in verandah for discussion. Bullocks, cows and goats are kept in separate shades constructed close to the house.

Contents of house

Material contents of Dandasis are very simple. The household articles are neither costly nor valuable. These are consisting of mainly earthen almunium pots, buckets, small and big axes, sickles, spades, iron digging stick, winnowing fans, rope-heives, baskets mats, some steel utensils, small bottle as oil containers, lanterns, kerosine lamps, wooden cots, wooden pidhas, few knives, turch, cycle, umbrella, iron taua and pithakhadika, agricultural implements, clothes etc. They purchase these articles from the local market.

Dress and ornaments

Dress and ornaments of Dandasi people are very simple which are just like those of their neighbouring other caste people. The males were dhoti, 'lungi' and shirts and women were saree and blouses. The older women use only a piece of cloth without blousa. The school going boys use pants and shirts and girls were pants and frocks. No special features are noticed in respect of their garments. The ornaments worn by the women are very simple and of lighter variety. The males do not wear any ornament. The common ornaments used by women are silver necklaces, toe-ring, nose-ring, ear-ring made of brass and silver. The poor women wear a piece of thread around their neck. Children use thread around the waist to avoid evil eye of witches.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Family

The family is the smallest social unit consisting of parents and unmarried children. A grown up boy

when married may stay separately. A girl immediately after her marriage not only changes her residence but also acquires her husband's surname. But existence of joint and/or extended family is not totally ruled out. It is also found that many of the individual families are residing in a large single dwelling. The authority in Dandasi family lies with the hands of male member. They trace their descent through their father side. The inheritance of property in their society is made through the male line. As far as division of labour in family is concerned, it is found that adult male and female are the earning members. But primarily the adult female members do the household work and secondarily help the male member in different jobs. The grown up boys and girls also help their parents according to their ability.

Caste Division

Dandasi community is found to be an endogamous unit and divided into as many as 11 exogamous sections or 'Banshas'. The institution of marriage is controlled by the Bansa or sept. The members of this community are not allowed to marry outside. The marriage is strictly prohibited among the members of same sept or 'Bansha'. The following are the exogamous septs recorded during field study.

1. Sanatrasi—Those who hid themselves during war behind one kind of bush used for mat-making.
2. Khandalasi—Those who use sword and worship it during Dashera.

3. Julasi—Those who worship *Jui* flower.
4. Diasi—Those who crossed the river.
5. Banlasi—Not known
6. Pahurasi—Those who hit by help of a stick.
7. Lambasi—Whose lineage Bansha is very long.
8. Ekalendia—Not known
9. Sahusi—Those who are brave.
10. Sikasi—Those who put articles on rope-helf.
11. Ekapatria—Those who use leaves for serving cooked food while eating.

So far as Gotra is concerned they use to worship different animals symbolically. Each lineage groups identify themselves separately.

Marriage

According to Dandasi society marriage is an essential activity of life. It not only seeks to satisfy the biological need of a man or woman but also helps the family or lineage to exist. In their eyes, marriage is an accepted form of union between man and woman and illegal union is strictly prohibited.

In their marriage with consanguineal kin is totally forbidden. The Dandasi practise monogamy as a rule and polygamy is not accepted in their society. The caste endogamy is maintained strictly. If a Dandasi marries outside the caste-group he is ex-communicated

from their society. But certain exceptions are noticed in this respect. If a boy marries in a higher caste it is accepted by the caste-panchayat with some penalty but in reverse if he is married below their status he is out-casted. The levirate type of marriage is accepted in their society traditionally. The younger brother marries the wife of deceased elder brother as a family obligation. The sororate type of marriage in their society is also in practice. If wife of a person dies he may marry the younger sister of the deceased wife.

At present child marriage in Dandasi society is not in vogue. But it was prevalent among them in past days. Girls are married after attainment of puberty. The normal age of marriage of a girl is between 14 and 18 while it is 18 to 25 for the boy. Cross-cousin marriage is a prescribed custom of the society. They do not have the practice of parallel-cousin marriage. A man may marry another's brother's daughter or father's sister's daughter and not paternal aunt's daughter. Marriage may take place among the members of the same village but not among the same lineage group.

Marriage by negotiation is a widely accepted custom among the Dandasi community. The proposal is first initiated by the boy's parents or elder members through mediator. If the proposal through the mediator is accepted by the girl's parents, a group of elderly persons then visit the girl's house to see the would be bride. If the bride is selected they invite the bride's parents to see the groom. When both the sides agree to this proposal, on a fixed day one or two near relations of the boy visit the girl's house and as an agreement of

marriage they present a ring to the girl. Then the day of marriage is fixed by the astrologer or Nahaka of the locality. On the fixed day marriage is celebrated. Usually marriage is celebrated at groom's house. It continues for four days. In the first day of marriage a grand feast is arranged at groom's house. All the community members of the village and other invited relatives including the bride's party enjoy the feast. As a customary practice on the seventh day of the marriage the son-in-law goes to the house of father-in-law and after a day or two he comes back to his house. On the other hand, on tenth day of marriage, the daughter visits her parent's house and returns back within a week. This is known as *Dasakarta*.

The most striking feature of Dandasi community is that they do not have a caste-priest to perform ceremonial functions and rituals. At the time of marriage the caste head 'Behera' officiates. The Behera gets new clothes and a nominal remuneration for his service during marriage.

Normally the brother-in-law of the groom unites the hands of both the bride and the groom. Arua rice and betelnuts are poured over the bride and the bride-groom and a turmeric-dyed thread is put around their hands. Then the musical instruments are played and the turmeric water is sprinkled over the couple. It continues for four days. In the last day, a feast is arranged and which marks the end of marriage ceremony. In Dandasi community payment of bride-price is not prevalent. The bride brings some necessary household articles like utensils, wooden-box, mats, silver pots etc. as dowry.

Marriage by exchange is also found among them. Generally, this takes place among the relatively poor families.

Widow Marriage

Widow marriage is approved in Dandasi society. A widow may marry again any man she prefers. This only requires approval of the caste-council.

If the lady marries outside the family she is bound to return all the valuable ornaments presented to her by her deceased husband's family. The man who marries the widow is expected to take care of the children already born to her. Widow marriage is not appreciated in the community. The procedure of widow marriage is very simple.

Divorce

Divorce as an institution is socially accepted in Dandasi society but which is very rare. Most of the divorce cases are due to barrenness and extra-marital relationship. Incompatibility may be ascribed as one of the reasons of divorce. Divorce can be initiated by both male and female.

If the divorce is initiated by the man he has to pay one hundred and thirty rupees to wife's father and if it is initiated by the female, she has to pay one hundred and sixteen rupees to husband's father along with the valuable articles presented to her by the husband's parents. The caste panchayat settles the affair.

Life-cycle

In Dandasi society it is belived that life passess through the following stages, viz. birth childhood, adult hood, old age and death. At different stages of this cyclic order certain rituals are observed to mark the value of life.

Birth

In their society pregnancy of a woman is highly valued and barrenness is severely condemned. Birth of a child brings rejoice to the entire family as a matter of pride and prestige. The cessation of monthly menstrual flow and vomiting tendency of the woman marks the pregnancy. For the pregnant woman certain restrictions are prescribed in their society. She is **not** allowed to do hard work. After five or six months of pregnancy she is not allowed to do outside work in the field. Generally she is not permitted to visit temples and travel by vehicles. Going to cremation ground is totally prohibited out of fear that spirits may cause abortion. At night she is not allowed to move outside the village alone. She is allowed to do light household work. Normally for a pregnant woman certain dietary restrictions are imposed such as taking of meat and other foods which are considered indigestive. During the period of pregnancy the sexual activities of the couple are restricted to some extent.

At the time of delivery an elderly woman attends the expectant mother as a mid-wife. The mid-wife cuts the umbilical cord of the child. Usually the first delivery takes place at woman's parent's place.

The birth pollution continues for 12 days. On the fifth day of delivery the first purificatory rite is observed which is known as *panchuyati* and on 6th day *Sathipuja* is observed. For seven days the mother is expected to remain in a corner place of the house as she is considered polluted. She may come outside with certain restrictions. Finally on 12th day of delivery the mother is free from pollution. Then she serves in the kitchen and cooks food. During the days of pollution the mother is not expected to take fish, meat, green leaves and mung which are considered indigestive. Usually the mother takes light food and vegetables like potatoes, brinjals and plantains.

Usually on 21st day of the delivery, the name giving ceremony is observed. The rituals on this day are very simple. If the birth takes place at husband's house the maternal uncle is invited on this day along with other kith and kins. He offers a pair of dress and other articles according to his ability. He takes the load in naming of the child. At night a feast is arranged to entertain the guests. In case of a child born at maternal uncle's house, the father of the child is invited to attend the name giving function. The entire cost of the function is borne by the uncle. The Behera officiates in the name giving ceremony.

Puberty

At the age of 12—14, the girl attains puberty. During this period she remains under pollution for 7 days. She is not allowed to go to outside and remains in one corner of a room in the house. The elder male members are not

allowed to enter into that room. She is kept hidden during that period. An elderly woman belonging to the family serves delicious food to the girl every day till the end of the rites. On 7th day, purificatory rite is observed. The girl under pollution takes oil and turmeric bath in the morning. She is presented with a new saree and a blouse. At the evening a feast is arranged. All the kith and kin members of the family are invited to attend the function. The entire caste-people of the village take part in the feast.

Death

The Dandasi believe that the death is a natural phenomena and it comes at the will of the supernatural power. They also believe the concept of rebirth. They view that unnatural death takes place due to bad deeds done during the previous birth or by displeasure of the God for wrong deeds.

As soon as a person dies, the members of the deceased family and kins men start crying loudly. Hearing the death of a person the Dandia arrives in the deceased family and convey the death news to the nearer relatives of the deceased. The lineage members hearing the news assemble at the doors of the deceased and make necessary arrangements for transportation corpse to the burial ground. A bier is prepared out of small bamboo sticks tied with ropes at different points. The corpse is covered with a piece of cloth. Normally, the nearest relatives of the deceased carry the bier. The widow of the deceased follows the funeral procession to a certain distance and returns back. The elder son puts fire

to the body of corpse first. In absence of a son the **nephew does the same work.** After **disposition of the** corpse the members take a ritual bath and come back.

The deads are invariably cremated. They have separate burial ground which is located at a little distance from the burial ground of upper caste people.

The period of pollution continues for 11 days in their society. On the 10th day cleaning of house, washing of clothes, **saving and cutting of** nails are performed. On this day **all the family members and lineage members** of the deceased take a holy bath. The caste 'Behera' sprinkles sacred water on them. On 11th day, *Sudhikriya* is observed. **A feast is arranged on this occasion in the** house of the deceased person. The death ceremony comes to an end after the feast.

POLITICAL ORGANISATION

The political organisation of Dandasi society is exists at two levels, i.e. at village level and at regional level. These institutions play very prominent roles in solving the inter and intra-caste conflicts. People in villages recognise this body in all caste affairs. It not only solves the caste disputes but also safeguards the interest of the community.

Regional Council

Each regional council has an administrative unit and a group of officials. It comprises of traditional

leaders, chief of which is 'Mutha Behera'. He is known as 'Dalbehera' and assisted by "Mutha Dandia". The council exercises autonomous power in matters relating to caste disputes, quarrels, breach of caste laws and deviant behaviour such as adultery, illicit sexual behaviour etc. The conflicting situations which could not find a solution at the village level, usually are referred to the higher territorial unit. It examines the details of the conflicting matters. The final judgement is declared after a thorough discussion with other leaders. The judicial power is vested in 'Dalbehera'. The post of these officials is hereditary. In case of absence of son of any office bearer, an elderly and knowledgeable person is selected to officiate at regional level. Generally the regional unit comprises of 15 to 20 villages but it varies from unit to unit. Among Dandasi there are as many as 21 regional units which are known as Taluk or Mutha.

Followings are the list of different Taluks

1. Terastan Taluk
2. Biral Taluk
3. Manisar Kote Taluk
4. Khallikote Taluk
5. Badakhemundi Taluk
6. Sanakhemundi Taluk
7. Dharakote Taluk
8. Bhitari Mahuri Taluk
9. Bahar Mahuri Taluk

10. Kulada Taluk
11. Berhampur Taluk
12. Huma-Palur Taluk
13. Chikiti Taluk
14. Taratarini Taluk
15. Upperbada Taluk
16. Talabada Taluk
17. Surangi Taluk
18. Digapahandi Taluk
19. Jarada Taluk
20. Bhanjanagar Taluk
21. Asika Taluk

Caste council

The caste council of Dandasi society is an independent socio-political organisation consisting a group of traditional leaders. They are the functional head in caste matters. The traditional office bearers are 1. Behera, 2. Dandia and 3. Jani.

The council does not meet regularly. When occasion-arises the meeting is convened. There is no specific place for holding meeting. Normally it sits in an open place or in a verandah of a respectable person of the community. The main function of the council is to maintain law and order of the society. Apart from this it also decides the matters

relating to caste conflicts, deviant behaviours like adultery, extra-marital or pre-marital relationship, readmission of ex-communicated persons and distribution of property among the members of the family. The council as a judicial body gives impartial judgement.

Social control

Every human society has its own built-in socio-political machinery to determine the behaviour of its component group and individuals towards conformity of prescribed social norms. The traditional usages and social sanctions act as the tools of social control. The caste council either at regional level or at village level are the effective machinery to exercise control over its own society. It not only solves the internal or external problems but also safeguards the interest of the community. In this section a short account of a few actions are analysed which constitute the mechanism of social control in Dandasi society.

1. *Duties of different functionaries:*—We have discussed earlier about the existence of caste council in Dandasi society at two levels such as at regional level and village level. These are the fairly effective tools of social control in their society. The caste council at village level decides minor disputes. Behera as the chief office bearer gives final decision after consulting the village elders. He also officiates at the time of religious ceremony. The disputed matters which are not solved at village council are referred to regional council Dalbehera, as the head of the territorial unit is empowered to declare final decision. Dandia is another official of the

council. He performs dual function. He conveys the news of birth and death to the doors of relatives at the same time also punishes the culprit according to the decision of the council. Jani being another official of the unit does not play any important role. His service is required only at the time of sacrifice of animals before deities.

2. *Procedure of meeting*:—The disputants make an appeal to the council for consideration of their cases. The Behera as the administrative head finalises the date of the meeting and presides over the meeting. Notice is served to different members through the Dandia. In the meeting full scope is given to both the parties to plead in support of their causes. Arguments and counter arguments are heard by the officials. Cross examinations are made to realise the truth. After hearing the case history of the incidents, final judgement is declared. Any body if not satisfied with the judgement can appeal to the regional council. Similar procedure is followed at the territorial level to consider the case as it is done in case of village level.

3. *Causes of outcaste*.—The Dandasi follow the principle of exogamy which means that marriage within the same lineage group is strictly prohibited. Deviation of this social taboos is considered offensive. This practice is not only shameful but also brings down the prestige of the family in the community. This is seriously viewed in the community. The offenders are removed from the caste and the caste people do not take food and water from them.

Extra marital and pre-marital relationships irregular union and pre-matril pregnancy are considered as sin in the community. Under such circumstances the offenders are socially boycotted.

Within the broad framework of the Dandasi society, inter-caste marriage is not socially sanctioned. Defiance of this social taboo leads to punishment. Deviants of such traditional laws are ridiculed and criticised and not allowed to stay within the caste group. They are socially driven out from the caste.

In Hindu caste system, the social stratification presupposes feeling of superiority and inferiority. Such feelings are also found in every day life among the untouchables. One untouchable caste considers itself superior to other untouchable caste in social status and avoids commensal and dietary relationship. Similarly Dandasis think themselves superior to many other untouchable castes like Hadi, Pana, Bauri, Mehantar, Mochi, Dhobi, etc. of the locality. If any body is found accepting food and water from these castes he is ex-communicated from the society.

An important fact is found that development of maggots in the wound of a person is seriously viewed and it is believed that in the long run this would-affect the kinsmen. So all his kith and kins avoid his presence. They usually do not touch and accept food and water from him. He is removed from the community. No social relationship is maintained with him.

4. *Readmission into caste*—When the offender or the outcaste person admits his fault and begs excuse before the caste council praying for the restoration of caste status, the council after examining the gravity of the offence may agree to admit him in the caste. If necessary, he has to undertake purificatory rites and arrange a feast to entertain the community members. He also pays fines as imposed by the council. In case of adultery, the male offender is to be present physically before the council while on behalf of the female her guardian is required to be present. Normally she does not come to the place of meeting. They pay fines in the name of Goddess Taratarini and beg excuse in the name of panchudevata. According to the direction of the caste council they also arrange feasts for the community members. For the sinful acts sometimes they go to Puri for getting the blessing from Lord Jagannath.

5. *Extra Pollution*—The family members and the members of the same lineage group of the deceased are considered polluted till the completion of purificatory rites. During that period they are not allowed to visit temples, worship deities and to perform ritual activities. Cutting of nails and shaving of beards are strictly prohibited till the date of funeral ceremony. After purification of rites they are considered pure and normalcy is restored.

Religion

They worship Gods and Goddesses mentioned in Hindu pantheon. To them almighty God is the creator of the world and He is the supreme power in the universe.

Everything moves according to His direction. They believe in rebirth. A man can reborn in a good family because of his good deeds in past life. They give importance to vice and virtue. Any unlawful act in the society is considered as vice and good deeds are considered as virtue. They believe in existence of ancestral spirits. These spirits are worshipped by the family head on the occasion of important festivals of the years. According to them if ancestral spirits are not propitiated properly. They may bring harm to the family. They believe in the existence of supernatural elements among whom some are benevolent and some are malevolent. The benevolent spirits ordinarily do not cause any harm to the society rather they cause good for the family and community. On the other hand the malevolent elements bring suffering and destruction for the family and society. The deities worshipped by them are Rama, Krishna, Shiva, Jagannath, Kali, Laxmi and Harsachandi. They keep lithographs of many Gods and Goddesses at their home and worship on auspicious days. They believe Laxmi is the Goddess of wealth and Kali is the Goddess of destruction. They have accepted Taratarini and Harsachandi as the Goddesses of their community. They take oath in the name of Taratarini.

During that time when thieving and robbery was considered as their caste occupation they have been worshipping Taratarini as the Goddess of protector. A notion prevails among them that the Goddess Taratarini renders her blessing during the act of robbery. Generally animal sacrifices are made to appease her. If she is satisfied, not only she

protects but also helps at the time of robbery. Kalua is another Goddess worshipped by the community which also helps them in this type of act. She is specially worshipped at the time of Dasahara.

There are no special religious festivals exclusively meant for Dandasi community. As they live among other Hindu people in rural areas they practise Hindu religious festival. The festivals observed by them during a year are presented as follows:—

1. Gundicha Jatra—Observed in the month of Asadha
2. Chitalagi and Gahma—Observed in the month of Srabana.
3. Janhi Osa—Observed in the month of Bhadrah
4. Dewal—Observed in the month of Kartika
5. Magasura Gurubar—Observed in the month of Margasira.
6. Bbyaghradevi—Observed as and when necessary
7. Bankeswari Puja—Observed in Makar Sankranti
8. Dasahara—Observed in the month of Aswina
9. Nus Pindha—Observed in the month of Jyesth

Conclusion

Out of 93 Scheduled Caste Communities in Orissa as many as five such as Dandasis of Ganjam district, Aduria Domb or Oriya Domb and Ghasis of Koraput district, Gandas of Sundargarh district and Panas of village Jaintara in Jajpur Subdivision of Cuttack district have been classified as denotified communities. So far as Dandasis are concerned they are looked down for their criminal habit and anti-social activities in the past. During British period they were declared as ex-criminal tribes. Now-a-days their outlook and behaviour has been changed. They have adopted agriculture, wage earning and other allied professions like stone-breaking, cattle rearing, rope making, collection of firewood for selling and small business as the sources of their livelihood.

As mentioned earlier Dandasis are Hindus and they live in the midst of other upper caste Hindu people where a great deal of social distance is maintained. The social interaction inside and outside of the locality greatly, influence their way of life.

The present economic condition of Dandasi community presents a very gloomy picture. Financially they are not in a position to purchase day to day requirements.

Mostly, they are found to be landless. A few families possess agricultural land. The amount of land owned by them is not adequate. Illiteracy, ignorance accompanied with social stigma leaves no scope for these people for getting employment. They live hand to mouth.

The housing problem of Dandasi people is very acute. They live in small houses which are not spacious. The area around their habitations are found unclean and unhygienic as they usually live in the outskirts of village. Garbages and dirt are heaped up throughout the length and breadth of the habitation. A constant fear was always emerging in the minds of these people of being overthrown from the dwelling places at any moment. The most tragedy lies even today that they are denied of drinking water from the village common place. The drinking water facilities available in their habitations are not adequate.

Educationally they are very backward. Majority of them are illiterate. A recent socio-economic study reveals that about 15.62 per cent of them are illiterate.

Whatever developmental programmes implemented so far for upliftment of Dandasi people have not yielded the desired result. From the general programmes a little benefit has been derived by them. The rehabilitation programmes implemented in Ganjam district have not helped them very much. Due to lack of proper maintenance and supervision the rehabilitated settlements are in a dilapidated condition. Many of the settled families have left the colony and gone elsewhere. Similarly the land which are allotted to the landless families are not suitable for cultivation. Reclamation of these lands is very much essential to go ahead with the agricultural operations.

Apart from the general programmes special efforts should be made to improve the living condition of Dandasi people. Therefore, the following suggestions are made which may provide a base-line for their development. The existing colonies which are found in a morbid condition should be revitalized. New colonies may be established for **landless and houseless families.** Allotment of house-sites with houses should be made to the poorest of the poor families. The available cultivable waste land should be **allotted to the landless and marginal farmers.** Along with the financial assistance for land development and reclamation they should be provided with agricultural inputs, implements and plough bullocks. Besides, irrigation facilities should be made available to the land owning households for better cultivation. Some families may be given financial assistance for piggery, goat rearing and small business. **Dandasi habitations should be supplied with drinking water facility.**

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