

By Beverly Deepe

A Special Correspondent

SAIGON.

The Communist regime begins to rear a North Vietnamese baby from the time it is four months old.

From then on the Hanoi regime, which came into power 20 years ago, molds the individual's life. This includes the most personal details of love, sex, marriage and the family's worship of ancestors, which had prevailed through the past several thousand years.

In an exclusive interview, Nguyen Sang, a 28-year-old defector, discussed the North Viet Nam government's policies and practices on child-birth, love, sex, marriage and religion.

The expectant mother goes to a government-operated hospital or maternity clinic and remains there for a week to ten days after the baby is born.

The family must report the birth to government authorities within a week, the defector said, so that the baby may have its own rice and clothing rations, instead of sharing family rations.

AT HOME

For the next four months the mother is allowed to breast-feed the baby at home. At the beginning of the fifth month it is placed in a government-operated nursery and the mother goes to work.

The mother, who generally works near her house, takes the baby home at lunchtime and at night. When the baby is one year old, the mother gets a job farther from her house, if the government decides this is necessary.

At the nursery, run mostly by women, the baby is first taught to walk and then to talk—and then to sing and dance. The child is taught the

Child Raising, Hanoi Style

[Oct 10, 1965]

rudiments of reading when it is five or six years old and is then ready for formal kindergarten and schooling.

The most intelligent and most obedient schoolchildren under fifteen years of age are selected to join the Red Kerchief organization, where they are taught "the five commandments of Uncle Ho." These commandments include being obedient to the family and teachers, to be virtuous and hard-working.

The children compete to become Red Kerchiefs and regularly copy the five commandments and paste them in the walls of their home. Those who are selected proudly wear red bandanas around their necks.

Then the cream of the Red Kerchief crop is selected for membership into the Lao Dong (Communist) Youth League, where the members range in age from 15 to 25. From 25 upwards, the best members are then selected into the Lao Dong (Communist) party, which has become the new elite.

CENTER

The party then becomes the center of life, surpassing even family relationships. If, for example, a daughter and her father sit together for at a meeting of the government, of the party or of government-run associations, they address each other as "dong chi"—"comrade"—instead of using their names. However, outside of working hours, the word comrade is dropped and family names are used.

The Hanoi regime has a

puritanical view towards illicit sex relations.

If, however, a love affair occurs and a baby is born out of wedlock, a committee judges the percentage of guilt of the man and the woman, and that percentage is applied to the support of the child.

For example, if the woman willingly submitted to the love affair, then she must also help support the child with her food and clothing rations and money; if, however, the man imposed himself on the woman, he is judged to be more guilty and must contribute more to the upbringing of the child.

FAMILY

Traditionally, the Vietnamese family arranged—and dictated—the marriages of their children. In North Viet Nam today, the party dedicates marriages.

Usually, the couple submits a request to be married to the leading committee of the association or organization to which they belong. This committee is dominated by the Communist party cadre.

It studies the marriage request and makes recommendations or suggestions. The committee can approve or disapprove of the request of marriage, and in case of disapproval the couple can still go ahead with the marriage plan. But they will be indirectly punished, usually through economic discrimination in rations or government housing.

The government may judge the marriage unwise because

it desires to send the persons to different parts of the country.

Marriage ceremonies have been drastically simplified and standardized. The most important traditional aspect of these ceremonies in former times was a giant feast for the whole family, which might number hundreds, including aunts, uncles and great-grandchildren.

Now, couples can still have "collective celebrations with songs," but there's not enough food for the feasts. There are no church marriages.

The ancient Confucianist-Taoist worship of the ancestors, which had prevailed in Viet Nam for several thousand years, has also been changed. The family altar, where the ancestors and the dead were traditionally honored, is now called "the altar of the fatherland." On it are the national flag, a picture of Ho Chi Minh—and last, photographs of the ancestors and the dead.

At best, the family can afford to have a candle or petroleum lamp to light the altar and a few cups of tea, a few fruits and flowers for reverence. But even if the family wants to and can afford to buy the joss sticks and fake paper money used as part of the religious rites, the government stores do not sell them, except at special times such as the lunar new year.

As in the case of marriage ceremonies, the large family banquets formerly held to honor the dead can no longer be held because of food rationing.

The defector said he knew there was once a heavily populated Catholic area in Ben Thuy, near the city of Vinh. But, he said, when he visited Vinh, there was no trace of the Catholics. He said he never saw a person wearing a cross or a home with a crucifix or a picture of Christ.