KINSHIP, FAMILY AND MARRIAGE

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This block comprises three units. D.N. Majumdar’s work on the polyandrous society of the Himalayas figures at two places.

The first reading in the first unit is by Meyer Fortes, originally from South Africa, who was trained in psychology, and later shifted to anthropology. He is best known in anthropology for his work among the Tallensi and Ashanti in Ghana. Like his other contemporary, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, he was a supporter of the structural-functional approach. He believed that for generating any kind of an analysis of society, empirical evidence was required. However, he incorporated the notion of ‘person’ in his structural-functional analysis of kinship. One of his contributions was to the concept of ‘complementary filiation’; he found that in a matrilineal society, the father’s line was not important for descent purposes, but was of great importance for sentimental and emotional dimensions. The same applied to the relations with the mother and her line in a patrilineal society. Fortes was a contributor to the ‘descent theory’ and the case of the Tallensi illustrated it well.

The second reading is from David Schneider’s work on American kinship. Schneider was the director of what was known as the ‘kinship project’; the question he explored was the response of middle classes to kinship. His was the first attempt to deal systematically with kinship as a system of symbols and meanings. It was not just a network of functionally interrelated roles dealing with consanguinity and affinity. His work on kinship also led to the development of a theory of culture that has proved valuable in other studies.

The second unit comprises two readings. The first by T.N. Madan is a study of one’s own society. Madan carried out his fieldwork in a village called Uttrasu-Umanagri on the Kashmiri Pandits. This work was on their family and kinship systems. For the analysis of his data, he made use of the approach of the developmental cycle of domestic group, according to which family is seen as a process, changing over time. The second work herein is Majumdar’s study of a polyandrous community. Although the work is titled *Himalayan Polyandry*, it is concerned with the changes that have come in the region of Jaunsar-Bawar. Based on a long association with this area – almost twenty-five years – Majumdar writes almost like a ‘native’, with an exemplary familiarity with the area and its people. Majumdar shows that the polyandrous family is not a static entity; it changes into a type that combines the elements of polygyny with polyandry, for which the term ‘polygynandry’ can be used. Of particular interest is Majumdar’s discussion of the position of woman respectively in her families of orientation and procreation.

The second reading in the third unit, by Margaret Trawick, a professor at New Zealand, is remarkably a different kind of study. It is a study of ‘love’, a force in human affairs. It is a topic which is rather unconventional in social anthropological researches, for it is supposed to be falling within the domain of psychology. Living for a length of time with a Tamil family, she has tried to understand the multiple and mutually shared expressions of love (*anpu*). She makes use of poetry and conversations, besides observations, for generating data.
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UNIT 1  KINSHIP

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Learning Objectives

In this unit, you will be introduced to kinship studies in ethnographic context for an understanding of the:

- diversity in kinship practices in the world;
- interrelationships among family, marriage and kinship; and
- interrelationships of kinship with other domains of life.

1.1  INTRODUCTION

Social/cultural anthropologists say that it was necessary to study social divisions and groups of a society in order to understand social structure and organisation. In most cases organisation of kin groups is found to be very effective means of maintaining social order. Family is one kind of kin groups which is a part of a larger group with common ancestry forming descent group that has been regulating social life of its members. Family has another correlated institution, marriage by which different families and descent groups are interlinked. Large amount of data collected cross-culturally enabled anthropologists to develop certain analytical concepts, methods and theories of kinship and social organisation. In fact, Ladislav Holy remarked, ‘if there was a subject which
anthropologists could have rightly claimed to be their own, it was kinship’ (Holy 1996).

In the first half of the twentieth century, anthropologists were fascinated with the discovery of kinship as an important feature of small scale societies where law-and-order institutions that are found in the Western society were lacking to maintain the social order. Serious attempts were made for comprehending its dimensions, various functions and efficacy in organising society. It was found that these small scale societies used the *idiom of kinship* to frame most of their activities, including those with political, economic and religious intent. In Western society, the kinship shifted out of society proper into the domain of the domestic, being divested of its political, economic and religious contents, but largely confined itself to the natural process of procreation and regulation of marriage practices.

Till 1970s it was thought that unilineal descent systems were necessary for societal order. However, other evidences later sharply pointed out that social cohesion is maintained by exchange systems wherein men exchanged women bringing solidarity among descent groups. It became clear that social life is organised not necessarily on the principles of unilineal descent instead cognatic, bilineal, double-descent or ambilineal also play significant role in ordering social life. There has been much debate on these theoretical developments to understand kinship and the societal order in small scale societies. The 1980s saw further change challenging both descent and alliance theories that located kinship in cultural domain. In this perspective kinship is a cultural system, persons and social relationships are cultural constructions. So far kinship has been studied through the rules of descent, *jural* norms, rules of marriage, obligations and social cohesion. It also focused on kinship terms and their relationship with marriage practices and kinship behaviour.

A brief account of two ethnographies presented here represent kinship in two different societies from two different theoretical perspectives.

### 1.2 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *The Web of Kinship among the Tallensi* IS AN EXAMPLE

This book is an example of a situation where kinship is the principle of social organisation.

### 1.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

#### 1.3.1 Intellectual Context

This book was written when the structural-functional approach, which looked at how societies were the organised wholes, was the dominant approach in British social anthropology.

#### 1.3.2 Fieldwork

Meyer Fortes carried out first hand fieldwork among the Tallensi using the typical anthropological methods of participant observation, interviews and case studies. He lived among the people to understand their kinship organisation.
1.3.3 Analysis of Data

Tallensi\(^1\) inhabit Ghana in Western Africa, earlier known as Gold Coast. They lack centralised political structure or tribal government. The society is divided into different descent groups which are independent, but their unity and solidarity emerge during the annual cycle of the Great Festival.

Lineage, clan, agnatic and cognatic relations

For Tallensi, the generic concept of kinship subsumes all kinds and degrees of genealogical relationships however remote they may be. The maximal lineage and clan are the basic units of social system that organise corporate activities. A maximal lineage is the most extensive group of people of both sexes related to one another by a common patrilineal descent traced from one known ancestor through known agnatic antecedents. A clan is a localised unit consisting of a defined segment of a maximal lineage or a whole maximal lineage. Usually, a clan consists of two or more linked maximal lineages of independent patrilineal descent whose association is accounted by a myth or remote kinship or of age-old local solidarity. The maximal lineage is not only an organic genealogical unit, it is also an organic ritual unit, and its cult is its founding ancestor for whom a shrine is dedicated whose custodian is the lineage head. A maximal lineage is divided into a number of segments, and each segment is identified by reference to its founding ancestor. A point is marked on the genealogical tree of the whole maximal lineage at which that segment’s line of descent connects with the other lines of descent sprung from the founding ancestor of the maximal lineage. In this way every maximal lineage is divisible into one or two segments which may be called major lineages. There is further segmentation down the line, and the lowest order is minimal segment or minimal lineage which may be defined as the domestic group comprising the children of the one man. This is the narrowest agnatic group a person belongs to. There is a degree of autonomy of segments at the three levels to have independent ritual, jural and economic affairs.

The Tallensi draw sharp line between kinship and in-lawship. Marriage implies the absence of kinship ties between parties. As the kinship ties exist in their own right, the marriage ties are artificial and contractual in nature. Marriages are bound by rights and duties which did not exist before. Procreation depends not only on the sexual fluids ejaculated in the act of coitus of both man and woman, but also on an active principle, the *naamis* – mingling of the male sexual fluids with the female sexual fluids. Thus function of the male is as essential as that of the female in procreation.

Patrilineal descent is the vertebral principle of social organisation and it is the vehicle of the continuity and stability of the social structure. From a father a man derives his rights to inherit land and other property, his clan membership and the political rights and ritual obligations which are essential for obtaining the goodwill of the ancestors. Equally significant principle of social organisation is maternal parentage which is based on sentiment and affection rather than on rights. It is founded on the norm of sibling equality and a bond between sister and brother, and between mother’s brother and sister’s son either of the first degree or in a classificatory sense.

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\(^1\)Tallensi means all the inhabitants of Taleland.
Homestead – Domestic Family

Homestead is built for a particular family. The social relations in it run on two lines: lineage, on the cannons of agnatic descent, and individual, on the bonds of marriage and parenthood based on bilateral kinship. On the lineage front they are brothers but with different mothers; they are oriented to different matri-centered segments. A homestead covers a circular or oval area, with public place, and in the centre granary which belongs to the head of the house. No one enters it without his authorisation. Around the space centering the granary living-quarters of the homestead are located for wife or wives and her or their children. The senior woman, mother of the head of house or senior wife is the mistress of the homestead. Each wife has three separate quarters or rooms, one for sleeping, a kitchen and a store of her own. The joint family may be seen as a transitory unit as the younger male members grow up, marry, and have children of their own and inner tensions begin to split up which may take place in the life time of the head or after his death. The senior most son may leave to farm independently and set up his family or cuts his own gateway at the same homestead and may come back after the death of father to become the head of the house. The practice of levirate has significant effect in the constitution of joint family.

Land and wives stand for fulfillment of fundamental social needs which run through the thoughts of the Tallensi. Wealth pre-eminently consists of livestock acquired through savings or in exchange of surplus grain or cash, and the livestock principally put is equivalent to acquiring wives. Wives are always highly prized because they were always at a premium. In consequence, no woman of child bearing age need to endure an intolerable marriage for she always finds another husband. But women rarely take advantage of this partly due to the stability of the patrilineal lineage system expressed in inter-personal relations in the power of father’s authority and obedience. The father exchanges a daughter for cattle which in turn helps to acquire a wife for son or for self. The marriage may break either through the actions of one of the spouses, generally the woman or through her guardian for nonpayment of bride price or for any other reason. There is no formal procedure for divorce, just woman runs off from her husband’s house to return to her parents or brothers. Despite initial pitfalls, families do get established and remain stable.

A woman does not forfeit her status in the natal lineage or clan or her personal ties with the parents or siblings; her natal family and clan have claims over her all her life. A woman brings up her own private resources, farming the land given to her by her husband, and gifts given by her parents and siblings. She can go back to her father’s home and settle there for her sustenance as a matter of right. She continues all her life under her patrilineal ancestors and observes their totemic taboos. She is always stranger in her husband’s family; she does not adopt the totemic taboos of her husband, and does not participate in the cults of his lineage ancestors. Marriage is forbidden within the lineage or clan and also mother’s clan or lineage. A woman maintains a general attitude of deference, modesty, and compliance towards her relatives-in-law.

A man ‘owns’ his wife, which means, he has authority over her and is responsible for his wife. She must perform indispensable domestic tasks such as preparation of food for the households, taking care of children, provision of water supplies, etc. A man has right to these services; but it is a right limited by the principles of
reciprocity. The man has to protect and take care of his wife, particularly provide her with home, food, and curative treatment if she is ill. Any money or livestock she may possess passes on to her sons on her death.

The man must show formal deference to his parents-in-law and the relationship rests on goodwill of his parents-in-law for the latter can take back their daughter any time. He has joking relations with siblings-in-law. On the death of parents-in-law he is obliged to attend the mortuary and funeral ceremonies, should provide gravestone, should distribute money freely to the grave-diggers, to the drummers, singers and musicians. The son-in-law is obliged also to send certain food contributions in prescribed kind and quantity to the funeral of parents-in-law. A man is not to have any sexual relations with wife of an affine, which is considered a heinous offence, though not incest. Co-wives refer to one another as ‘sisters’. They have a bond of mutual attachment that holds independently of their relations as wives of the same man or the same lineage. They help each other regularly and altruistically; they share such things as foodstuffs and firewood more readily. They do quarrel but nevertheless stay on.

A father’s first duty to his children is to provide them with food and clothes. A good father should allow his adult sons to work a little for themselves and so earn enough to buy clothes, and he may allow them to wear some of his clothes on special occasions. He ‘owns’ his children; has the right and the duty of disciplining them; he has the right to inflict corporeal punishment on them. A father has the right to dispose of a daughter in marriage as he pleases and to use her brideprice as he pleases. A mother’s rights are less defined. A mother has the right to the obedience and the respect of her children.

The inner lineage or minimal lineage is the widest segment with common interest and it is smallest corporate unit, as such, when a son dies and his wife marries his brother takes care of the children. Sometimes even daughter’s children grow along with son’s children, though the children have no claim on patrimonial land. With the natural parents the emotional elements and the jural and moral elements of the relationship are completely interfused. The son attains his first degree of freedom of independence only on the death of his own father. A man cannot offer sacrifices to partilineal ancestors in his own right while his father is alive. His father does on his behalf. It is only when his father dies that a man can sacrifice directly to his ancestors. While he has a proxy or classificatory father alive he is still to some extent under paternal authority. In the absence of any senior brother or father’s brother, one becomes the head of the homestead or head of the minimal lineage if father was the head of the lineage.

**Filial Piety**

The fundamental moral principle is that bonds between parents and child cannot be obliterated, and from this follows the duty of filial piety. A man or woman can never disowns his/her child, and one must obey one’s father, respect him, work for him, take his side against anybody else, even against one’s mother. The parents can bless or curse a child. There is a direct connection between this emphasis on the dependence of children on parents and the worship of the ancestors. Similar to the punishment of the parents, the ancestors exercise their power without compunction. They punish and slay as arbitrarily as they bless. The ancestors demand establishments of shrines where sacrifices are offered. A man’s mother’s spirit is as important as his father’s. He has a shrine dedicated to her. These are
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Inheritable by half brothers also. Filial piety is the psychological bridge between the relations of parents and children in life and in the ritual relationships of the living with the ancestors. All the ancestors are projections of the parents, different manifestations of the images the Tallensi culture draws. The supreme filial piety sons owe to their parents lies in the performance of mortuary and funeral ceremonies. It is believed that a man’s ancestor spirits accompany him wherever he goes, but they are most tangibly present in his house where he sacrifices to them.

There exists tension between the generations, the Tallensi explain this in terms of Yin or personal destiny. There is inborn antagonism between the Yin of a father and the Yin of his eldest son. The son’s Yin wants to destroy the father’s Yin; but the father’s Yin desires to live. Therefore, the father must avoid meeting son in the gateway of the homestead. However such restriction is not applicable to other children. Only after the father’s death the eldest son is shown the father’s granary and his quiver. This is the symbolic replacement of the father’s status and his role or the social personality with the eldest son. A person’s loyalty and solidarity with his lineage springs from his relationship with his father, his ties with his matrilateral kin from his relationship with his mother.

Uterine and Extra-clan Relations

The uterine bond is very strong, intimate and is a permanent social bond between two brothers born to the same father and mother. The other siblings – children of different mothers and father’s brother’s children are differentiated terminologically as well as in behaviour. These brothers are coheirs and come under the same jural norms and are members of the same maximal lineage even if they live independently. The clan brothers have no property relations except that they are clansmen. Sexual relations with clan sisters outside the medial lineage are not regarded as disgraceful though it is considered adultery, it is not incest. In fact it is rare; it is reprobated as it is considered individual’s act of omission. The bride price received for a girl should be earmarked for the payment of the bride price for the wife of her closet brother. A widow of child bearing age who has children usually consents to marry one of his close brothers. Next to him is brother of late husband’s inner lineage brother. Inheritance of a grandfather’s widow by a grandson is confined to the inner or at the most medial lineage. A sister’s son can marry mother’s brother’s widow or his mother’s brother’s father’s widow. All these bear out social equivalence of siblings; it is graded according to the genealogical distance.

A man’s relationship to his sister’s son has a jural and ritual coefficient. It is tied to the lineage structure and functions on the lineage principle. A lineage stands in the relationship of mother’s brother, and the mother’s brother offers sacrifice on behalf of the lineage into which the mother is married in order to secure blessings from the matrilateral ancestors. Often mother’s brother’s son is identified with mother’s brother. Mother’s brother keeps his interest in his sister’s son, often by giving gifts. They cannot contract debts towards each other. Sister’s son enjoys the status of a foster-child, though the latter cannot inherit any property. If one is cared by mother’s brother, he will not forfeit his property rights in his lineage. He acts as intermediary between his maternal and paternal clan members and help erection of maternal shrine for the mother’s brother. While the lineage system separates individuals and corporate groups from one another, the network
of extra-clan bonds knits them together. The extra-clanship provides complementary function to the clanship. Through marriages that extra-clanship kinship ties are woven into the lineage fabric; and this runs through several generations. These social relations are governed by a general rule of amity, and one is obligated to help in difficulties if possible. Further, marriage between extra-clan kin of any degree is forbidden. Thus, kinship outside the lineage lies in the sphere of individual’s sentiment and conduct. It is located beyond the inner lineage in the level of mother’s brother’s clan. The sister has to fulfill certain customary obligations at the funeral in her or brother’s lineage. She, in fact, has very little count in the web of kinship of extra-clan kinship. A man usually informs his sister’s sons and his father’s sister’s son whenever he offers sacrifices to his ancestors, who may participate in it. A man establishes shrine for the founding ancestor as well as his mother and, similarly shrine is consecrated to mother’s ancestors also. Thus there is complex of shrines at a homestead.

1.3.4 Conclusion

The work shows that kinship systems are further segmented and these combine to form levels taking care of different aspects of society. The major theme of this book is that unilateral descent groups are corporate structures.

1.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

This work shows that in unilateral descent groups, the gender category which is theoretically supposed to be excluded is not really excluded. Fortes, shows that among the Tallensi, women play an important role.

1.5 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY American Kinship: A Cultural Account IS AN EXAMPLE

David Schneider’s work shows that the corporate functions that Kinship plays among the Tallensi are not found among the Americans, yet kinship plays a significant role in the lives of the people.

1.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

1.6.1 Intellectual Context

The book examines kinship from a symbolic point of view.

1.6.2 Fieldwork

Fieldwork was carried out among Americans using standard tools of investigation, but being an American, Schneider, was able to bring in his own insights into the understanding of American kinship.

1.6.3 Analysis of Data

American kinship is quite different from that of the Tallensi kinship. It is relatively highly differentiated, distinguished from other social institutions and relationships.
There are no corporate activities among the kinsmen with reference to economy or polity or religion.

**A Cultural System**

It is a cultural system, a system of symbols; it consists a system of units or parts defined in certain ways which are related to one another in a particular way. These units are cultural constructs that have a reality of their own, and these units in their relationships to one another follow certain rules that determine social action of individuals.

**Symbol:** “Something which stands for something else or some things else, where there is no necessary or intrinsic relationship between the symbol and that which it symbolizes” [Schneider (1968:1)].

**Relatives**

For an American, a relative is a person who is related by blood or by marriage. The kinship terms can be divided into two groups: the *basic* terms and *derivative* terms. The derivative terms are made up of a basic term plus a modifier. For example, “Father” is a basic term modified by “in-law” resulting in father-in-law. The other modifiers are “step”, “in-law,” “great,” “grand,” “ex-,” etc. The conception of a blood relative goes in biogenetic terms. A child derives one half of the biogenetic substance from one parent and the other half from the other parent. Therefore, the blood relationship between parents and children and among the siblings or among the blood relatives, nothing can really terminate or change the biological relationship that exists among them.

Unlike blood, marriage is not a material thing in the sense as biogenetic substance. Marriage is natural, a state of affairs; it is terminable by death or divorce. The persons by marriage are relatives because they have the role of close relatives without being “real or blood relatives”. A foster child is taken care of as one’s own child though the other parent may be different. In this case, the natural and material bases for the relationship are absent, but the relationship follows a pattern for behaviour, a code for conduct. However, a person who is related by blood is related by common biogenetic heredity, a natural substance, by a relationship, a pattern for behaviour or a code for conduct. While the blood relationship follows the *nature of order* of things, the marriage follows the *order of law*. The latter is an imposition by society, rules, regulations, customs and traditions. It is a law in a special sense.

Family is a unit that contains a husband wife and a child or children, and they are relatives in the sense that all the relatives are members of the family. In this cultural unit, sexual intercourse (act of procreation) is the symbol that provides distinctive feature for the family and to the members of the family as a cultural unit. Living together also means a man and woman live in sexual intercourse. Children have their own families, implies the same meaning. The family members consisting of husband, wife and children and living together is natural and therefore family is a natural unit. The family is formed according to the law of nature as is found in some animals, birds and even fish. But nature alone does not constitute the family. In addition, there is human reason which selects two orders of world of nature i.e., the order of nature and the order of law. A blood relationship is involuntary, it is through birth - a matter of procreation whereas marital relation is defined and created by the law of man.
Differentiation of Members

Nature distinguishes male and female by sexual organs, one gets sexual identity by physical features such as facial hair for men. In addition there are temperamental differences along with the sexual organs. While man is aggressive, possess great physical strength and stamina whereas woman is passive, has nurturing qualities which men lack. Sex-roles also differentiate man and woman; a man is a policeman, soldier or a clerk and a woman may be nurse, a school teacher or a cook. The cultural constructs of father and mother are made not only out of sexual organs but because they are distinct, father as genitor and mother as genetrix of the child. The members of a family are distinguished among themselves and together as a family also distinguishes itself from other family. Americans hold that family is responsible for the troubles such as poverty, crime, delinquency, drug addiction and so on that it encounters.

The family as a symbol is a pattern for how kinship relations should be conducted and it can be explicated from the opposition between “home” and “work.” Home is different from a house, home is where one lives. A homemaker makes a house into a home, a place for everything and anything in its place. Work, like home, is both place and an activity. Different things are done at home and work towards different ends. There is interstitial area between home and work, the vacation where there is relaxation, there is another area of relationship where individual can be picked up as friends unlike the blood relatives who cannot be chosen but born with them. The friends can be loyal, faithful, and helpful and everything a relative can be. Relatives can also be relatives, as friends can be evaluated and dropped also, so also the relatives.

The symbols of American kinship consist of spiritual unity of husband and wife, and unity of love among the members of the family. The sexual intercourse also stands for love, and love is a relation between persons but not between things. Love is freely and unselfishly given and it is to be never forsaken, betrayed or abandoned. This love can be translated as *enduring diffuse solidarity* for the well being of its members.

Person as a Relative

Just as family, the person is another major cultural unit in American kinship that is capable to act. A person may be a father, a policeman, judge or a priest. The father is a person in the family as judge is a person in court. Different elements are blended together in the conceptualisation of the person such as sex, age, job, ability to read, marriage and so on. A person is conceptualised as concrete and as abstract. The concrete one is a real one who should behave in accordance with some norms. Relatives are persons and the family is a group of persons. Family is conceived as a concrete group of persons and the concrete family has a counterpart, an abstract one. In abstract sense one can say about family consisting of husband, wife and children, but in concrete sense one says “my wife,” “my son John” and so on. As blood relatives, persons are firstly to behave according to cognatic love rooted in sexual intercourse. Secondly, relatives should behave towards each other in *enduring diffuse solidarity*.

A person is counted relative in the kinship domain if only a substantive element is present than if there is only code for conduct. Lacking of any of the elements may not be counted as a relative. With both the elements present that person is
most likely to be counted as a relative. Distance and closeness also matter in terms of two persons who share common biogenetic substance. The closeness is only a first measure but this is modified with the code for conduct; even if there is no substantive element, the distance depends on the code for conduct. The distant relatives are termed as “shirt-tail relatives” or “cakes-and-wedding relatives” or “kissing-kin” or “kissing-cousins” who lack code for conduct.

**Relative in-law and by Marriage**

There are two classes of relatives by marriage. The first is ego’s own husband or wife. The second class consists of the mother, father, brother and sister of ego’s own spouse along with spouses of ego’s brother, sister, son or daughter. All of these take the derivative terms and the in-law modifier. Sometime “in-law” is used for anyone in any way connected by any marriage. Also, it is used as a collective designation for anyone in any way connected through one’s own spouse. There is ambiguity the way relatives are traced by marriage. A son’s wife and daughter’s husband are daughter-in-law or son-in-law, but an uncle’s wife is not an aunt for some. An aunt can be only father’s sister or mother’s brother’s wife. Again if uncle’s wife is an aunt for some, why is there is no kin term for cousin’s wife who is also related by marriage but considered as a non-relative? Death, divorce and remarriage raise special problem to understand American kinship. A step-parent, if remarries, there is ambiguity to connect the children of the step-parent’s from the next marriage or step-parent’s spouse also. The relatives by marriage are in a relationship of kinship due to code for conduct, there is no substantive basis. These relatives choose to follow that code for conduct rather than some other code. In this context, it is necessary to note that relationship is also a matter of consent, that is, it is voluntarily undertaken and voluntarily maintained.

As regards to the meaning and association of the concepts “in-law” and “by marriage” in their use in kinship domain referring to those related by marriage is not clear. It is explained in terms of the symbol of coitus. Before offering an explanation it is to be noted that only certain kinship terms are modified with in-law like “mother-in-law” or “brother-in-law”, but there is no kinship term for cousin’s spouse or sibling’s spouse’s siblings though one is related by marriage. Here, it is not clear as why there is this kind of difference when the relatives belong to the same category? The explanation is as follows. The universe of kinship is divided into two parts: nature and that of law. Nature conforms to the ‘law of nature’ and therefore law in its widest meaning refers to order, regularity and obedience to rules. But nature in the inheritance of blood follows the nature as “given” substance which is opposed by in-law which is “made” and imposed upon mankind and man’s nature. Here law is restricted to custom, tradition, the more and the ways of man as against any other way. This order of human reason is within the domain of kinship. It is in this sense that relatives are connected by this law of regularity imposed by the human reason in marriage. The normative construct of relative “by marriage” or “in-law” as a person has the stipulation that, lacking a natural or substantive component, it consists of a particular code for conduct alone. It is voluntary, in that it is up to each party to enter into it, maintain it or opt out of it unlike the blood relationship. It is the kind of relationship “by marriage” not because each of the two parties to it is married to each other but because it is that specific kind of relationship.
Kinship Terms

It is also important to note that in American kinship there are far more kinship terms and terms for kinsmen than there are kinds of kinsmen or categories of kinsmen. For example, Mother may be called “mother,” “mom,” “ma,,” “mummy,” “mama” and so on. Similarly, Father may be called “father,” “pop,” “pa,” “dad,” “daddy,” and so on. In several instances father-in-law and mother-in-law are called “pop” and “mom”. There is variation in usage of kinship terms with regards to who is spoken to and who is being spoken about. In some cases “ma” and “mom” are less likely to be used by daughters than by sons, and that “mother” is more acceptable to daughter than to sons. The father term “father” has formality and authority and respect implications which “mother” does not share.

In case of relatives by marriage or (in-law), there are no kinship terms in some instances as in case of cousin’s spouse though the relationship is recognised, it depends on the consideration if one is a relative or not. When considered as a relative appropriate term is used. Uncle’s wife may be considered a relative and if so called as aunt, if not she is only uncle’s wife. In case of step- and other foster relatives derivatives of kinship terms are used as “step-aunt” - a step-father’s sister, a “step-cousin” – mother’s brother’s step-son etc. Kinship terms are applied to persons who are not kinsmen or relatives as Mother superior in a convent or Father for a priest in order to indicate their role. When this happens, the term is specifically modified to make this clear to the listener. Kinship term is not an object by itself, it invokes certain role. The kinship terms have one of their many meanings of the biogenetic relationship or the code for the conduct of kinship. The uncle’s wife and aunt’s husband are called “aunt” and “uncle” only means that some kind of a kinship role is invoked for them.

1.6.4 Conclusion

David Schneider’s work is a cultural account of kinship. Generally kinship has been studied in small scale societies as it was believed that it is the principle of social organisation in these societies. Modern societies were believed to be fee from kinship. Schneider’s work shows the importance of kinship in American society.

1.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

This ethnography familiarises us with the cultural aspects of kinship.

Comparison

It is clear from the above description that kinship relationships play significant role but in different ways in the ordering of social life. Among the Tallensi, the kinship relation is such an irreducible principle that it organises all activities related to food production, consumption, other material goods, reproduction, rearing of children so on, besides bestowing rights, privileges and assigning duties. Agnatic and cognatic elements based on descent and sentiment respectively that constitute the domain of kinship complement each other. The genealogical and kinship relations are so extensive that no individual, either alive or dead, or an event does not fall outside the orbit of kinship. The submergence of the individual’s interest in those of the corporate unit is quite obvious among the Tallensi.
American kinship is not a matter of corporate groups. It is person-centered system. It follows the natural principles of animate world; it is a system of symbols expressed in sexual intercourse, inheritance of biogenetic substance and human reasoning following certain code for conduct. Thus, it belongs to both the spheres of nature and culture. Relatives are defined by their biological interrelationships and appropriate behaviour, and those related by marriage are counted on the basis of code for conduct. Individual’s interests order the domain of kinship.

1.8 SUMMARY

Though a salient feature in any society, it is difficult to achieve an analytical, universal and adequate definition of kinship and its nature, given the diverse practices that are found. The competing descent, alliance and cultural theories are different ways to approach the subject yet they are inadequate as the massive data gathered so far indicate. The studies on kinship though loom less large these days, the key concepts such as selfhood, agency, gender, childhood, personhood, rights, and construction of social categories that emerge from the study of kinship figure in several other contexts. Feminist anthropology can easily be traced to the cross cultural studies of kinship. Similarly, the Marxist anthropology owes a great deal to kinship studies. Presently, anthropologists are looking at the social relationships and kinship terminologies more than biological or jural instead they are concerned with the quality of these relationships embedded in power and processual action, and gendering of bodies into social adulthood in the ordering of the social world.

References


Suggested Reading


Sample Questions

1) Explicate the nature of kinship from the above ethnographies.
2) What are the basic premises on which kinship operates?
3) What are the functions of kinship?
4) How the agnatic and cognatic elements operate in these two societies?
UNIT 2  FAMILY

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Learning Objectives

In this unit, based on two ethnographic accounts the students will be able to understand the:
   ➢ the complexity on which the family is based;
   ➢ peculiar form of family;
   ➢ functioning of the family; and
   ➢ comparative perspective vis-à-vis one’s own family.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The first example in this section is on the Kashmiri Pandits. Written by T.N. Madan, it is a good example of a study that was carried out in one’s own society. In contemporary terms, it is an example of ‘auto-ethnography’; but it may be noted that Madan did not study his own village. He stationed himself in a different village and carried out his study using the standard anthropological methods. Thus, for him, the Kashmiri Pandits were the ‘other culture’. Later, reflecting on his work and his writings on Kashmiri Pandits, Madan says that the frame of mind he adopted was ‘defamiliarisation’, making the familiar things ‘strange’
Kinship, Family and Marriage

and then carrying out its study, in the same way as anthropologists have studied the ‘other cultures’, qualitatively different from their own.

2.2 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY Family and Kinship: A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir IS AN EXAMPLE

This work is a contribution to the understanding of a household process in time. Like in the famous work of Meyer Fortes on the Ashanti and Tallensi of Ghana, Madan also incorporates the element of time in his analysis: how the household changes over a period of time.

2.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

2.3.1 Intellectual Context

*Family and Kinship: A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir*, a pioneering and ethnographically rich account of the Indian family, is considered to be a classic study in Indian anthropology and sociology. It is probably the only study of its kind on the traditional Pandits’ life in rural Kashmir. In this book, Madan made an in-depth study of family and kinship among the Pandits (the Sarasvat Brahmans) of a village called Utrassu – Umanagri in rural south Kashmir. In this work, the author has tried to determine the structure and function of domestic groups, their inter-relations with other groups and how kinship served as a mechanism of organising social activities and coordinating social relations.

Primarily, Madan’s study concentrates on the patrilineal household (*Chulah*) which is the most important kin unit in Pandit society. The book comprises 11 chapters. Several chapters are devoted to the structure and functioning of the household covering such aspects like size and composition, recruitment to the household, economic functions and processes underlying growth and partition.

Madan’s analysis of Kashmiri Pandits reveals that there are no formal social groups or associations and there is a lack of solidarity among them at the village level. They do not act as a social group within the village. The only significant groups found among the Pandits are those based on kinship. Even here patrilineally organised domestic units are significant than affinally related households (non-agnatic cognates). On the other hand kinship institutions have no role in politico-jural functions. Its relevance is largely limited to the domain of domestic relations. A greater part of the study deals with *chulah* (domestic group), *Kotamb* (the extended family and *Kol* (the exogamous patrilineal kind group).

2.3.2 Fieldwork

Madan has consciously chosen to study “one’s own” society in order that anthropology expands its scope from studying ‘primitive’ tribal societies and ‘other’ cultures. Madan took a position that a proper understanding of the subject, is possible firstly by conducting intensive field studies to collect first hand information and analysis of that information.

Fieldwork was conducted from January 1957 to January 1958 in Utrassu – Umanagri. He made brief week long visits to five other villages. Utrassu-
Umanagri was selected due to its representativeness of other rural Kashmiri villages, its relative isolation, unaffected by disturbances and the presence of sufficiently large number of Pandit population and households. Because of its representative feature, the results of this study hold good for family system among Brahmans of rural Kashmir.

2.3.3 Analysis of Data

Madan has employed the following methods for data collection:

a) Sociological census;

b) Interviews;

c) Genealogy, family history and biography and

d) Participant observation.

He employed structural–functional approach in the analysis of the data. Madan held the view that the structural approach fails to take into consideration ‘time’, is not necessarily true, for he felt that defining “social positions in terms of behavioural sequences…. consume time and happen on a time scale” and “relationships” can be conceptualised only from “successive repetitive actions” (p.10).

Basic Premises

Madan elaborately gives a “preamble” to his study emphasizing conceptual background and several analytical premises which shaped the study process right from conceiving the idea, data collection and analysis. Some of these premises are listed below

1) Madan assumes a position that Hindu family and kinship can be studied as separate analytical categories without viewing them as embedded realms in the larger domain of caste and not necessarily equating social structure with that of caste system.

2) Madan opines that too much reliance on Sanskrit texts in the study of caste and kinship has led to “the neglect of the study of Hindu kinship as it is in the villages” and “acted as blight on the growth of field studies” (p.4).

3) Madan holds the view that family and kinship in village India need not be organised and functioning on the basis of scriptures.

4) As the Pandits happen to be only Hindu caste in Kashmir villages, Madan treats caste as a neutral factor.

Pandits of Utrassu – Umanagri: The Community and the Village

The community studied by Madan belongs to Sarasvat Brahmans, one of the two sub-divisions of the Puranic division of Gauda Brahmans of North India. The Sarasvat Brahmans constitute the great majority of native Hindus in Kashmir. They are popularly known as Kashmiri Pandits.

The village studied by Madan is called Utrassu – Umanagri. Located in the Kothar valley in Ananatanag District, it is a bi-nucleated village. The village is inhabited by the Pandits and Muslims only. This study focuses exclusively on the Pandits.
There were 431 homesteads in the village with a population of 2,644 persons of which 59 and 522 were Pandit homesteads and Pandit population respectively. The remaining households belong to the Muslims.

The Kashmiri Pandits

Kashmir Pandits comprised two sub-castes namely the gor (or basha batta) and the karkun. The gor performed priestly activities whereas the karkun have taken up secular occupations. The latter consider themselves superior than the former in the Pandit caste hierarchy. These two sub-divisions came into existence over a period of time by means of occupational specialisation, endogamy and discrimination of social status between the two sub-divisions.

Even though the sub castes and internal divisions within karkun comprise important structural features of the Pandit society, The domestic groups play a major role in their life.

In Pandit society, functionally as well as structurally important groups are:

1) Domestic groups called gare (household) or chulah (hearth group) also identified as household which comprise the former.

2) A wider group comprising Chulahs called kotamb (family, usually extended family).

3) Kol (patrilineage which link the constituent domestic groups- gara/chulah- by the rule of agnatic descent)

These three groups are the important sites for the operation of kinship ties and affinal roles. Pandits kinship ties lay emphasis on agnation. Non-agnatic cognates fall outside one’s own agnatic groups as can be seen in case of howur (wife’s natal family) which remain forever in the category of non-kin. Wife’s conjugal family is also her family of procreation

The Homestead and Household

The pandits call homestead jay which consists of a house with a yard and kitchen garden and one or more out-buildings used as cattle shed, or granary, a shop, etc. Granaries and cattle sheds are also shared by the neighbouring homesteads.

A house of the homestead is called lar - a building which is normally three storeyed and comprise about 12 rooms. The house is inhabited by chulah (household). The number of resident chulahs in a house varies. However, a house can accommodate not more than four chulahs at a time as a typical Pandit house can have a maximum of 4 kitchens and each chulah must have one kitchen. Even though the number of households residing in a house vary, the common type is one household in one house. The variance in the number of households per house is the result of social events like partition, shifting to new or other houses, a rare migration, marriage, etc., which cause increase or decrease in the number of households per houses.

Madan’s interest in studying domestic groups lies in explaining the significance of (1) “the range in the numerical size of the chulah, and (2) the variation in its genealogical structure” (p.58). He applies the development cycle approach based on diachronic data to analyse the above issues.
Madan uses several examples to draw the general characteristics of the household development cycle and possibilities of the structural variations within the household.

1) The Pandit kinship system distinguishes the jural and ritual position of male and female agnates. Patriarchal residence entails jural right on the daughter but not ritual rights. Usually a daughter takes residence in her husband’s house and foregoes her jural and ritual statuses and acquires the right of maintenance. Widowed daughter can return to her natal family and are entitled to the right of maintenance but not to jural or ritual rights. Her ritual rights continue to exist in her deceased husband’s family.

2) Male agnates of the family are coparceners of the ancestral property without any recognition of definite shares as the father is considered the authoritative custodian and as long as he is alive, property remains undivided. Structurally these jural rules are significant in the sense that the family is quite likely for partition once the father dies.

Basing on the above two rules which govern the Pandits family, the emergence of various possible structural family units in the development processes, can be discerned.

The development cycle of household largely depends upon the number of sons (or only one son) and number of daughters or childless widowed daughters. A family survived by only one son, would take a biological course and its subsequent phases depend upon birth and death. If a family is survived by more than one son, partition results though not invariably, leading the brothers to establish separate households. Marriages also lead to the fission of the household. In the absence of sons, adoption also leads to the biological course where subsequent birth, death, marriage, etc., in the descending generations influence the emergence of different family types. If a son is not adopted, the family may perish or the daughter(s) may inherit the property but her/their father’s line of descent comes to an end.

The family composition also changes as the household’s development cycle phases change. Several types of household compositions are seen in the village, of which more popular types are nuclear, fraternal extended family, (siblings, and siblings and first cousins) and paternal extended family. Even though Pandits regard the extended family as ideal, in reality the chulah’s composition is differently constituted. Nevertheless, the data from six villages including Utrassu-Umanagri show that numerically preponderant type is the extended family.

**Recruitment to the household**

It is through birth, adoption, marriage and incorporation that individuals become members of the Pandit household. Membership enables exercise of rights and obligations and facilitates renewal, new roles and individuals into persons. Of the 522 Pandit persons in the village, 71% became members in Pandit society by birth, 25.5% by marriage, 2.5% by adoption and 1% by incorporation.

**Parent-child relationship**

Ideally, parent child relationship is governed by hawalyat (preordination) and command of moral law. It is dharma (moral and religious duty) to beget children
and bring them up and it is again dharma to love and respect one’s parents. This reciprocal relationship ensures continuation of lineage, transfer of property, performing rituals of food offering and libation to their manes, etc. Even though conflicts do occur between parents and children, they are rarely very intensive. Religious rites (for eg. Sharirsamskar rituals for the good of the body) strengthens parent-child relationship. Particularly sons acquire full membership by means of undergoing various rituals (for eg. Mekhal = ritual initiation). Another important ritual is antimasamaskar (last rites). Food offering (shraddha) is performed for one’s lineal ascendants of six generations. This ritual strengthens the bonds between parents and children and ensures continuity of the household. Grandparents, parents and children constitute three important categories of relatives in the household with mutual rights and obligations.

The economic aspects of the household

Madan considers economic aspects of the household in conjunction with its influence on the development cycle. The income sources are multiple to a majority of the Pandit households. Land, salaried employment, wage labour, and trade are the main sources of income. Income from all sources is pooled and held as joint income. Madan writes “to the extent to which individual earnings are not an important part of the household income, the solidarity of the joint household is maintained without much difficulty” (p. 151). An individual earner usually remits a part of his salary/wage to the joint household as a matter of duty and kinship sentiment. There are certain situations where an individual earner willingly continues his membership of the joint household, instead of establishing a separate family at the place of work. However, at some point of time, particularly when the household is in the developmental phase of a fraternal-extended family, the individual earner may refuse to remit salary/wage which leads to household fission.

Household property is jointly owned by the coparceners with equal rights. It is managed by the eldest person (karta) who is the main decision-maker by virtue of his structural position as a lineal ascendant of the other coparceners. The household property is divided when the other members develop difference of opinion between themselves or with the karta. No coparcener has exclusive rights in the joint estate. Therefore each coparcener has no heirs but only survivors who will have joint property right. Property is shared between the coparceners at the time of partition.

Economic conditions have witnessed over time various changes: devaluation of landed property due to land reforms; enrolment as labourers; out-migration to take up employment; increased dependence an individual efforts (to work as employees, labourers, servants, etc.) and cash income. These changes have had implications for the maintenance of household solidarity.

Partition of the household

Ideally, the Pandit society provides appreciation to joint living. When father is alive, his sons rarely embark on partition of the household. Households are prone to divide after the demise of the father. Besides, Pandit household do not expand over and above three generations, as the data indicate. Joint households do not contain “kin more distantly related than first cousins” (p.165). Households with members spanning over three or four generations and kin extension beyond first
cousin are very few in number. Death and partition are the factors that prevent expansion of the above said limits. In a majority of the households, partition take place between married brothers of which one or more brothers had children. Father and son dividing the household is also reported, though rare.

In Pandit society, the son(s) remain subdued under the moral and jural authority of the father. In the event of partition, the father is entitled for a share and also sole right on self-acquired property, whereby the share of the seceding son(s) can be substantially reduced, the consideration which make a son or sons not to opt for partition. There are at least two structural conditions under which a household is quite likely to undergo partition: father’s death and setting up of own household by getting married. However these structural conditions by themselves are not the causes of partition. The major cause is the conflicts that arises between brothers in due course after the death of father and also mother. The eldest son succeeds as head of joint family and his younger brothers may not quite likely accept him in the position of their father and the oldest son is also under the obligation of showing his loyalty to his own wife and children quite contrary to the way father functioned, before his death.

The sisters-in-law also find a situation of confusion regarding their rights and duties in the household. Sometimes partial partitioning occurs where the immovable property is held jointly but the chulah is divided for separate residences and consumption. Conflict between brothers on one hand and one’s bondage with wife and children on the other is usually resolved by partition. However the ties of agnation and territorial proximity bind the households of brothers and patrilineally related cousins.

The Family and the Patrilineage

The natal members of a Pandit household have their patrilineal kin living either in another or other households. All such agnatically tied households are termed Kotamb. It is larger than a small group of closely related members in a Chulah and each Kotamb comprises a grouping of Chulahs.

When partition of the household occurs, over a period of time, the necessity to construct new houses also arises to accommodate the closely related agnates. New houses are usually constructed nearby the ancestral house around the same yard (homestead) or in adjacent yards. Such closeby constructions are necessary in order to use outbuildings, yard, kitchen garden or granary which has usually remained undivided. These newly constructed houses around the ancestral house become a cluster in course of time and become a compound. A compound comprises two to four homesteads (a house with a yard, kitchen garden and outbuildings), of agnatically related households. In course of time, new homesteads also come up adjacent to the previously existing homesteads which together may form a neighbourhood. The homesteads also form into compounds or independent homesteads within the neighbourhood. Households with the same Kotamb name live in compounds and neighbourhood, forming into a unilocal extended family.

Kotamb, sometimes is dispersed in more than one locality (neighbourhood) separated sufficiently so that face-to-face interaction between Kotamb members gets diminished. However, the kotamb members act together in contingent situations like death. Even though they are dispersed, they feel the togetherness
as belonging to the same extended family (Kotamb). Irrespective of how remotely related, the chulahs of agnatically related kin dwelling in a single village constitute one single Kotamb.

The Kotamb members observe ritual pollution when one of their own members is polluted due to an event of birth or death in his house. Distantly related members and dispersed members may not take active association and “regard themselves as belonging to the same Kol (gotra) rather than the same Kotamb” (p.226).

A kol is the widest patrilineal exogamous category. Kol brings out the significance of patrilineage and agnation by providing kinship connections between the households in a Kotamb, notwithstanding the structural connections that marriage, filiation and vicinage generate in the formation of a Kotamb. Kol establishes kin connection between members who are not members of one’s own Chulah or Kotamb but distantly related by virtue of belonging to the same kol of an ego. It is not, however, a structural group like a Chulah but an ad-hoc gathering in a wedding or funeral. Either the Kol or the Kotamb have no role in the politico-jural arena. All the economic, ritual and jural functions falls within the Chulah.

The patrilineal kin are bound together by observing birth and death pollution, Kol exogamy and offering food and water to the manes, which the morality of agnatic kinship enforces. Performing Sharadda is limited to the common sixth lineal male ascendants signifying that the Pandit patrilineage (kol) extends up to six generations of ancestors.

Confining to the above activities, the Kol serves the purpose of sharing and effecting continuity in family life. Kol is a recognisable agnatic kinship category and beyond Kol, the Pandit kinship enters into the domain mythical descent.

The Family and Wide Kinship Structure

Affinity and non-agnatic kin are also fundamental to Pandit kinship though the primacy of agnation never subdues. Pandit kinship is characterised by the presence of three categories of kin namely (1) ego’s affines (2) ego’s agnates and (3) ego’s maternal and other cognates. However these three relationships are maintained as discrete categories by rules of exogamy and preferences in spouse selection. The third category is called matamal which is generally used as one’s mother’s natal chulah. The matamal has special place in the life of the children of its (matamal’s) female agnates, i.e, females who are married into another chulah. It occasionally presents gifts to the young children, though rare, a child whose parents are dead is fostered. Matamal is like a holiday inn to the children of its married female daughters.

2.3.4 Conclusion

Madan has studied the family and kinship of rural Kashmiri Pandits in a village called Utrassu –Umanagri. Pandits’ social organisation and culture remained insulated from the co-residents of Muslims and no other Hindu castes are reported here. The Pandit and the Muslims relations are limited only to economic interactions.

Brahmans of rural Kashmir, as elsewhere lack formal groups, other than kin groups, which instill solidarity and organised action at wider community level. Madan attributes territorial divisions and subtle class formation for these features of Pandit’s society.
The kin groups are the only groups that play major role in organising the Pandit’s life. Kin groups are fundamentally patrilineal groups. A hamlet or a village comprise two or more patrilineal groupings of kin some of whom may be related by affinity or cognatic kinship. However, agnates, affines and non-agnatic cognates do not fuse or associate by means of common interests like joint ownership of property, common hearth, and daily interactions. Patrilineally related kin form into cohesive and functional kin units. However, kin units do not have politico-jural functions on a wider scale beyond one’s own domestic groups. The relevance of kinship institutions is strictly limited to the domain of domestic relations.

The most basic and fundamental kin group in the Pandit society is Chulah or the household. It is based on patrilineal ideology usually characterised by patrivirilocal residence and patrilineal inheritance. The oldest male member of the household is the head. The Chulah may have different member composition giving rise to nuclear family, paternal–extended family or fraternal–extended family depending upon the phase of the development cycle of the households. The Chulah is an estate–holding group, where the natal male members are the coparcenaries.

Worshipping gods and offering oblations to the ancestors of the household constitute an integral function of Chulah. In all the above, the principal of agnation is thrown into relief.

The principal of agnation is applied differently to man and woman. In Pandit society ritual adulthood for a man is conferred in his own natal family. Ritual adulthood is acquired by a woman only after her marriage and it is recognised in conjunction with other members of her conjugal family, however, with limited rights. This way a woman becomes a permanent member of her conjugal family and cease to be a member of her natal family losing her coparcenary rights, save some payments and presents during marriage and periodic/occasional gifts. She is entitled for maintenance if joined her natal family after husband’s bereavement and childlessness. A widow’s residence in her natal family does not entail jural and ritual ties there. These ties are located in her conjugal family even though the widow is no longer its resident.

Pandit’s distinguish zamati (natal members) and amati (in-married members). Due to this division, the women married into the Pandit’s chulah, has only limited rights in her conjugal family. She is not a coparcener of the household estate. However, a woman attains functional importance in running and organizing the affairs of the household.

Agnatically related groupings of Chulahs are called Kotams – an extended family. It is a segmentary grouping emerging owing to partition of Chulah. The Kotamb comprise patrilineal kin living in separate households within the village or neighbouring villages. The Kotamb as such does not own any property in common. As the Chulah increase in size and due to birth, marriage and death, new chulahs emerge but the agnatic relations are kept alive. Joint ownership may exist between two or three Chulahs. The kotamb as one single unit does not have economic or ritual obligations towards its individual members. However, the individual members of Kotamb, an account of proximity of residence or unbroken contact, observe ritual pollution and ritual offerings to manes. In reality active interaction is limited to brothers and first cousins and vicinage strengthen kinship bonds between them.
Wider than Kotamb is the Kol an exogamous category of patrilineage. The linkage between the constituent Chulah’s of the Kotamb is effected by this patrilineage. Kol ties are invoked with distant kin of known genealogical connection but falling outside the chulah or kotamb.

The genealogical knowledge itself does not exceed the limits of fifth degree cousinship as the Pandits do not evince much interest in preserving the kol genealogy. Just as kotamb, the kol also does not have politico–jural functions.

### 2.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

T.N. Madan’s work is one of the most significant work on Indian kinship and family systems. Incorporating the element of time, Madan shows how the Pandit household develops.

### 2.5 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY Himalayan Polyandry: Structure, Functioning and Culture Change – A Field Study of Jaunsar–Bawar IS AN EXAMPLE

The second ethnography of the present unit deals with socio-economic and political life of people inhabiting a small region called Jansuar–Bawar located in lower Himalayas in the North–West corner of the state of Uttar Pradesh (now in the state of Uttarkhand). It provides rich anthropological data on Indo–Aryan speaking Hindus who are the representatives of the Western Pahari culture area. These people are distinguishable from the plains living Hindus linguistically and other cultural practices of which the practice of Polyandry is one.

### 2.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

The book comprises 12 chapters divided between three parts. The first part with 2 chapters is concerned with the region and the sample villages. The second part comprising 7 chapters dealing with various aspects of socio-cultural life like social stratification, kinship, village organisation economy, religion, etc. The last part consisting of three chapters mainly deals with an analysis and evaluation with community development programmes and culture change. Keeping in view the subject of the present unit-2, the discussion in the following pages is mainly limited to “Family”. Other aspects are briefly discussed.

### 2.6.1 Intellectual Context

Majumdar was interested in studying Jaunsar–Bawar region because of the wide prevalence of Polyandry. Majumdar opined that polyandry was widely practiced by the Indo – Aryan settlers in the lower Himalayas rather than attributing it as a feature of the non-Aryan, Dravidian or Tibet people. The polyandrous people are mistakenly ridiculed by their neighbours without any assessment of the possible courses of the origin of polyandry and its continued existence in Jaunsar – Bawar region.
2.6.2 Fieldwork

D.N. Majumdar conducted fieldwork during the autumn of 1937 for two months. However due to high altitude problems, fieldwork could not be conducted continuously over a period of time. However, for the next twenty years, he and his team of investigators and supervisors, conducted fieldwork in Jaunsar-Bawar almost every year for few weeks during summer. Totally, the team stayed in the field for four years and eleven months.

Village census, family genealogies, structured interviews and observation were employed for data collection.

2.6.3 Analysis of Data

Majumdar begins the ethnography of the people of Jaunsar-Bawar by giving an account on the past and present conditions of the region. The region is located in the north-western corner of the State of Undivided Uttar Pradesh, now in the state of Uttarkhand. The region falls in the Tehsil of Chakrata. Jaunsar and Bawar are the two sub-regions, the former forms the lower part and the latter is in the upper part of northern part of the Jaunsar-Bawar region. The region is characteristically mountainous in its terrain.

The region was ruled by the Hill Rajas of Sirmer, Muslim invaders, the Gurkhas and by the British. A local code of common law (Dastur-ul-Amal) was in vogue in Jaunsar–Bawar which was followed to the recent years and also observed to some extent even today.

The population of Jaunsar–Bawar exhibited a trend of continuous increase, though there were minor and major fluctuation between the period 1881 (45,117 persons) and 1951 (58,469 persons). The sex-ratio (females per 100 males) between 1881 and 1951 showed about 20 per cent less than males. The precise reasons are not clearly indicated though infanticide existed in remote past and in recent years the practice was abandoned.

Villages in the Jaunsar–Bawar comprise multi–castes of which only a few familiar castes are seen. The castes fall into three groups namely the high caste group, the intermediate group and the lower caste group. The people of Jaunsar–Bawar have been isolated from people of other areas. However the border areas have been in contact with neighbouring people.

The Jaunsar–Bawar comprised 39 khats (Hill sectors), each containing a number of villages. The khat villages traditionally formed into one unit, for administrative as well as social and ceremonial purposes. Each khat is headed by a leader the khat sayana or Sardar sayana. The khat sayana is responsible to the official administration (Tahsildar and the Patwarism–village revenue collectors) in collecting and remitting revenue. At the village level a goan sayana(s) used to look after the affairs of the village.

The People: Castes

Majumdar studied a population of different castes which belonged to atleast three ethnic types: the Mangoloid; the Indo-Aryan or Mediterranean and the Austric or pre-Dravidian. In Jaunsar-Bawar region, the latter two ethnic groups are reported. The Indo-Aryan group is represented by Rajputs and Brahmin castes.
and the Austric group is represented by the Kolta and other artisan castes. The Rajputs of the lower Himalaya region are known as Khasa. In Jaunsar-Bawar, the Rajput and the Brahmin together are also called the Khasa, probably due to frequent intermarriages between them. However, in this monograph, the term Khasa is used interchangeable for the caste of the Rajputs.

Field Centres

Three villages namely, Lohari, Baila and Lakhamandal – were selected basing on two considerations: representativeness of the culture of the region and suitable size and setting. Lohari and Baila represented the general Jaunsar –Bawar culture and Lakhamandal is selected to understand the cultural influences of the neighbouring Tehri –Garhwal area. The data from the former two villages formed the basis for general understanding of Jaunsari culture while the data from the latter village was used for indicating changes.

The village settlements are characterised by crowded houses, and are distributed basing on caste and lineage. The high castes occupied an open high altitude part of the village. The lower caste Kolta inhabit the lower parts of the rocky slopes or at outskirts of high-caste habitations. The residences of the intermediate artisanal castes are sprinkled, here and there as they are few in numbers, within the main cluster of houses of high castes.

Families belonging to the same lineage (aal) and sub-lineage (bhera) cluster in a common habitat. In the past, each family owned plenty of space around its dwelling so that families separating from the ancestral family could construct new houses nearby. The houses are constructed mainly on the basis of sub-lineage (bherea) and one or more sub-lineages of single lineage (aal) occupy a continuous area or ward. In the same way the sub-lineages of a second lineage occupy a separate area distinctly removed from the first one as a separate ward. However, in each ward there is more than one lineage.

The settlement history shows that even before the Rajputs or Brahmins arrived, the villages were inhabited by artisanal and other lower castes. The latter generally migrate from place to place. Inter marriages between Brahmins and Rajputs are reported whose descendants have grown in number in course of time on account of which the Rajputs have become the dominant caste in Lohari and Baila villages.

Population Composition

The caste composition of all villages is more or less similar except in their number. Rajputs are predominant in Lohari and Baila villages whereas the Brahmins outnumbered other castes in Lakhamandal village. The Kolta is the second largest caste in numbers.

The castes are divided into three strata: (i) the higher castes represented by the Rajput and the Brahmins; (ii) the artisanal or intermediate caste; and (iii) the low caste represented by the Kolta. There was one Sindhi Rajput migrant family and one Gurkha male.

Social Stratification And Caste Hierarchy

Social groups in the three villages are formed on the basis of economic status, professional calling and caste.
**Economic Classes in the Village**

By taking into consideration the size of landholding, strength of livestock, number of houses owned, cash, gold, etc., the people of the three villages are divided into rich, intermediate and poor classes. Rich are generally represented by high castes, though the other two classes are also seen among them. The lower caste Kolta are generally poor and landless, though some rich people (however not comparable with the rich of the high castes) are better-off compared to the poor families in the high castes. Among the artisanal castes, a majority of them belong to the intermediate economic class.

**Professional Classes**

Majumdar used the term professional castes in place of caste occupations in view of the fact that the traditional calling of a caste was no longer the monopoly of specific castes. In other words, certain occupations were practiced by a number of castes.

There are three broad categories of professional classes: Agriculturalists, Artisans and Community servants and free professionals. Agriculturists comprised (a) Zamindars or owner cultivator, (b) owner cultivator-cum-tenant, (c) The tenant or Asami and (d) landless labourers and serf. In the former two classes, the individuals have property rights on land whereas the latter two lack it.

Artisanal group comprises various essential professionals needed in the village such as (a) carpentry and masonry, (b) goldsmiths (c) blacksmiths, (d) barber and tailoring, (e) weaving and (f) leatherwork. Even though there are specialist castes which traditionally identified with a specific caste occupation, other castes are also seen practicing occupations other than one’s own. The following gives the professions and names of the caste traditionally associated with

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste Name</th>
<th>Caste Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Badi</td>
<td>Carpentry and masonry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sunar</td>
<td>Goldsmiths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Lohar</td>
<td>Blacksmiths</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bajgi</td>
<td>Barber and Tailor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Julaha/Garav</td>
<td>Weaving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Koltas/Doms</td>
<td>Leatherwork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the above castes, the Badi, the Bajgi and the Koltas are seen in the field centres and the remaining are seen in other villages in Jaunsar-Bawar.

The third groups of professionals serve in the temples or during ceremonial occasions, or serve as medicinemen, magicians, etc. Some of these services and the associated castes are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Associated Occupations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bajgi</td>
<td>Drummers, messengers or village chowkidar magicians and diviners popularly known as ‘Baki’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Nath/Jagdi</td>
<td>Religious service, traditional sorcerer and Medicineman escorts, Maha Brahmins;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Brahmin</td>
<td>Priest in temples and marriages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the three villages, for the professional castes, including the artisanal castes and community servants, agriculture is the important stay in the form of tenancy or tenancy-cum-own cultivation, whereas their hereditary professions are only secondary.

**Caste Hierarchy**

Castes in the three villages and also in Janusar-Bawar region, are grouped under a three tier hierarchy. The top one comprised high castes (Rajputs and Brahmins), the middle comprised of a number of intermediate castes (Badi, Sunar, Jagdi, Nath, Lohar, Bajgi) and the bottom tier comprised low caste groups (the Kolta and in few other places Dom, Mochi). Caste hierarchy is accepted in the region as a matter of religious sanction.

Majumdar lists three important features of the caste system (p.53-54). The first one is the dominance of the high castes by virtue of land ownership and own-cultivation which helped these castes to strengthen their position by means of numerical preponderance and wealth. The second feature is the presence of low caste Kolta who are inferior to others as they are serfs, leatherworkers and provided their labour to the land owning high castes. The third feature is the marginal importance of the intermediate artisan communities whose numerical strength (in small numbers) is largely determined by the needs of the village communities. Between the artisan castes, the importance of Bajgis is relatively higher as their services as drummers are required in the temples and social ceremonies. To conclude, the castes in the three field centres are composed of the “stereotyped castes stratified on both economic and socio-religious grounds. These castes are functionally interdependent as well as supplementary to one another” (p.54).

One of the special cultural features of the Jaunsar-Bawar region of the lower Himalayas is the widespread presence of a special type of family which is designated by Majumdar as fraternal polyandrous family. The matriarchal polyandrous family once in existence among the Nayars of Malabar is different from the polyandrous family seen in Jaunsar-Bawar. Among the Nayar, the husbands of a wife are not necessarily related as brothers or by kinship or by consanguinity. In Jaunsar-Bawar, the husbands in the polyandrous family are invariably brothers.

Another special feature of the family here is that a group of brothers are married to one or more number of women who live together as a joint family which Majumdar designated as fraternal polyandrous joint family or simply polygynandrous family.

**Structural Features of Typical Family**

Family system discussed in the ethnography refers mainly to that of Rajputs and the Brahmins of Lohari and Baila villages which represent the traditional pattern in the Jaunsar-Bawar. In case of Lakhamandal, the family system is influenced by the neighbouring Tehri-Garhwar region and hence considered only to highlight certain distinctive features.

A family in Jaunsar-Bawar is characterised by “patrilocal residence, patrilineal descent, patronymic designation and patriarchal authority” (p.71). Characteristically a Rajput and a Brahmin family is a joint family. It is “a union of all male members of all living generations, in the patrilineal line of descent,
along with their wives and their unmarried sisters and daughters” (p.71). However, this joint family is quite different from the Hindu joint family reported elsewhere in India. In the latter case, each adult is married to a woman and all such married males live together in a single compound. In the case of Jaunsari joint family all brothers are married to one or more women. It is the eldest brother who marries a woman or successively several women. It is through him that his brothers also become husbands to the woman or women whom the elder brother married. In other words, “all the brothers form an inseparable group as ‘fraternal husbands’ in the name of the eldest brother” (p.72). This form of family is termed by Majumdar as polygynandrous joint family (a group of brothers married successively to more than one woman) rather than as polyandrous family (a group of men married to one single woman).

Another structural feature of the joint family in the Jaunsar-Bawar region is the presence of additional members. Married sisters and married daughters often tend to stay back in their natal families. Because of the practice of child marriage, the girl stays back in her parental family till she attains puberty. In the same way, the divorced or widowed daughters and sisters may return to their natal families. Further, married sister or daughter make frequent visits to the parental home during festivals, etc., and stay for longer periods.

Thus typically a joint family in Jaunsar-Bawar region is composed of brothers, each group of brothers belonging to two or three generations, along with their respective groups of wives, unmarried sisters, daughters, and married or widowed/divorced sisters and daughters. Unmarried brothers and sons are an integral part of the joint family who in course of time are married to the wife of the brother or marry another woman.

However, fraternal polygynandrous joint family is not the only form of family seen among the Jaunsari Hindus. The major forms are polygynandrous, polyandrous, polygynous and monogamous unions.

Majumdar inferred that while polygynandrous marriages are more typical of Jaunsari region, other forms may in course of time result in polygynandrous unions. Other forms emerge owing to divorce, death of wives or division of family.

Polygynandry and polyandry are common among the Rajputs and the Brahmins as well as other lower castes especially in the villages of Baila and Lohari. However in Lakhamandal village, owing to the influence of tehri-Garhwal, monogamy is popular.

As far as the types of family are concerned, Majumdar reports several sub-types among the major forms of families namely polygynandrous, polyandrous, polygynous and monogamous. These sub-types are in a transition stage where in they change from one type to the other in course of time due to death, divorce, division of family, etc.

**Functioning of the Typical Family**

The head of the Jaunsar family is called Sayana. Sayana is usually the senior-most male person – the eldest brother of the members of the senior generation living in the family.
The succession to the office of family headship is based on two criteria: (1) the eligible person should be the eldest; and (2) the person should belong to the senior generation, even if his age is equal to or younger than an eldest person of the next descending generation. Senior-most member is the most respected person and the representative of the family. His command over family affairs is supreme. Even if he has retired due to old age, his word is respected by the acting head—(either his younger brother or eldest son). Even though the wives and children belong to all the brothers, it is the eldest brother who possesses supreme command over all family members.

The family Sayana is not only vested with authority but also has to run the family efficiently. He represents as a manager of the family property, and assigns various works to the family members. He has to protect the interests of the family, represent his family and defend it in village meetings. It is also his duty to ensure cooperation between the family members. As a matter of tradition, the family members have to obey the head of the family and the latter has to exhibit considerable care on the former.

While the family Sayana is the overall in-charge of all family affairs, external as well as internal, it is the senior-most woman, usually the first wife of the Sayana, who is vested with the responsibility of organising household chores by distributing works among womenfolk of the family. She is known as Sayani who enjoys a privileged status among all the other wives. She is respected and regarded as the caretaker of her co-wives. Wives and children are regarded as valuable because of their labour contribution to various household chores and domestic works as well as in agriculture.

Even though the Jaunsari family lays emphasis on jointness, due to differences between women, disputes in division of labour, or when family size has grown beyond manageable level, division of families take place. Property division is arranged as per the preferences of the brothers or father and his son in the village meetings. Women are not entitled to inherit property. However, their maintenance is taken care of by the male persons—either husband(s) or son(s) with whom they wish to stay.

One salient feature of the Joint family in Jaunsar-Bawar is no brother including the family Sayana can claim exclusive right over one or more wives, one or more children, or on land, livestock or other property. All the brothers are considered equivalent. A woman considers all the brothers as her husbands. Children regard all the ‘brothers’ as their father without reckoning real paternity or maternity. This feature binds together all the family members as long as individual members wish to stay in the joint family.

**Family Size**

Given the special type of family system. We can expect that among the Jaunsar’s, the family size would be considerably large. Let us now look into family size.

Of the 160 total numbers of families in the three villages, 50% of families had 1-5 members; about 41% had 6-10 members; 8% had 11-15 members. One family (that of a Rajput family) contained 16 members. Of the 63 families belonging to the Rajput caste about 32% had 1-5 members, about 51% had 6-10 members, about 16% had 11-15 members. Of the 22 families belonging to the Brahmin
caste, about 50% had 1-5 members, 41% had 6-10 members and 9% had 11-15 members.

The Kolta caste comprised 49 families of which 65% had 1-5 members, 33% had 6-10 members and the remaining 2% had 11-15 members.

The family size of the artisan castes was generally small. Of the total number of all artisanal castes of Jagdi, Badi, Bajgi, Nath and Sunar (N=26), 65% had 1-5 members and the remaining 35% had 6-10 members.

From the above data, it may be inferred that the family size of the high caste Rajput and Brahmin is high. For both the Rajput and the Brahmin caste put together, about 37% contained 1-5 members, 48% contained 6-10 members and the remaining 15% had 11-16 members.

High family size among the high castes can be correlated with the wide prevalence of polygynandrous families among these high castes.

**Variations in Family Form**

Fraternal polyandrous marriage and family is regarded as ideal in the Jaunsar-Bawar. There are certain compelling reasons behind this preference. In this subsection, we will concentrate on family forms in three villages. It must be kept in mind that the family form in any society is subjected to development cycle. Due to marriage, birth, death, divorce, division or by the presence or absence of core members (primary kin) or additional relatives (eg. a divorced/widowed sister or daughter), the composition of the family is subjected to change. This results in nuclear families becoming joint families or vice-versa and other types including polyandrous, polygynous form from monogamous family and vice versa.

Majumdar himself recognises this temporality in family composition and the resultant family form. We shall remember that the data for the present account is largely drawn from the villages of Baila and Lakhamandal and refers particularly to the Rajputs (Khasa) and the Brahmin of the former and the Brahmins of the latter. Majumdar opines that Baila being a backward village, it represents Jaunsari tradition of polyandry and polygynandry.

In Baila village, four principle forms of marriage are reported:

1. Polygynandrous,
2. Polyandrous,
3. Polygynous, and

At the village level, of the total 89 marriages, 29 (33%) are polygynandrous marriages, 22 (25%) are polyandrous unions, 8 (9%) are polygynous unions and the remaining unions (30 or 34%) are monogamous. Among the Rajputs, 18 of the 45 unions are polygynandrous (40%), 13 (29%) are polyandrous unions, 2 (4%) are polygynous and the remaining 12 (27%) are monogamous unions. Even among the low castes, polygynandry and polyandry are reported in high frequency. These figures indicate that these two marriage forms are common among the Jaunsaris. In Lohari village 49% of 57 unions were polygynandrous, 12% are polygynous and 39% are monogamous unions. In the case of Lakhamandal village, the frequency of polygynandry is less than that of monogamous unions, a change attributed to frequent separation of brothers and culture contact.

As far as the family type is concerned, Majumdar relies on the data drawn from the Baila village and gives caste-wise quantitative data. The interesting aspect is
the existence of sub-types within each of the major family types. Without going into quantitative details, the following statement provides family types and sub-types.

### Types of Family in Baila Village

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Type of Family</th>
<th>Sub-types</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Polygynandrous</td>
<td>1. Simple polygynandrous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Multi-polygynandrous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Polygynandrous-cum-monogamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Polygynandrous-cum-polyandrous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Polygynandrous-cum-polygynous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Polyandrous</td>
<td>1. Simple polyandrous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Multi polyandrous</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Polyandrous-cum-monogamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Polyandrous-cum-polygynous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Polygynous</td>
<td>1. Simple polygynous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Multi-polygynous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Polygynous-cum-monogamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Monogamous</td>
<td>1. Multi-monogamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Appended monogamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Nuclear monogamous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Broken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Others</td>
<td>1. Single male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The precise composition of the family sub-type listed above is not given in the monograph. However most of the sub-types are self-explanatory. As Majumdar observes (p.77), that “in a joint family of two or three generations, the combinations” produce complicated forms of family types. Further the demographic composition (for eg. a family in which only one male is born without brothers) and personal preferences or situational forces may determine the form of marriage and thereby the family form. Due to these “constraints” a single male in a family has to choose between either monogamy or polygyny. Similarly two more brothers might prefer polyandry or polygynandry together. Sometimes wide age differences between two brothers precludes polygynandry and each of such brothers may choose monogamous marriage though the brothers may live jointly. The student has to keep in mind the difference between the commonly used family terms like nuclear family and joint family and the polygandrous union and the consequent family forms in Jaunsar-Bawar. For this reason, Majumdar takes into consideration the type of marriage unions for classifying families, instead of taking family composition.
2.6.4 Conclusion

In his work, Majumdar offers several explanations regarding the development and existence of Jaunsari polygynandrous joint family.

Firstly, the Jaunsari agriculture is extremely arduous given the geophysical conditions of the local mountainous terrain with steep hills and deep gorges. The terrain is characterised by the following features:

Availability of agricultural land is highly limited; lands are located far away from the village sites; The terrain is subjected to landslides, floods, heavy rains, lack of suitable irrigation facilities. At suitable localities, irrigation canals are to be constructed over long distances. The canals are subjected to damage by huge boulders brought down by flooding rivers; lands at lower slopes need to be terraced with great care and fortification lest the terraces collapse and landsliding destroys terraces; cultivating un-terraced and un-irrigated fields (Khil cultivation) require cutting and burning grasses and shrubs which is very tedious; Khil cultivation causes disintegration of hill slides resulting in landslides and hence frequent fallowing; inter village disputes on sharing water from a single source; the necessity to build cattle-cum-residential sheds at the site of agricultural fields, the necessity of some members who have to stay away from the family and to stay at the field. High altitude variation (between 2,500 feet to 9,000 feet) imposes restriction on the crop cultivated; hence rice cannot be cultivated at high altitudes due to the difficulty of supplying water to the fields.

There are several other problems associated with high altitude agriculture, which involve various arduous tasks.

The above account can be conveniently divided into two categories; (1) scarcity of agricultural land and (2) requirement of additional lands to practice cultivation which is constrained by many problems listed above. The above two problems, in turn necessitates an adaptation wherein, it is required that the family landholding be kept undivided and that the family has to equip itself with the necessary number of persons to meet the heavy labour requirement. The Jaunsaris, as Majumdar indicated, found that the polygynandrous family is the answer to meet the above two conditions.

By means of polygynandrous joint family, the land property can be kept undivided as well as meet the labour requirements. Multiple marriages in various ways, ensures this requirements.

If families separate frequently, the landholding would shrink to unviable size. Further the children born are not recognised on the basis of individual father but that of the family itself which reinforces unity. On the other hand, in polygynandrous joint family the eldest brother can bring in an additional wife or wives as and when required in accordance with economic and personal needs of the household and male members of the family. The number of wives could be equal, less or more than the number of males in the family depending upon requirement, convenience, etc.
2.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

Majumdar’s work shows that polyandrous families do not remain so for the entire duration of their life span. They become polygynandrous because of a variety of reasons that have been discussed in this lesson.

2.8 SUMMARY

The two ethnographies discussed in this unit contribute to the understanding of different family types prevalent. The first ethnography by T.N. Madan reflects on the family system in rural Kashmir where emphasis is on the Chulah (household) within a Jay (homestead). While in *Himalayan Polyandry* Majumdar’s focus is the Jaunsari Polygynandrous joint family. Both the works deal in an in-depth analysis of the patterns functioning and changes in the family system.

References


Sample Questions

1) Discuss homestead and household as relevant in a Kashmiri Pandit family.

2) Analysis the functioning of a typical family among the Jaunsaris.
UNIT 3 MARRIAGE

Contents

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   3.3.1 Intellectual Context
   3.3.2 Fieldwork
   3.3.3 Analysis of Data
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3.4 How does the Ethnography Advance our Understanding

3.5 Theoretical Part of which the Ethnography *Himalayan Polyandry: Structure, Functioning and Culture Change: A Field Study of Jaunsar-Bawar* is an Example

3.6 Description of the Ethnography
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3.7 How does the Ethnography Advance our Understanding

3.8 Summary

References

Suggested Reading

Sample Questions

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, you will be able to understand the:

- concept of cross-cousin marriage in South India; and
- polyandry among the Jaunsar-Bawar.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, marriage is an institutional arrangement between persons, generally males and females, who recognise each other as husband and wife or intimate partners. Marriage is a human social institution and assumes some permanence and conformity to societal norms. Anthropologist William Stephens said marriage is (1) a socially legitimate sexual union, begun with (2) a public announcement, undertaken with (3) some idea of performance, and assumed with a more or less explicit (4) marriage contract, which spells out reciprocal obligations between spouses and between spouses and their children (Stephens, 1963). For the most part, these same normative conditions exist today, although many marriage-like relationships are not defined by everyone as socially legitimate, are not begun with any type of announcement, are not entered into
with the idea of permanence, and do not always have clearly defined contracts (written or non-written) as to what behaviours are expected. Thus, debate exists as to whether certain types of intimate relationships (such as among same-sex partners or unmarried cohabiters) are socially and legally recognised as marriages or families.

3.2 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY Notes on Love in a Tamil Family IS AN EXAMPLE

Marriage and alliance have been central topics in ethnographic studies in anthropology and the referred monograph, a profusely illustrated study is a significant contribution to anthropology and south Asian studies. The Dravidian kinship system with its preference for cross-cousin marriage has been the subject of wide anthropological theorising. Cross-cousin marriage is a ‘romantic ideal’ in southern India (Trawick 1996:151). For Tamils, as Thomas Trautman and others show, the whole conceptual structure is as much in the language as in the actual behaviour. An approach proposed by Margaret Trawick is that the pattern itself is something like an art form that is perpetuated as any form of expressive culture; moreover, it creates longings that can never be fulfilled, and so it becomes a web of unrelieved tensions and architecture of conflicting desires that are fundamental in interpersonal relationships of Tamils.

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

3.3.1 Intellectual Context

The monograph by Trawick is a person-centred ethnography in which she has attempted to present the notion of love in social scientific discourse which was not treated as focal theme by earlier social scientists. Emotional love is primarily dealt within the monograph; though it provides deeper insights into kinship patterns, terminologies and bonding in south Indian families. It also explains how ‘relational’ love is an enduring feature of filial interactions.

In the ethnography, Trawick illustrates the lives of women and children in the everyday context of life. The theme of ‘intentional ambiguity’ (p. 40–41) as a means of understanding how multiple strands are woven into everyday life, drawing from experience, mythology, poetry, and most importantly, relationships with others, is drawn up and elaborated. In Trawick’s estimation, ambiguity is a fundamental quality of the Asian psyche. It is assumed to be an inherent part of the belief of the sacred, and is an integral part of the communication system. Issues of relationships between caste groups, which are an integral part of Indian life, are also dealt within the association between the members of the family and their servants, who belong to a lower caste (Sriram and Choudhary, 2004).

In her work, Trawick has weaved together exegesis of an ancient Tamil poem and her fieldwork notes or in other words we can say that she combines classical Tamil poetry with her ethnographic details to analyse emotions and relationships in south India with special emphasis to Tamil families. Trawick is of the opinion that previous ethnographers including idealist structuralists like Levi-Strauss (by way of Louis Dumont) and culturalists like Kenneth David and Stephen Barnett had presented distorted understandings of Tamil family and culture. Here in this
monograph Trawick attempts to remove such shortcomings by rendering the ethnographer’s relationship to her subjects and theoretical framework transparent (Samanta, 1991). Trawick met Pullawar S.R. Themozhiyar (known as ‘Ayya’ in the ethnography) accidently who was a Tamil scholar engaged in lecturing masses about Saiva literature. He introduced Trawick to the epic poem Tirukkovaiyar by Manikkavacakar. It was a love poem replete with metonymy and metaphor. While Trawick was involved in translating the epic, she met the various members of Themozhiyar’s (Ayya) extended family whose members acted as subjects for her study. She lived for a long time in the midst of this extended South Indian family and sought to understand the multiple and mutually shared expressions of anpu —what in English we call love. Often enveloping the author herself, changing her as she inevitably changed her hosts, this family performed before the anthropologist’s eyes the meaning of anpu: through poetry and conversation, through the not always gentle raising of children, through the weaving of kinship tapestries, through erotic exchanges among women, among men, and across the great sexual boundary.

Trawick explains that the first thing this book is about is the way that India both exceeds and shatters Western expectations. Of course there are the stereotypes: India is “more spiritual” than the West, its people “impoverished”, “non-materialistic”, “fatalistic”, and “other-worldly”, its society structured according to a “rigid caste hierarchy”, its women “repressed” and “submissive”, its villagers “tradition-bound” and “past-oriented”, their behaviour ordered by “rituals” and constrained by “rules” of “purity” and “pollution” (p.4-5). The remaining chapters of this book are about exactly what the title says, love in a Tamil family, the family of the man who taught the poem. These chapters describe different aspects of Tamil family life that touch upon love-kinship organisation, child rearing, sexual relations, habits of speaking, rules of behaviour (p. 2). Trawick attempts to highlight those anecdotes focusing upon anpu's expression which are originally baffling for the Western ethnographer (and her readers) – a mother’s cruel provocation of her two-year old to tears, for instance (p.77). Then, by unpacking her informants’ understandings of the ideal forms and expressions of anpu, Trawick renders ‘legible’ those baffling anecdotes of a suddenly less alien culture: a mother’s love expressed through cruelty could be viewed as sowing the seeds for the child’s future happiness (p.104).

This study of anpu (or love) offers extraordinary insight into how familial relationships in South India are expressed and experienced. Her highly original study of an extended family establishes the ideology of love as central to interpreting the tensions and shifting balances between generations and genders. Demonstrating remarkable ease with a range of topics in South Indian scholarship, she shows how anpu illuminates patterns in Tamil poetics, theology, ritual life, cross-cousin marriage, and the raising of children. The book’s engaging style intertwines vivid description, self-disclosure and questioning, and critical analysis of earlier theory. Trawick presents an understanding of culture as performed or constructed in the interaction between the informant and the anthropologist, a refreshing addition to the current critiques on ethnography. She skillfully weaves many strands into a poetic text. Scholars familiar with South Asia will perhaps respond differently to the multiple levels of this book, but all will admire its courage and intelligence. Margaret Trawick treats the most powerful of all emotions, love, with humanity. In the introduction to Divine Passions: On the Social Construction of Emotion in India, Lynch (1990) refers to Trawick’s work
as being ‘a doubled dialogue’ (p. 25; see Trawick, 1990). At one level, an ongoing dialogue with the family is taking place. At a more crucial level, Trawick is in dialogue with herself, trying to explicate, analyse and elucidate the dialogues with the family. It is possible to discern yet another level of communication in the book: that with the reader as she guides her audience to accompany her in the search for the reality as it unfolds before her. This dialogue is carried through till the end with skill and openness. Trawick does not set herself up to judge the people whom she lives with and becomes a part of (Sriram and Choudhary, 2004).

### 3.3.2 Fieldwork

Trawick conducted her fieldwork in three phases, first phase of which was started in 1975 and continued till August 1976. The second phase was in 1980 and then third phase in 1984. Trawick spent long period in the villages of Madras and Madurai while doing her fieldwork in South India.

**The merits of the work are:**

This work by a woman anthropologist, avowedly feminist in that it deals with: “the particular, the private, the affective, and the domestic”, and because it considers the relations between males and females, and children’s experience of these relations, to be largely constitutive of the social order (p. 154).

- A deconstructionist approach forms the theoretical mainstay of Trawick’s interpretation of love (*anpu*). On the premise that “meaning” lies beneath its surface and obvious explanation (Samanta, 1991).

- Trawick seeks to understand *anpu* in terms of what it does, what directions it inspires and takes within her Tamil family. In other words, *anpu*’s meaning is found in its use: “To many people, the informational content of what they say is not nearly as important as the personal relationship they establish in saying it. And this relationship is established largely through indirect, hidden messages, subtle responses to context” (p. 50) (Samanta, 1991).

- Trawick herself says, “...The central topic of this book – in Tamil, *anpu*, in English, “love” is a feeling, and my approach to the study of this feeling has been through feeling. I have tried throughout the course of my research and writing to remain honest, clear-headed, and open-minded, and to follow the dictates of reason and empirical observation in my descriptions and analyses of the events I have sought to comprehend. But I have not attempted to be “objective” in the common sense of this term. I have never pretended to be disinterested or uninvolved in the lives of my informants, and I have never set my own feelings aside. Only by heeding them have I been able to learn the lessons that I try, in this volume, to pass on” (p. 2). Trawick mentions that while searching for “good informants”, she mostly found two kinds (1) scholars who quoted to her from books (2) ordinary folks who couldn’t understand what she wanted to know and were afraid of answering her abstract philosophical questions (p.8).

- She lived with Ayya’s family for extended periods of time, along with her husband and sons. In addition, she carried out open-ended but prearranged interviews with 150 other respondents to supplement the findings from Ayya’s family. However she also reiterates that she never formally interviewed any one in
Themozhiyar’s household. Trawick’s stay in Tamil Nadu with Ayya’s family earlier was not with the intention of studying love and its diverse expressions in India. Her primary interest was Tamil poetry and how it related to everyday life.

- Trawick didn’t use any interpreter to translate the responses of her respondents. Perhaps due to this Trawick was able to get integrated with Themozhiyar’s family. Her familiarity with Tamil would also have helped her understand the nuances emerging from the discourse that she observed and was involved in. As Trawick says (speaking of Ayya’s inability to communicate with others when he visited America, so that she acted as interpreter), ‘I learned the powers of an interpreter, then, and was glad I never had one in India. The temptation to edit things people said to each other was sometimes very great’ (p. 21). It is precisely this feature that produces the consciously dialogical framework.

- However, it appears from the ethnography that Trawick is not an impartial observer; she is very much a part of what is happening around her.

- Also, an important feature of Trawick’s ethnography is that she enters into a dialogical relationship with her subjects; her subjects are not merely informants, but people on an equal footing from whom researcher can also learn.

- When Trawick introduces the family to the readers, she also includes her son and herself in the introduction, a subtle inclusion but a significant stance in the political implication of doing research in the field. This is another thread that is woven in the rendering of her story: the balancing of her position as an obvious outsider who has chosen to mediate the social distance between herself and her field to become closer to the people whose lives she unpackages for the world.

- As a participant observer Trawick attempted to use tape recorder in order to record natural conversations but often found it very difficult. However, she was successful in recording songs sung by labourers who were considered untouchables.

3.3.3 Analysis of Data

The important feature of Tamil society is that Tamils organise their families and larger kin groups into patterned systems. Trawick is of the view that several western scholars have studied such kinship patterns in one way or another. Few explained these abstract patterns just as such as ‘patterns’ without ever having to deal with real people. Others explained such patterns believing that south Indian people create such patterns because they perform some necessary social ‘function’ and they may be understood as objects of artistic appreciation.

In the words of Trawick, “kinship organisation is as much a matter of feeling as it is of thinking, or, it is as much a matter of “affect” and free from “aesthetics” as it is a matter of “cognition” and social “regulation”. Also there exists continuity between abstract patterns of kinship organisation and lived reality of actual people on the ground (Trawick, 1996).

In south Indian kinship system preferred or prescribed cross-cousin marriages are found i.e. (i) a man can marry a woman in the category of his father’s sister’s
daughter (FZD) (patrilateral cross-cousin marriage); (ii) a man can marry mother’s brother’s daughter (MBD) (matrilateral cross-cousin marriage); (iii) in a few cases, a man can marry his own sister’s daughter.

In other words we can say matrilateral cross-cousin marriages are approved and are found in higher frequency but patrilateral cross-cousin marriages are in very less frequency and are disapproved. The Dravidian kinship terminology varies from region to region but within a given region the terminology is same irrespective of above mentioned variants of marriage systems.

An important feature of Dravidian kinship terminology is that its overall semantic structure is uniform throughout South India. Such uniformity or shared semantic structure strongly suggests an ‘ideal’ system of bilateral cross-cousin marriage i.e. two men exchange sisters, their sons also exchange sisters and so on down through the generations, so that the mother’s brother’s daughter and father’s sister’s daughter are the same person.

Trawick (1996: 121) is of the opinion that real life, of course, seldom if ever matches this ideal. She further opines that in Dravidian kinship, three levels of ‘ideal’ versus ‘reality’ exists-

i) Level A is the bilateral marriage ideal indicated by the Dravidian terminology itself.

ii) Level B is preferred marriage pattern of any group which is usually unilateral and only partially fulfills the conditions set by level A.

iii) Level C is set of actual marriages which take place.

Another important feature of Tamil kinship is that without departing from the fundamental pattern of cross-cousin marriage, a particular kindred group (vakaiyara) may opt for matrilateral or patrilateral marriage; patrilocal or matrilocal residence. Here, matrilateral and patrilocal marriages contribute to the solidarity of male and female patriline by allowing all the members of a patriline to remain together within a single household, but become dispersed over separate households. Matrilateral and matrilocal marriages allow for the continuity within a single household of male and female matriline, but patriline are spatially dispersed.

**Approaches to the study of cross-cousin marriages in South India**

The functionalist explanation asserts that the practice of cross-cousin marriage fulfills some social function or human desire and contributes to individual or societal wholeness.

For South Indians, the principle of *kanyadana* is much like the notion of transubstantiation of a woman’s bodily substance to that of her husband at marriage. Both principles align southern praxis with northern ideology but at the same time skew southern praxis in a certain direction. Both principles justify a complete severance of ties between a woman and her natal family at the time of a woman’s marriage; both principles also justify the complete subordination of a married woman to her husband and his family (Trawick, 1996: 138).

The continuity of a kinship strategy such as cross-cousin marriage may be attributed to a dynamic of unresolved tensions and unfulfilled desires as much as to the fulfillment
of some function or the resolution of some conflict. Second, we can see kinship strategies as played out from the emotional habits acquired in early childhood within the domestic family, (Trawick, 1996: 154).

The purpose of getting married, according to village men was to have offspring, heirs (varicu). These were people who would carry on the lineage, take care of one in one’s old age, work the land that one passed on to them, and see that one was properly buried and remembered in yearly rites after one died. Daughters, however much one cared for them, could not contribute to one’s continuity in this way. “They stay with you for ten years and then they are gone,” said a number of fathers. Ironically, the consensus among both male and female parents was that daughters were more loving than sons, if there was any difference at all among them along this dimension. Daughters would welcome their father into the house. They would ask, “Have you eaten?” Sons would just say, “Oh, it’s you.” (Trawick, 1996: 158).

In Tamil marriage, in life it is the girl who is most likely to be separated from her mother, especially while still a child, because marriage is normally virilocal, and girls are younger than boys when they marry. Not only when she is still a child, but when she is a mother, or even a grandmother herself, a woman may still make visits to her natal home, “seeking her mother.” Thus it happened that one young woman, married to her mother’s brother, come to the town of her birth to visit her mother, only to find that their paths had crossed on the way (Trawick, 1996:166). Another feature is that patrilocal marriage contributes to the continuity of the patriline, but it uses a break in the continuity of the martiline, and this break is felt specially keenly by the daughter who is cut off (albeit only partially and temporarily) not only from the mother but from the entire natal home and family. The mother stays in the place she was, and she may have other children to console her, but the daughter has no other mothers. So a daughter may feel herself to be shattered by her marriage. Conversely, a return to the mother’s home may be felt by the daughter as reuniting of herself, with herself. Surely, the break in continuity with the mother is one meaning of the several major myths about females shattered or dismembered as a consequence of marriage of the allied action of males (Trawick, 1996: 167).

In most of Tamil Nadu, however, the brother-sister tie is neither clearly severed at marriage, nor is its emotional priority over other ties translated into social priority. The blood bond remains, and is affectively the strongest bond, but the marital bond is supposed to take precedence over it in cases where the two bonds conflict (Trawick, 1996: 179).

Meanwhile, the nature of the bond between spouses is vague, neither clearly hierarchical nor clearly egalitarian. On the one hand, the ideal of chastity and devotion to the spouse is entirely a female ideal, entailing a wife’s subordination to her husband. On the other hand, it is not unusual to find men espousing a “feminist” point of view on this matter. So for example, one old man, advising a young man on his imminent marriage, told him, “Think that a goddess is entering your home.” On the level of technology, either the male or the female may be regarded as superior, depending upon who is talking, and under what circumstances. In practice an egalitarian household policy appears to be common. When Trawick asked villagers about decision making authority in their households, more than half of both males and females said that husband and wife made them together (Trawick, 1996: 179).
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Within the household, as well as in the domain of paid labour, there was a strong spirit of rivalry between many women and their husbands. Wives would not automatically accept submission, neither would their husbands. Neither was it easy for wives nor husbands to keep out of each other’s way, sharing a household as they did. Consequently their relationship was often disputatious. Nevertheless, at all levels of society, lifelong monogamy and fidelity to the spouse were the ideal, though some honoured this rule in the breach more than did others. Even among members of untouchable castes, who are often reported to be more lax than higher castes as regards marriage rules, divorce was not easy. When a young Paraiyar woman whose husband had deserted her and her children was asked why she did not divorce him and remarry, she replied, “It would bring down the caste.” Others of the community concurred (Trawick, 1996: 180).

3.3.4 Conclusion

The Themozhiyar’s family described by Trawick in the ethnography is characterised by the kinds of kin networks assumed to be typical of Southern India. In many South Indian families, cross-cousin marriage is desirable. This further means that the position of the bride on entry into the family is not as a stranger, as occurs in North Indian families, where this form of marriage is not permitted. Thus, relationships within a marriage are likely to carry the resonance of earlier, comfortable relationships within the natal family. While there is social sanction for cross-cousin marriage, data from actual marriages show that the incidence of such marriages is low (Trautman, 1981).

The phenomenon of mirroring or twinning, patterns of complementarity, dynamic union, connections between Tamil myths and everyday life, sequential contrast, phenomenon of projection/introjections are some important principles which help in maintaining cultural unity and sameness. Trawick indicates that these are certain operating principles functioning towards the solidarity of the family.

Trawick’s methods, which can be seen as unconventional by some, can be of use in the study of families in a cultural context. She has used a certain amount of licence in extrapolating from her observations to linkages in classical literature, and applying her findings to everyday life. Intuition has played a part in her analysis. It requires courage and a great deal of conviction to use this method of studying a culture and, more importantly, of reporting that allows the reader to enter into a dialogical frame with the researcher and the respondents.

Trawick develops a theory of the importance of ambiguity in the life of the Indian and the Tamil in particular. In Trawick’s estimation, ambiguity is a fundamental quality of the Asian psyche and it is assumed to be an inherent part of the belief of the sacred, and is an integral part of the communication system. Also, an understanding of ambiguity is crucial to the understanding of the cultural system. Dynamic union is an integral part of the Dravidian cosmos as reflected in the kinship system and the conscious seeking for affinity as belonging. Trawick makes connections between Tamil myths and everyday life. Just as in myths, events are viewed in sequence, never being seen at the same time to give a complete picture (Sriram & Choudhary, 2004)

3.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

The ethnography Notes on love in a Tamil Family, is a fine contribution to critical
theory. It looks at the aspects of marriage, family and kinship from the perspective of a strong human emotion called love. Her method, which may be unconventional, is most appropriate for the study of emotions and sentiments that bind the family. Trawick has contributed to the development of an indigenous theory of emotional expression.

3.5 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY

Himalayan Polyandry: Structure, Functioning and Culture Change: A Field Study of Jaunsar-Bawar IS AN EXAMPLE

From 1937 until 1960 the late Professor D. N. Majumdar, and his students at Lucknow University worked intermittently among the residents of Jaunsar-Bawar, a small region of the lower Himalayas in the northwest corner of the state of Uttarakhand, India.

3.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

This monograph is a product of field research covering a period of twenty two years in which Majumdar worked in Jaunsar- Bawar almost every year for some weeks during the summer recess. The total period of his stay in the area has been in all four years and eleven months (Majumdar, 1963: ix). The book provides valuable and hitherto unavailable ethnographic data on the Indo-Aryan speaking Hindus who are its subjects. They are called as representatives of the Western Pahari culture area by Grierson / Berreman, distinguishable linguistically and by a number of other features including a widespread incidence of fraternal polyandry. Ethnography examines various aspects related to life of the Jaunsarese and also explains certain crucial parameters of academics of various social institutions prevailing in their society and their importance in the social structure of Jaunsaris. In Jaunsar-Bawar the preferred form of marriage is fraternal polyandry which with the addition of multiple wives is termed “polygynandry” by the author and is the most frequent type of family.

3.6.1 Intellectual Context

The fraternal polyandry of Jaunsar-Bawar in the western Himalayas of India is described in the monograph by examining the domestic groups it creates. The form and composition of these groups vary within the society so that structures commonly associated with the terms monogamy, polygyny, and group marriage, as well as polyandry and polygynandry, occur simultaneously in a community and, over time, in many families. All are manifestations of a single set of principles and beliefs about the nature of marriage, family, and the domestic group. The variations are the result of changes in family composition during its life cycle (the developmental cycle) and in response to circumstantial and optional factors. Generalisations about polyandry, its causes and consequences, can only apply to this society if they encompass the temporal and situational diversity of the domestic group. The developmental cycle of the domestic group explains most of the intra-cultural variation in the Pahari family.

3.6.2 Fieldwork

Majumdar conducted his fieldwork in three villages of Jaunsar- Bawar viz. Lohari,
Baila and Lakhamandal. While selecting these villages a two-fold consideration was kept in mind by Majumdar: firstly, the villages were representative of the culture of the region under study and second the villages were to be of suitable size and setting. Easy rapport with the villagers of these field centres helped them to select these villages (Majumdar, 1963: 29).

- Village Lohari is in Khat Dhanau, and is the biggest constituent village from the point of population as well as cultivation.
- Village Baila is in Khat Bharam and a larger culture area.
- Lakhamandal belongs to Khat Baundar. (Majumdar, 1963: 31).

Trained in Malinowskian tradition of fieldwork, Majumdar and his fellow field workers while exploring for this ethnography have employed popular methods of field research in Anthropology. In the words of Majumdar, “The study of the demographic structure of villages has been made on the basis of the village census and family-wise genealogies. The census is recorded in prescribed forms for families in the area, and the genealogies are taken according to a model designed for the polyandro-polygynous type of family. Besides, certain narrative accounts have been collected through structural interviews with various families and individuals, and general observations have been made with regard to the conditions of the village settlement. Reference data have also been gathered from various official sources and checked with our field findings” (Majumdar, 1963: 32).

### 3.6.3 Analysis of Data

Polyandry, though far more restricted than polygyny, is still being practiced in various parts of the world. From the distribution of polyandry, it appears that it is not a primitive institution. The evolutionists have explained polyandry as an important phase in the development of marriage.

A family among the Jaunsaris, as among the plains people, forms a domestic unit, with patrilocal residence, patrilineal descent, patronymic designation and patriarchal authority. Further, it often takes the form of a joint family which, as found normally among the local Brahmans and Rajputs (Khasas), is a union of all male members of all living generations, in the patrilineal line of descent, along with their wives and their unmarried sisters and daughters. Often there are also the married sisters and daughters who remain in the family before the consummation of marriage or after divorce or on being widowed. Child marriage was also customary. Often a girl’s wedding is celebrated during her infancy, but she remains at her father’s home till her puberty. It is also a custom that a married sister or daughter, even after consummation of marriage, frequently returns and stays in the parental home for months, though she is not a member of the family. The polyandrous family of Jaunsar-Bawar differs from that of other parts of Uttar Pradesh. The nuclear family is not as stable as we find in a monogamous society; the wives are not permanent members of the family. During festivals and on other occasions they go back to their mait or parental village, and divorce is so frequent that seldom does a wife stick to a family for many years. It is in this sense that the family assumes a unilateral character and thus forms the unit of the lineage system (Majumdar, 1963:71-72).

The high castes of Jaunsar-Bawar, Brahmans as well as Rajputs, live in joint families; but what distinguishes the Jaunsari family from the joint family of the Hindus of the plains is the absence of a horizontal joint family. All the brothers marry together, and
have one or more wives in common, instead of having separate wives. In fact, the Jaunsari family system is not only polyandrous but a combination of paternal polyandry and polygyny. All men of each generation who are brothers marry together with one or, as is usually the case, more than one wife (Majumdar, 1963:72).

Traditionally, the eldest brother is the representative of the family, as well as the controller of all the brothers, in matters of marriage and conjugal life. It is he who marries the wife or wives, and it is through him that his brothers have access to the common wives. In principle and in practice, all the brothers form an inseparable group as ‘fraternal husbands’ in the name of the eldest brother. The wives, on the other hand, join the union individually, one after another, in the same way as is usually found in polygynous system, except that the single husband is substituted by the polyandrous group of husbands. This form of marriage may, therefore, better be known as polygynandry, and this union a polygynandrous family unit, instead of being known by the popularly used term ‘polyandrous’ (Majumdar, 1963:72).

As intermarriage between Brahmans and Rajputs is permissible, and as marriage outside the group is tabooed, they constitute a single endogamous group; while each separate group among the Doms constitutes a single endogamous group, arranged in hierarchical order. Again, no man is allowed to marry within the same village. This has given rise to a subtle distinction in the status of a woman; as a ryanti when she is in her husband’s village and as a dhyanti when she goes back to her own village.

Polyandry is a common form of marriage in Jaunsar-Bawar, where all the brothers are the common husbands of a wife or wives and the family therefore is patrilocal and patriarchal. It is the eldest brother who gets married and all others ipso facto become her husbands. But so long as he is in the house they cannot have sexual relations with her under the same roof. The usual practice among other brothers is to follow her to the field, or else, to wait for the eldest brother to be absent from home for some work; since all the management of the household is in his hands he is mostly away. To a married woman all the brothers with whom she has to live are known by a single term khawand, meaning husband. There is no word in Jaunsari terminology to differentiate her relationship with her husband’s brothers. Similarly, all the brothers are called Baba (or father) by the children born out of this polyandrous union. The only distinction that may be drawn between one brother and another by the children is according to the function they perform. The brother who looks after the goats is called Bakrawa-Baba, one who tends sheep as Bhedava-Baba, and the third who looks after the cows as Ghair-Baba. If there is a brother who looks after the buffaloes, he is known as Mohishava-Baba, and so on (Saxena, 1955:28).

It is obvious that the husbands of a woman are always brothers with the same set of fathers, although if their fathers had shared more than one wife among them, all the brothers need not be the sons of the same mother. These brothers may have one wife among them, or they may have two or three wives, or even more, in common. Thus, we may come across a peculiar combination of polyandry and polygyny, termed polygynandry. But nowhere has polyandry been given up even with the plurality of wives. All the wives have to share bed with the eldest brother turn by turn, and so it goes on in the strict order of precedence among all other brothers. A second wife may be taken in if there is great disparity in age between that of the first wife and any other brother. In such cases, either the eldest brother marries again according to custom more for the sake of younger brother or the younger brother himself takes a new bride. But that does not mean that polyandrous relationship ceases. In the former case the eldest brother may have access to the new bride and in the latter case the younger
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brother may retain his sexual relationship with the older wife. A second wife may also be introduced in the family, if the first wife does not give birth to a child within a reasonable limit of time. In this connection it may be mentioned that a barren woman enjoys a very low social status. She may even be supposed to be possessed by a witch and incurs a great social wrath which may end in her being turned out of her husband’s family.

The additional wife is generally a sister of the first one, but sometimes she comes from a different family. In order to avoid quarrels between co-wives a certain ceremony is observed when the newly wedded wife comes into the house. The new wife is made to sit in a corner of the room and the old one sits opposite her. Two elderly women stand by each holding a lighted stick in her hands. The light is held in such a manner that the shadow of one wife does not fall on the other. A third woman joins their hands and each gives the other a silver coin. If there be more than one wife in the house, this ceremony is repeated with each one of them (Saxena, 1955:30).

The senior most woman in the house, usually the first wife of the Sayana, is known as Sayani. She looks after the household matters and makes the domestic assignments among the womenfolk. She is the commander as well as the caretaker of all ryantis (or wives) in the family. Traditionally, a special and privileged status is given to the first among all the wives. She is more respected than her co-wives. All other wives have equal status, but those who have proved their fertility are more favoured by the husbands. Often additional wives are taken for begetting children, though usually the number of wives depends upon the economic condition of the family and the amount of work for women to perform. Women are great assets to their husbands. They not only perform the household work, such as cooking, washing, cleaning, fetching water and rearing of children, but also help their husbands in grazing cattle, collecting fuel, as well as in agricultural operations. They may be helped voluntarily by their daughters and their husbands’ sister or sisters who, generally known as dhyantis, are frequent visitors to the family. However, dhyantis are by tradition not allowed to take part in any hard tasks (Majumdar, 1963:74).

Although the family economy demands the maintenance of a joint unit, division of families does take place occasionally, either among the brothers or between the fathers and sons. It seems that the main causes calling for the division of a family are the quarrels between women, especially when one or more of the husbands take a fancy to one of their common wives. Otherwise, it may result from the division of labour among the family members, especially when the size of the family has grown beyond the desirable limit, and working hands are few. Often one or two of the brothers, with special attachment to one of their wives, may choose to establish a new household, while the rest stay back together until further division of family takes place (Majumdar, 1963:74-75).

Regarding the formation of polygynandrous joint family among the Jaunsaris, Majumdar ascribes it to geo-economic cause, security of family property, a mean of adjustment to their economic means and personal needs as well as it is also considered convenient for companionship. Although joint family system is a dominant feature of the Khasas or the Brahmin society, yet simple or nuclear families are also found. The nuclear families, however, tend to become joint in course of the process that characterises family life among them. Generally speaking, the high caste group maintains a big household and, in general, a more complicated form of family, whereas the lower castes employ simpler forms. Majumdar believes that it is the local geo-economic setting which appears to
have created the complicated form of ‘polygynandrous’ marital union. In a joint family of two or three generations, the combinations different forms of marital union in different generations complicated the issue of the composition and the type of the family (Majumdar, 1963:77).

**Some other characteristic features associated with Jaunsari marriage**

- The girls and boys usually get married mostly at very early age or in other words we can say that age at marriage among Jaunsaris is between 10 to 13 years. The tradition of early age at marriage is associated with Durhonj (equivalent of Gauna of plains of Uttar Pradesh). Betrothal often takes place at a very tender age. Parents decide the fate of the marriage i.e. the boy’s father along with his relatives visits the bride’s house and if some agreement is reached then boy’s father gives an earnest money (bondho/jeodhan) to the girl’s father. In this way betrothal is organized. Kartik, Pausha, Magh, Phalgun and Baisakh are considered auspicious months for marriage.

- After fixing of an auspicious date by Brahmin, one or two days before the fixed date, the bridegroom’s father along with a batch of relatives goes to the bride’s house. The bride’s people show him their herd of goats out of which he selects a few and slaughters them with his own hands. The boy’s father also gives one or two ornaments to the bride and after enjoying a feast his party comes back. A day later the bride (joyolty) is brought to the bridegroom’s house with her dowry (painta) and accompanied by her relatives and other members of her party. The size of her party (jajoria) depends upon the type of the marriage to be celebrated. All the members of Aal are expected in the jojora or marriage party. There are three categories of marriage, but the difference among them is only of degree: (1) **Bewa** - Bride’s party consists of 5-10 persons and there is little or no dowry. It is the simplest form of marriage. (2) **Booe Daudee** - The party consists of 20-30 persons or even more and the dowry is carried by 8-10 persons (paintrus). (3) **Bajdyaa** - This marriage is celebrated among the rich Zamindars and sayanas. The invitation is extended to the whole khut. The bride’s party may consist of 500-2,000 persons, or even more. More than 50 goats are slaughtered on such occasions and ghee, rice and superior wine (phool) are freely served. The dowry is carried by thirty to forty men. In this connection it is interesting to note that it is the bride’s party that goes to the bridegroom’s village and all the ceremonies are gone through under the roof of the bridegroom’s home (Saxena, 1955:33-34).

- The marriage ceremony is quite a simple affair. It consists of a vermilion mark (tilak) being applied to the bride and the bridegroom by the Brahman and then the mother-in-law applies a tilak to the forehead of the bride. Some hymns in the local dialect are also recited by the priest (purot). A tilak is also applied to the head of a he-goat, which is then sacrificed and thus the marriage is announced. But now more elaborate Vedic rites are gradually being observed. Not only are the services of a Brahman priest being availed of, but also seven rounds of the sacred fire (phaira) are performed, and Sanskrit mantras recited as in the case of orthodox Hindu marriages. The bride’s party usually arrives in the evening and the whole marriage ceremony is finished in a very short time not more than half an hour. The guests are then entertained to a big feast and served with the best wine (Saxena, 1955:35).

- However, the impact of education has risen the age at marriage among both boys and girls. Love marriages and inter-caste love marriage are getting common.
• Divorce (*chhoot*) is frequently resorted to due to adultery, disloyalty or even slightest slip on the part of *ryanti*. When a wife is divorced, her parents or the new husband have to pay her former husbands an amount of money, as demanded by them as compensation or *chhoot* or *kheet* (alimony). Remarriages and widow remarriages are also frequently seen now a day.

### 3.6.4 Conclusion

Social organisation of Jaunsaris is based on caste hierarchy. Different Hindu castes, namely, Brahman, Rajput, Badai, Bajgi, Nai, Deor, Lohar, Sonar, Kolta and Nat are there. Clan organisation is not at all elaborate and effective, but village exogamy is. Inter-caste marriages and hypergamous and hypogamous unions do take place. Exclusive polyandry has been modified to some extent, and bipolyandry, polygyny and monogamy are practised. Descent succession, inheritance and residence are reckoned in male line. Family structure is basically polyandrous. The eldest male member is the authority in the family. The Jaunsari polyandry is exclusively fraternal. In case of fraternal polyandry village exogamy is considered important among them. Infant marriage is common but cross-cousin marriage is absent and sexual freedom in some form or other is/was permissible among them. (Mukherjee, 1963) The affinal kin of the Khasas is known as *soga*, which means the affinal relatives or the ‘kindred’, excluding the agnates. The term *soga* has its Hindi equivalent *rishta*, to which reference has been made by many a well-informed Jaunsari informant. The practice of cross-cousin marriage may orient the kinship structure by eliminating the ego’s mother’s cognate, a separate kin group. Due to the customary rules of lineage and village exogamy, the terms *dai* and *soga* have not only their kinship connection, but also their territorial significance. The *sogas* are those outsiders who are related to the speaker by an affinal tie (Majumdar, 1963:97). In between the co-wives, the senior one in order of their marriages is addressed by her junior co-wives as *dadi*, which means ‘elder sister’, whereas in return she addresses others by name, as divorce and remarriage are common features in this society, a newcomer among the co-wives may be older in age than some of the earlier ones. In that case, both of them would address each other as *dadi*. In the term of reference, they refer to each other as *shokh* or by name according to seniority (Majumdar, 1963:102).

It may be added that although there is no ‘preferential marriage’ typified here, the Khasas do prefer to marry with the *soga*, whose family condition is better known to them than those of the non-related caste men (Majumdar, 1963:113). Spouse relationship is the most complicated and most important of all the interpersonal relationships in the Khasa family, in view of its polygynandrous composition. The interrelationship between the spouses should be in the spirit of cooperation and mutual help. However, whatever economic or other importance it may have for the foundation of this family system, a family, as soon as it is established, functions more as an affectionate unit than an economic corporation. There is in the Khasa family much affection and mutual care between the husbands and the wives, as well as between either the co-husbands or the co-wives themselves. Interpersonal jealousy is remarkably absent. In fact, a wife here has a much greater responsibility than that of a monogamous wife, as she has to cater to the needs and satisfaction of all husbands to the same degree, despite her possible liking for or dislike of someone or the other among them. The conjugal relations between husbands and wives are usually cordial, though either side is always on guard against the other, lest his or her partner may go to clandestine
The fraternal co-husbands, on the other hand, share their common wives without quarrel or even bitterness (Majumdar, 1963:125). Strict taboo on marriage among agnates exists, as conveyed by the term baba and kaka used for their paternal uncles in the aal and dai chara, respectively (Majumdar, 1963:126). There is an absence of specific names for the ‘amitate’ and other kin groups and the classificatory use of kinship terms for these kin. It seems that the Khasas are content with a dichotomization of their kin into the dai, who are barred by a taboo from marriage with the Ego, and the soga, with whom Ego’s family has an affinal tie (Majumdar, 1963:128). They remarry widows, practice levirate, sororate and polyandry, recognise divorce as legal, and as against the Hindus of the plains intermarriage between the various Khasa groups is not tabooed and children born of such marriages do not suffer any social stigma (Majumdar, 1963:249).

3.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

Majumdar’s work shows that marriage in polyandrous societies has a different meaning and significance in comparison to other societies. One of the social aspects of this work is the change that comes in a polyandrous family and how it becomes polygynandrous.

3.8 SUMMARY

Both the ethnographies discussed in this lesson acquaint us with the institution of marriage in different societies. The ethnographies chosen here are from different parts of India. In one case the focus in on the understanding of love, in a societal context, whilst in the other is how polyandrous societies function.

References


**Suggested Reading**


Trawick, Margaret. 1996. *Notes on love in a Tamil family*. First published in India, Oxford University Press by arrangements with the University of California Press. ISBN 0–19-564058-6

**Sample Questions**

1) Discuss how social institutions like marriage influence social structure.

2) Explain cross-cousin marriages in South India with reference to Tamil families.