

9 PERSPECTIVES OF THE WOMEN

A lady anthropologist was asked to observe/study the Jarawas, particularly the women of the community, to gain as much additional insight as possible. She joined the team in course of the second phase and continued to work through the third phase of the study. She could interact with 37 women in the second phase and 38 women during the third. Among the 75 women, 25 were married, 2 were widows and the rest were unmarried. Some information that was collected from the women is being presented here.

Puberty: Jarawas observe certain norms as well as rituals, when their girls attain menarche (*opemame*). During the field study one case was observed; a girl of about 15 years of age in the Thidong area attained menarche. On the first day of menarche her movement was restricted within a small square area surrounded by four posts and she kept her eyes closed. A mixture of *alum* (a reddish soil), pig fat and gum extracted from a creeper was applied on her head, neck and face. During that period she did not talk to any person; she did not take bath and kept seated or lied on a bed of 'deoa' leaf. Every morning those leaves were changed. There were some restrictions on food: she was not served pig meat and honey. During those days, a girl would primarily subsist on *onog* (a kind of mollusc) and *eeng* (water). But in this case the girl took boiled rice, *pethe* (woodborer), turtle egg, seeds of *aab* (wild jackfruit) etc. After three days she took bath and ate pig meat, especially pig fat. That morning she took some small kid(s) on her lap and prayed for fertility. On that day all women and girls present in the camp gathered around her. The girl was dressed with floral ornaments; the women and the girls sang and danced. In their songs they described what adulthood of a woman means, that she has entered the reproductive life, and how she would make love (*henaga*) with her mate. The girl also sang a song of her own. It is important to note that after attaining puberty a girl is given a new name. The information collected by the lady anthropologist led her to think that unmarried girls spend time in jungle and make love with their beloved ones. They use two types of leaves (known as *wachahi* and *hatho* among the Jarawas), as contraceptive. Some of the married women also do that.

Marriage: After attainment of menarche, the girl gets prepared both physically and mentally for marriage. Generally marriage takes place after attainment of menarche in the girl and in case of males, when one becomes *lepa*, i.e., one who has attained hunterhood. Every girl has a selected mate and her parents or some other adult person, who may or may not be related, makes this selection.

During the second phase of study one marriage took place. It was a marriage between a widow and a widower. After getting proposal from the groom, the bride, who was from Tanmad, took several days before agreeing to it. Though the lady has a cheerful personality, those few days she was visibly morose. She had two morbid children and one moody son. Her elder son was happy with this marriage. The groom was her deceased cousin-sister's husband and father of two sons. After spending their

first day of conjugal life in the forest the husband went back to his own place, Thidong.

Fertility and mortality: During the second phase, reproductive history was collected from eight ever-married women; most of them have more than one child. Out of eight, two were widows and one was in her menopause. Those eight women gave birth to 31 children altogether (average 3.87). Out of those 31, only 21 children survived. In the course of the study two women were found pregnant. As per the information collected from 12 ever-married women, it was found that the range of parity was 1-8. It has also been noted that outcome of pregnancy is 31 birth (average 2.58) from 12 ever-married women of which 22 survived; four cases of infant mortality were reported (three males and one female).

Usually an elderly lady of the settlement attends to the delivery of a child. No childbirth has been reported to take place in hospital so far. The women demonstrate their happiness after birth of a female child by clapping. The old women, particularly the maternal grandmother of the new-born, start crying after the birth. After a while all of them participate in dancing and singing.

Health status: Most of the Jarawa women are healthy, though some sickly women were also found among them. The women accumulate more fat than men.

Childcare and breast-feeding: Both father and mother take care of their children since birth. A baby fully depends on breast feeding till dental formation and such feeding continue up to 2 to 3 years of age, along with other foods. They feed the new-born the first breast-milk (colostrums). Breast milk is given to the child not only by the mother, but also by other women of the same group, whenever necessary. Sometimes even the unmarried girls put their breast in the child's mouth to stop it from crying.

Dress and ornaments: Generally the women are careful about the way they are decked up. The women, including the young girls, collect flowers, colourful leaves, stems, fruits, fibres made from bark regularly. In afternoon hours they prepare colourful garlands, which often are huge enough to cover the upper part of the body, head gear or hair band, bracelets, armbands, and waist girdle. Not only women, the men also wear such floral ornaments and participate in dance and music.

Washing habit: The Jarawas wash their woollen or cotton dress and ornaments while taking bath; this obviously is a recent practice. A few of them were observed to use soap during bath, such soap is collected from the friendly non-Jarawa people. It was also observed, that after taking honey they always take bath.

Material of dress and ornaments used by them these days may be non-traditional, but there is some kind of cultural continuity in the practice. Ornaments made of flowers, leaves, stems and fruits were and still are used by many Jarawa women.

Music: The Jarawas are very fond of music. Singing is related to almost all their activities like making floral ornaments, baskets, wooden buckets or fetching water. Dance is also an integral part of their life.

Some other observations:

1. Some women were asked about their choice between the jungle life and life in *eenen* settlements. They have some exposure and knowledge about the latter settlements, as some of them have spent days in health centres and hospitals during their own or relatives' sickness. Most of them were not willing to leave forest, their free abode, though a few others seemed to be hesitant on this question.
2. At the time of first visit in the Jarawa settlement at Lakra Lungta, the lady anthropologist felt that the Jarawa women were a bit suspicious towards her and tried to avoid her. Later, it became apparent that in their society a married woman, in absence of her husband, is not allowed to sleep alone. Some young girl, who may or may not be her own child, should accompany her.
3. When the women folk went into forest for purpose of foraging and they were supposed to stay away from their camp for days, particularly when adult males were not around, all the unmarried girls accompanied the ladies. The widows headed the girls' camps.
4. The Jarawa women observe some restriction on food, like Monitor lizard. During menstrual period they observe certain restrictions. Application of a type of clay, called *oddu*, for body decoration and decorating the body with ornaments, are restricted during pregnancy.
5. The women were found equally adept in learning the Hindi language as some of the teenaged boys.