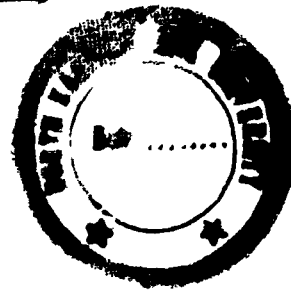


# **THE IMPACT OF CROSS-CULTURAL MARRIAGES ON THE KHASI FAMILY**

**Dissertation**  
submitted in part-fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy in Anthropology

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**1990**

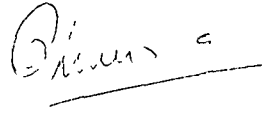
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that MR. ROLAND KHARKRANG, M. Phil student of the Department of Anthropology, NEHU has worked for the thesis 'The Impact of Cross-Cultural marriages on the Khaxi Family' under my supervision. The facts reported by the candidate in his thesis have been duly collected first hand by him and other sources wherever used, have been duly acknowledged.



A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Promode K. Misra', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is positioned to the right of a faint, circular stamp that is partially obscured by the text.

PROFESSOR PROMODE K. MISRA

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Where shall I begin, please Your Majesty?"  
asked the white Rabbit, putting on his spectacles.  
"Begin at the beginning,"  
said the king gravely,  
"and go on till you come to the end; then stop."

(Lewis Carrol, *Alice in Wonderland*)

That is what Professor P.K. Misra, my supervisor, did. It was he who very ably guided me in the formulation of the problem of this study, and supervised it till the time he had to leave for Trinidad in September, 1990. I am grateful to him.

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November 30, 1990

**ROLAND KHARKRANG**

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**Chapter I**

**MARRIAGE IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES**

### **1.1.0 INTRODUCTION**

"To live and to cause to live, to eat food and beget children, these were the primary wants of men in the past, and they will be the primary wants of men in the future as long as the world lasts."<sup>1</sup>

Males and females are the two universal components of that unique human relationship called marriage. All animals mate, but only human beings marry. Thus marriage is a feature only of human societies, and every society makes some regulations and provisions for this relationship between the sexes.

The first chapter intends to examine marriage as a cultural mechanism. Amidst a great number of varying cultural practices, there are certain underlying general principles.

Marriage is basically an exchange of persons who become spouses. This exchange takes place, not haphazardly, but according to definite rules and laws, which, however, are not free from exceptions.

Matriliny, where it is found, is a form of marriage which is riddled with numerous conflicts and difficulties. Various matrilineal groups have evolved different methods to overcome these difficulties; four of such attempts are discussed in this chapter.

The phenomenon of several matrilineal societies turning round about to patriliney, like the Rabbhas, makes one want to enquire into the viability of matriliney today.

Cross-cultural marriages are heterogamous. Depending on the social,

economic, educational or even racial status and the position of the partners, these marriages can be hypo or hypergamous, that is, marrying upwards or downwards.

### **1.2.0 DEFINING MARRIAGE**

Different cultures have developed a variety of marriage arrangements.

i) A situation in which several men obtain both sexual and domestic services from one woman but only one man legitimizes the woman's children, as is the case with the Todas of India.

ii) A situation in which one man has the exclusive access to both the sexual as well as domestic services of several women, as it is among the Yoruba of Western Africa, and among many others.

iii) A situation in which a man has all the rights and obligations of one woman, though virtually none of her children may even be recognized as his, as is the case with the Navaho Indians.

Any definition of marriage has to take all these and several others into consideration. Three key considerations may be pointed out :

1. Recognition of the sexual relations between the sexes (even in the cases of homosexuals and lesbians). Marriage gives primary sexual rights to the partner in marriage, whether or not those rights are exclusive.

2. Marriage is publicly recognized and socially sanctioned. It is formalized differently in different cultures, places and times. It is also entered

upon with some sort of expectation that it endure for some period of time.

3. Marriage brings with it certain other rights and obligations between husband and wife, and through each other, in many cases, even to their kins and clans.

Thus, "marriage is a socially recognized and relatively stable union providing sexual access, legitimizing offspring, and establishing other rights and obligations between the marriage partners and other units of society."<sup>2</sup>

Malinowski regarded marriage as doing two things :

- a) it is "the licensing of parenthood",
- b) it gives "birth-status rights".<sup>3</sup>

### **1.3.0 FUNCTIONS OF MARRIAGE**

Edmund Leach listed the following as the functions of any viable marriage :

1. To establish the legal father of a woman's children.
2. To establish the legal mother of a man's children.
3. To give the husband or his extended family control and rights over a woman's sexual services.
4. To give the wife or her extended family the rights and control over the man's sexual services.
5. To give the husband or his extended family control over the wife's labour power.

6. To give the wife or her extended family control over the husband's labour power.

7. To give the husband or his extended family control over the wife's property.

8. To give the wife or her extended family control over the husband's property.

9. To establish a joint fund of property for the benefit of children.

10. To establish a socially significant relationship between the husband's and the wife's domestic groups.<sup>4</sup>

#### 1.4.0 MARRIAGE AS EXCHANGE

While incest is the very reason for looking for spouses outside the group, it will not in itself suffice to bind groups together over long distances. Some of the persons present in the local groups may not be consanguines. Thus, human groups have gone beyond the norms of incest regulations. They add the rule of exogamy, that is, a norm specifying that marriages occur outside the local group or social groups. Sex is prohibited among family members. Exogamy regulates marriage; it requires a marriage with someone outside the group.

Claude Levi-Strauss argued that the beginning of human society occurred when the men of a group denied themselves sexual rights to women of their own group, that is, the women who were like their own sisters. By seeking mates elsewhere, the men intensified ties of reciprocity that might

have been initiated by feasting or exchange of material goods.

### 1.5.0 RULES OF MARRIAGE

In marriage, the families themselves are in a give-and-take set of relations, one family losing and another gaining a working member; and the common experience is that generally no family loses or gains all the time.

Marriages may be distinguished on grounds of mate selection :

1. Whom one may marry -

a) exogamy - when one chooses his mate from outside one's own group/clan. This serves to be the more general rule.

b) endogamy - when a mate is selected from within one's own group/clan. It appears that among Nepalese, for example, Thapas will marry each other, one Chetri will, as a preferred norm, choose a Chetri for his mate.

2. How many one may marry -

a) monogamy - a one-to-one partnership : This seems to be the more general rule at present.

b) polygamy - a one-to-one-or more relationship :

i) polygyny - one man to two or several women;

ii) polyandry - two or several men to one woman.

A rare combination of polyandry and polygyny is "group marriage"<sup>5</sup> in which sets of men and women enjoy more or less equal and free conjugal

rights over each other. It is said that this form of marriage is indicative of social permissiveness and promiscuity.<sup>6</sup>

### 1.6.0 VARIATIONS

Polygamy is said to have its variations in levirate and sororate. Levirate, when it is practised, it coincides with patrilineal descent, and patrilineal or virilocal residence. It is more prevalent in the Middle East even till date. Levirate may include claims to brother's property and in some cases, even of the father. The son may even inherit his father's wives, excepting his own mother.

Levirate provides for security of the widow and her children or one's brother's and it is a way for the husband's family to maintain their rights over the sexuality of the woman and over her future children. It preserves the bonds that have been already established.

Evans-Pritchard gives a variation of Levirate called "ghost marriages"<sup>7</sup> which is practised among the Nuer. The brother of a man who dies without children could actually marry his dead brother's wife "to the name of" his brother. The offspring resulting from the union are regarded as children of the dead man, and thus, as his heirs.

Among the Kedara of Northern Nigeria, a man may be required to marry the widow of his elder brother and even the widow of his father's father (M.G. Smith<sup>8</sup>), the former being the most frequent. In reality, however, the second situation would occur only when the father's father left no survi-

ving junior sibling, and there is no one else left to look after and provide for the widow.

Levirate, then, wherever it is practised, fulfils either or both of the two functions : a) to raise children to the deceased brother, b) to provide for the widow.

Sororate, on the other hand, has been believed to be complementary to levirate. It usually occurs when the woman given to a man is barren or dies without leaving an issue. In either or both of such cases, the woman's family is obliged to give the man another girl or woman as wife.

Sororate also is found in patrilineal and patrilocal societies. It may also become polygynous. If the women are consanguineal sisters, the practice is known as sororal polygyny. If a woman dies, her family may be expected to provide a replacement, especially if the man and his kin group provided a sizeable brideswealth at the time of marriage.

Miller and Weitz (1979) believe that the sororal type is a more common form of polygyny. In marrying one woman, a man may acquire the right to claim her sisters too as his subsequent wives without additional payment or ceremonies. Sisters are believed to get along well also as wives of the same man; this results in their mutual cooperation. This, however, need not be taken as a general rule.

The Baganda tribe of Uganda in the sub-Saharan Africa, practises sororal polygyny, although other unrelated women too may be married to



the same man. A Baganda king can afford hundreds of wives;<sup>9</sup> a chief may have dozens of them; even the most modest commoners may have 2, 3 or 4 wives, depending upon their wealth.

In such cases, a wife is considered an economic asset, since the fruits of her labour go to her husband. Moreover, a wife can have a very heavy work-load, and may gladly welcome additional spouses for her husband, especially if she is the first or second wife, since, generally, the first or second wife, has higher status.

The wide dispersal of polygyny among the Baganda was made possible by the high mortality rate among Baganda males. Contrary to female infanticide among the Todas, in chiefly families of the Baganda, male infants were often killed at birth. Once the successor to the throne had been chosen, the princes of the royal house were put to death. The king arbitrarily killed male retainers and servants who displeased him. Males, never females, were taken in great numbers to be sacrificed to the gods at appropriate ceremonies; and great numbers of men were killed in the annual wars with the neighbours. Added to this, large number of women taken as booty in war expeditions, tilted the sex ratio in favour of the females by one is to three.

There seems to be some causal relationship between fertility and the practice of polygyny. On 23-2-90, the BBC quoted a certain professor from Colorado who said that polygyny is declining because of the increase in fertility.

### 1.6.1 Polyandry

Polyandrous marriages are much rarer than polygyny; however, instances are not lacking. Bourguignon and Greenbaum sample (1973)<sup>10</sup> contained four instances; two of them are the Todas of Southern India, and the Sinhalese of Sri Lanka.

The Todas are a people of Southern India. They are a colourful people who offer anthropology a typical example of a type of polyandry called fraternal polyandry, which prescribes that when a woman marries a man she becomes, in theory as well as for all practical purposes, the wife of all his brothers, both the living as well as those as yet unborn. Frequently such marriages occurred and a set of brothers (or even clan brothers<sup>11</sup>) with but one wife, lived together in a single hut. There was little jealousy or friction. When one of the brothers was with the wife, he placed his mantle and staff outside the hut as a warning to the rest not to come. Seeing the wife's first pregnancy, one of the brothers performed over her the "bow and arrow" or the 'pisitt' ceremony, which confers social and legal fatherhood on one husband, usually the eldest brother. The one who performs the ceremony first becomes the father of the first two or three children. At successive pregnancies another husband may perform the bow and arrow ceremony and become the father of the children in those pregnancies and of all the children until another husband performs the rite of bow and arrow.

Once the ceremony is performed the child becomes affiliated to

the clan and the family of their "father". Although social fatherhood is conferred on the eldest, all the brothers are equally regarded as fathers of the child. If a man is asked the name of his father, he usually gives the name of anyone of the brother-fathers, and most often of the one who is more prominent and influential than the rest.

W.H. Rivers was the first to write in detail about the polyandry among the Todas. Some have presumed that this polyandry originally might not have really been fraternal. The increase in the number of women among the Todas is expected to affect the status of polyandry. Actually Rivers had forecasted that monogamy among the Todas would develop out of polyandry through a stage of combined polyandry and polygyny.

As with the Baganda, Toda polyandry is undoubtedly the result of a disproportion in the men-women ratio; in a population of 800 there were about 100 men more than women. This disproportion is owing to the practice of female infanticide. However, it is not clear how widespread this practice was.

It is of interest to note, however, that polyandry remained a preferred form of marriage, even after female infanticide greatly decreased and the disproportion of males to females was approaching near equality. The practice of polyandry then took a somewhat different form. A set of brothers would take two or even more wives instead of just one. But the persistence of the older cultural form was evident even where each brother had a wife, for these wives were clearly considered to be held in common by all the

brothers.

The Nayars of South India present yet another type of polyandry. In their "traditional times"<sup>12</sup> a Nayar woman might contract formal marriages with a number of different men who were not members of the same household.

Panikkar called the Nayar type of polyandry adelphic. When a woman smeared oil on the back of a man, the act was considered a sort of semi-marital gesture as only the wife could perform it. A man could always request his brother to allow his wife to do it. It was allowed by public opinion and the woman was not restrained by the brother who was her husband. The wife of a brother was looked upon as a person to whom one could openly, though not strictly legitimately, pay court. This may indeed suggest an earlier existence of fraternal polyandry.

This privileged intimacy was restricted only to those brothers of the husband who were older than the wife, because a Nayar husband must always be older than the wife.

The Nayar type of polyandry is non-fraternal.

Of course, one should remember that the Nayar society is a Hindu society; it is a caste society. There are many castes among the Nayars. The Nayars are something like the Kshatriyas. Among themselves there used to be constant conflicts. Therefore, most of the youth had to be involved in the defence of or warfare for the village and as such there was no regular marriage among the youth. In each big family called Tarawad, only the eldest

would get married. The wife and children would live with him. This was a regular elaborate marriage called Thalikattu kalyanam.

The thalikettu kalyanam was a ceremony in which a member of the Nayar family generally tied a gold-plated tali or a mangal sutra round the neck of a girl. The husband who was going to have the thalikettu kalyanam became the father of the child. Practically, every woman had, at least one thalikettu kalyanam. Others are Sambandham marriages, a chief characteristic of the (traditional) Nayar matriliney.

In a sambandham marriage, the "husband" is only a visitor ("visiting husband") to his wife's bed and board, but children have no ties with him. Children born of sambandham belonged to the mother. Tarawad was inherited from the mother.

The Sinhalese of Sri Lanka have a form of polyandry which allows two brothers to live together in a household with a common wife. Sinhalese allow both polyandry, and also polygyny, but the first husband must consent to his wife's successive husbands and to her sexual activities with them. Each husband legitimizes the children he has fathered.

Non-fraternal polyandry is found also among the Marquesars of Polynesia. A number of unrelated men join the household of a woman of high status and participate jointly in economic responsibilities and sexual privileges.

In polyandrous societies, paternity is determined differently. The

arrangements are said to be related to economic conditions. For example, among the Todas, women are said to perform minor tasks; it is, therefore, more economical to have more men and less women. The Tibetans, on the other hand, say that all land holding is passed on to sons. In order to avoid fragmentation of it, sons take a common wife.

Although polyandry depends largely on local facts and circumstances, its causes can, to some extent, be generalized as follows :

1. Imbalanced sex ratio, in which there are less women compared to men.

2. Extreme poverty on account of which each man may not be able to support a wife. Brothers specially may then decide and agree to have a common wife.

3. Scarcity of arable land. The family may not wish to divide the little land that belongs to it. Joint ownership is one solution, and fraternal polyandry is one consequence. It is said that Tibetan polyandry arose out of this kind of circumstance.

4. Desire to limit the population.

5. Negative social premium placed on woman from the economic point of view.

6. Desire to maintain and continue the joint family system.

It is clear that the ideal monogamy that seems to be apparently

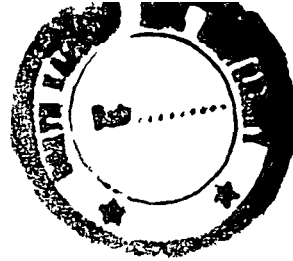
so common, is not shared by all peoples and cultures. In many societies, monogamy is only one possible form of marriage, with polygyny and polyandry as accepted or practical and possible alternatives. Among the Bagandas, for example, monogamy is looked down upon as a poor substitute for polygyny, and is indicative of a low status both racially and economically.

Marriage can be classified also on the consideration of residence patterns.

Where some form of conjugal or extended family is the norm, incest taboos require that at least the husband or the wife must move out to a new household.

Residence patterns are also a matter of territory and density of population which exploits the environment. A certain viable ratio of territory to people is to be delicately maintained in such a way that the environment is neither over utilised nor underutilized. The prototypical form of the local group, such as the patrilocal extended family, consists of brothers and their wives and children. Such a group may attain a size of perhaps twenty or thirty households by including within it, usually as brothers, the male children of father's brothers.

In real life, a purely patrilocal grouping is difficult to maintain. Men may go off to live matrilocally with their wives' local groups. If there is need for manpower, unrelated or distantly related persons may be invited to move in. Thus, even though the model for the local group may be patri-



local or matrilocal, it is much more likely to be eclectic in actual composition than a household.

The terms patrilocal and matrilocal applied to territorial groups such as the household or the local group are intended to describe the situation in which the married couple lives in the father's or in the mother's group. For greater precision, several anthropologists prefer "virilocal" and "uxorilocal" in reference to residence in the husband's or the wife's group respectively. In the virilocal residence, the woman moves in to her husband's and in the uxorilocal, the man moves into his wife's residence.

When a newly married couple resides in any new or independent place they choose, the residence is called "neolocal". If the choice is wither in the husband's group or in the wife's group, residence is "bilocal"; where the couple shifts back and forth between the husband's and the wife's group, residence is "ambilocal".

George P. Murdock proposes a direct correlation between :

1. Virilocality and male centrality in subsistence;
2. Uxorilocality and the need for female cooperation in subsistence;
3. Neolocality and the emphasis of isolation of the nuclear family;
4. Ambilocality and the fluidity of social groupings so that a group can move about freely according to availability of food resources.

Miller and Weitz (1979) make the following distinctions within the concept of residence :



**Patrilocality** : when the couple lives in the groom's or husband's household which is headed by his father.

**Virilocality** : when the bride goes to live with the groom in the vicinity of his origin rather than in the father's household per se.

Similarly,

**Matrilocality** : is a household that is headed by the wife's mother.

**Uxorilocality** : where the groom goes to live with the bride in the vicinity of her kin group or family of origin, rather than in the mother's household per se.

Anthropologists have hit upon further insights. They have computed a kind of correlation between residence and authority and descent.

1. In patrilocal or virilocal residence, authority and descent both at home and in society are centred on the male, in patrilocality on the groom's father, and in virilocality, on the husband over the wife.

2. In matrilocal or uxoriocal residence males retain authority, but the lines of descent and inheritance are traced through the female. Thus males live in the community of their mothers and sisters; therefore, they hold positions of responsibility in the community of origin. Generally, at least in more traditional societies, men do not move too far from their maternal communities. Furthermore, warfare is inconvenient in matrilineal societies.

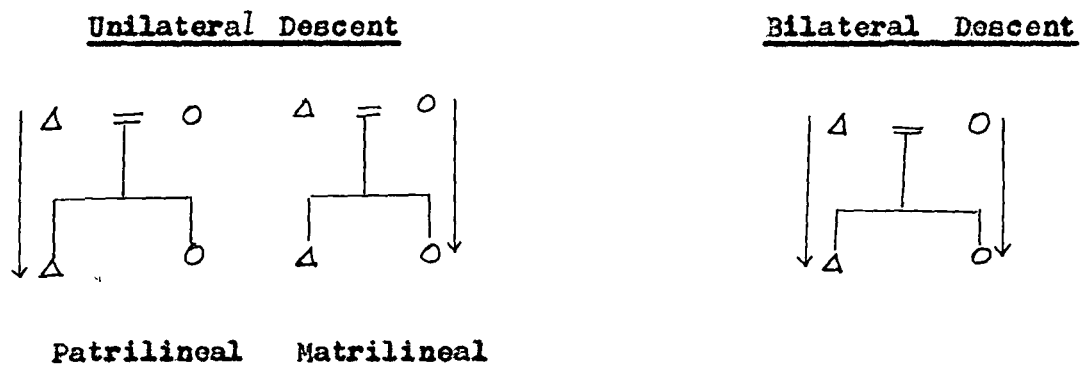
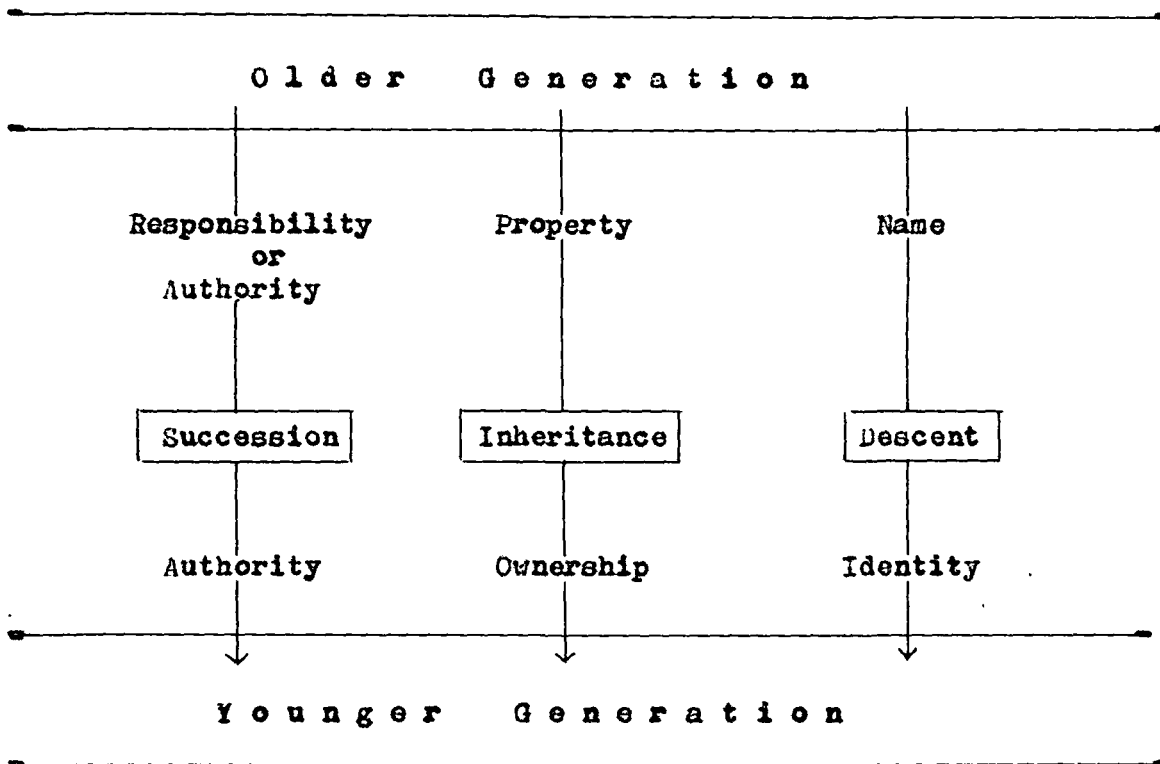


Fig. 1

### **1.7.0 PATRILINEAL DESCENT**

Women, such as the founder's daughters, the founder's son's daughters, belong to the patrilineage. But these women cannot pass on their rights to their offspring.

In patrilineal systems, marriage is of considerable importance. On the other hand, in matrilineal systems, marriage is of less significance and a casual male attachment may accomplish the biological purpose of impregnation. The women who marry into a patrilineage are important to the system, since they produce the heirs that allow the lineage to continue and perpetuate itself.

A patrilineage is exogamous; the men may not impregnate women of their own lineage to produce heirs. But women from other lineages bring with them more than their fecundity; they bring their rights and privileges held in their own patrilineages. The claims they are able to make on the basis of these rights can be significant in a number of fields of activity. In many instances, the marriage of a woman into a man's lineage creates an alliance between her lineage and that of her husband.

### **1.8.0 MATRILINEAL DESCENT**

In matrilineal systems, women must mate with men from groups other than their own. Although inheritance rights are transferred along the female line, authority is vested in the males, in many instances giving brothers

control over their sister's children. "They provide competition to any relationship she may have with a husband, who is an outsider in her family group."<sup>13</sup>

The crucial relationships in a matrilineal system are between the mother and the daughter, brother and sister, and mother's brother (uncle) and the sister's son (nephew). Consequently, the conjugal relationship between the sister and her husband is relatively unimportant, and the matrilineage has little need for the social roles of husband or father. Thus, the biologically necessary male role may be fulfilled as casually as is socially possible.

Patrilineal and matrilineal descent patterns are not simple opposites. Whereas patrilineal descent generally combines residence and authority with the descent group, this patterning of relations is seldom affected in a matrilineal system. Authority relations usually pose a problem. "Matrilineal organization does not necessarily mean high status for women within the matrilineage. Although primary rights and duties are transferred through the female line, authority is often in the males of the matrilineage. Problems arise as a result of the discrepancy between relations of residence and descent, on the one hand, and authority relations on the other".<sup>14</sup>

Matrilineages which are exogamous must establish relationships with men from outside the clan or the lineage in order to reproduce. But the rule of descent keeps rights and duties out of the hands of the males marrying into the group. In matrilineal systems, then, men generally retain power and control within the lineage of their mother and sisters, but inheritance

passes on to their sisters' daughters. Consequently, it is a relationship between a man and his sister's sons on which we must focus. How is the tension resolved? The following are four typical test cases :

#### **1.8.1 The Nayar Case :**

Since the Nayars of Kerala have changed over from matriliney to patriliney, this is a thing of the past, but the solution they evolved is worth examining.

There was at one time no significant marital alliance nor did any significant father-child interaction take place, the father being only the visiting husband. Hence the men of the matrilineage had no divided loyalties. The family home (tarawad) was the centre of the matrilineage. Nayar brothers returned to it after their military service. The women remained there and their children lived with them. The residence pattern is called natalocal, that is, members reside in the household in which they were born. Within the tarawad, the eldest brother was the authority figure. He directs the other members of the household. On occasion, population pressure within the tarawad led to segmentation. However, the sub-lineage maintained close relationships and shared in religious ceremonies.

#### **1.8.2 The Case of the Navaho Indians :**

In the Navaho society, a man went to live with his wife and her matrilineal relatives after marriage. This pattern of residence is called matrilocal. The man's own property and powers remained in the matrili-

neage of his mother and sisters and sisters' children. The senior brother was the head of the matrilineage, and the children of his sisters were the heirs. In such an arrangement, marriage tends to be weak institution. A woman easily divorces a husband who is no longer wanted and then both are free to strike fresh matches. In the case of the Navaho divorce, the man simply returned to his matrilineal home. Evidently, the relationship between the mother and sons, and even more so, between the brothers and sisters, was crucial and it was likely to come in between the sisters and their husbands.

The Navaho matrilocal solution maintains the unity of the females of the lineage. But it does not really solve the problem of male control because the men of the matrilineage are scattered. Most matrilineal descent groups are in fact matrilocal and this arrangement can work fairly well with two provisions :

a) The geographical units should be close so that the men can commute between their homes and their wives', and the homes of their sisters and maternal nephews.

b) The lineage should be relatively weak, with few specific functions to perform and with the ownership of property vested in its women, while men engage themselves in hunting and warfare. If the property and political rights of the matrilineage become significant, the men of the matrilineage would need a more structured connection to the source of the family's power.

### 1.8.3 The Trobriand Solution :

Upon marriage, a woman goes to live with her husband whose home is in the village of his own matrilineage. A village centres around the men of the matrilineage - the mother's brothers and sisters' sons - since the mothers, sisters and daughters live in the village of their husband's families. When a boy reaches puberty, he goes to the village of his mother's brother. This combination of residence with the husband's family (virilocal) and residence with the uncle (avunculocal) results in a community that consists of all males who are matrilineally related along with their wives and dependent children.

The Trobrianders believe that a woman's husband is not an equal procreative partner but simply the "opener of the way" for the child, whom the woman conceives in a "spiritual" manner.<sup>15</sup>

Whereas the Nayers eliminated the husband-father altogether, the Trobrianders minimised his biological role. Both explanations reinforce the matrilineal ideology.

An avunculocal solution, or the viri-avunculocal combinations of the Trobrianders, keep the men of the matrilineage together in order to enable them to wield authority and to control property. At the same time, this solution creates a situation in which a man loses his sisters and his children. Malinowski (1929) reported that as a result of the above arrangement, there was frequent hostility between a man and his wife's brother. The matrilineal problem is not completely resolved by the avunculocal solution. There is

an inevitable conflict between the role of a man as the husband of his wife and as father of his children.

#### 1.8.4 The Toka :

To the typical cases above, we may add the following :

The Toka is a matrilineal group which attempts at reconciling female descent and inheritance with virilocal residence. Notions of descent are sustained by a specific spatial distribution of people. When a Toka man explains the concept of village ownership or membership, he points that one can be a true member of a village if one's mother was born there, irrespective of whether it is her patri- or matrilocality.

After marriage, and after all the brideswealth has been paid, the man takes his wife to his home, so that every Toka is actually born in a village where he is not an owner. It is their attachment to their mother against their father which brings them eventually back to their own village, that is, where their mother was born, usually after the death of their mother, or after she has been divorced.

The lowest status in a village is that of uxorilocal residents. For the man, the ideal post-marital residence is virilocal, because, in uxorilocality, apart from his children, no one is attached to him. Even his children belong solely to their mother, and not to him. A man's situation is even worse if he has his father-in-law living in the same village. He is forced to carry out in full his menial duties and obligations towards his father-in-law, of



which other men are relieved simply because they do not reside uxori locally and with their fathers-in-law. The man becomes the constant butt of jokes and subject of ridicule, and is considered to be nothing better than a slave.

However, uxori local residence is fairly frequent, for the following reasons :

a) As head of the hamlet, the man relies on his own children and possibly on the kinsmen of his children's spouses when building up his hamlet. He tries to keep in it not only his married sons, but also his married daughters and their husbands. He exercises on them whatever pressures he can to make them reside uxori locally for as long as he can.

b) The tendency of the matricentric family to maintain its local unity.

c) Non-payment, in part or in full, of the brideswealth. It is the brideswealth that makes any marriage formal. Only on full payment of it is the man allowed to take his wife to his own village. Till then, he is allowed to live with his wife in her village where he has to cope with various strains, on top of the social disadvantages faced by any man who lives uxori locally. For instance, his children belong solely to his wife and her kin. He has to leave them behind when he chooses to divorce his wife.

Succession follows the matrilineal pattern, and ideally, one's nephew (one's sister's son) succeeds.

The last part in the final mourning ceremony is the division of the

deceased's estate among the inheritors. The things constituting the estate are allocated to individual kinsmen and affines usually by the one who presides over the meeting for choosing the successor.

The successor, his own kinsman, is always the main heir. He inherits his gun (if there is one), spear, axe, the fly-whisk, walking-stick and cap. These things are closely connected with the deceased's personality, and their transfers to the successor symbolises the transfer of his social role to him; there are always the first part of the estate to be given away.

A wife never inherits from her husband, nor he from her. Some grain from the husband's granary is, however, left to her if she does not have enough grain in her own granaries to support herself and her children till the next harvest.

If a woman dies, her daughter usually becomes her main heir.

Thus, the Toka solution is a matrilineal descent coupled with the apparently contradictory element of virilocal residence. The pattern seems to be a compromise between descent, inheritance, and authority.

#### **1.9.0 GENERALIZATIONS ON MATRILINY**

The four solutions to the difficulties of matrilineal systems seem to make it possible for a few generalizations :

1. The matrilineal system emphasizes the relationships between blood-related kins in the lineage - mother-daughter, brother-sister, mother's

brother, sister's son. The men, that is, the sons and brothers, maintain their control over the group's or the clan's affairs and retain authority.

2. In another form, the mother-daughter-sister relationships are emphasized by means of matrilocal residence. The women of the lineage are the property holders, and they provide the continuity of the lineage, as their brothers commute between their home of origin and their conjugal home.

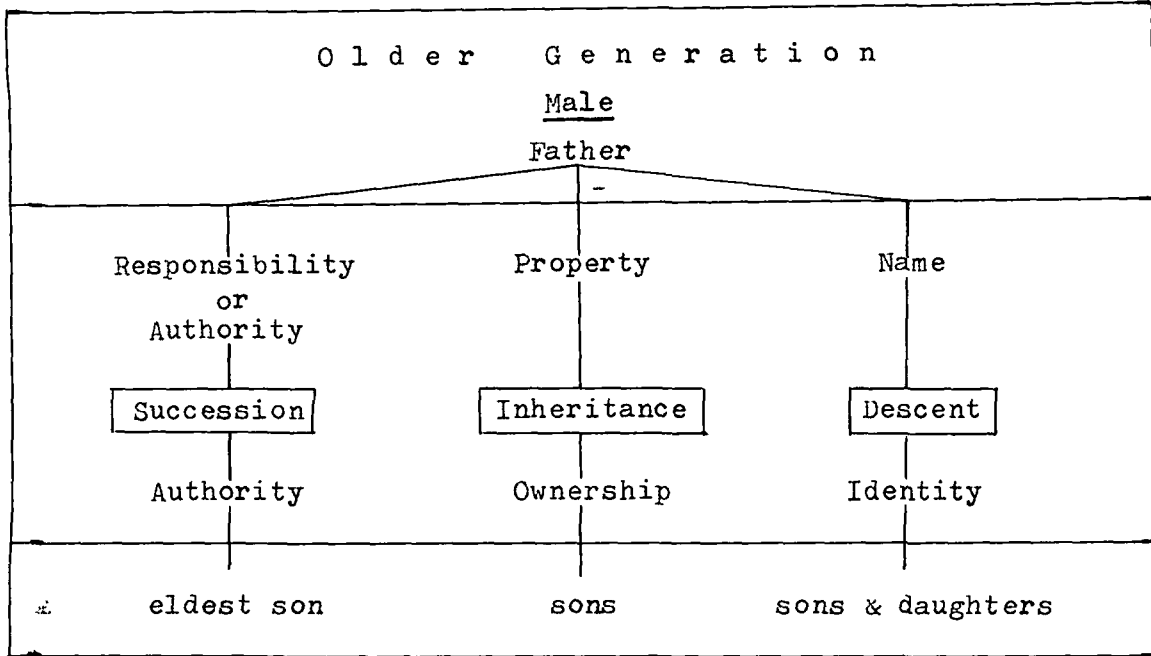
3. In yet another form, the brother-sister-sister's son relationships are central. Avunculocal residence or some other mechanism provides the sister's brother with control over his nephews.

4. Male authority is a very real factor in all the four solutions offered, although it is minimised in the case of the Navaho Indians. In an avunculocal society, such as that of the Trobriand Islanders, the status of the female is indeed very low.

In most societies, political and economic authority is vested primarily, if not totally, in males. The matrilineal system creates conflicts between male authority and female descent. This problem is absent in patrilineal systems in which relations of authority, descent and residence are conveniently combined.

The following figure is a comparative graphic representation of the two systems :

A. Patrilineal System



B. Matrilineal System

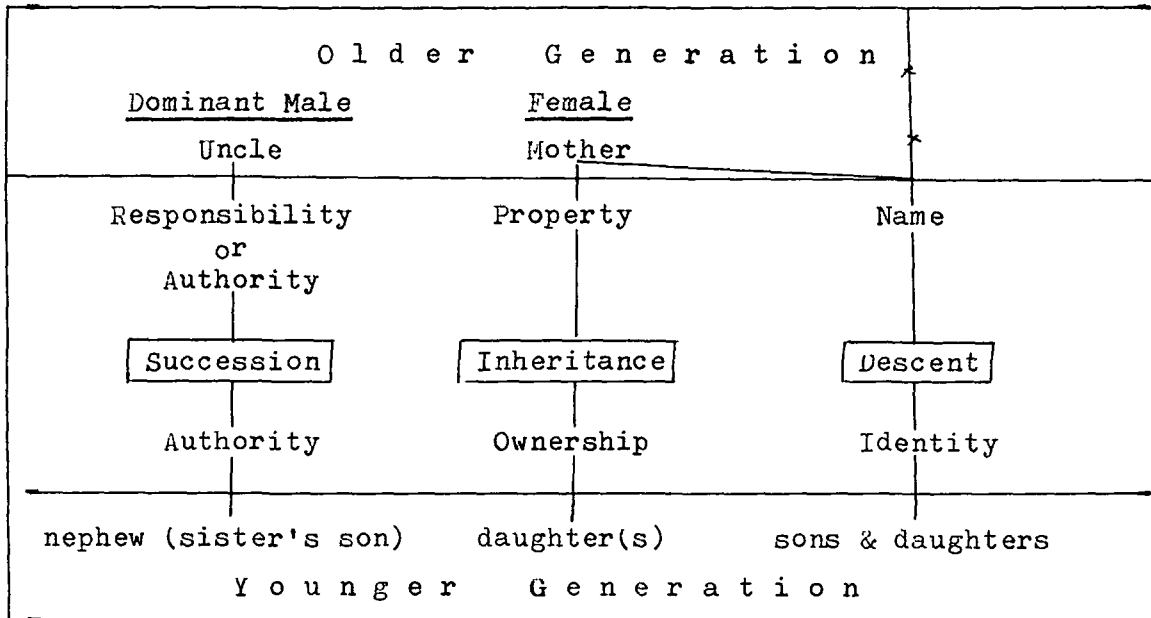


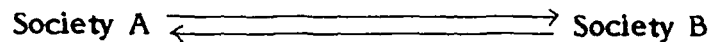
Fig. 2

Patrilineal system has got its own problems; it must lose its sisters and daughters to other groups and the men must secure females from other groups to produce heirs to their lineage.

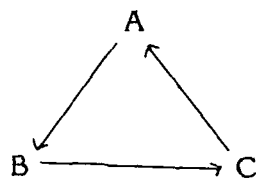
It appears that as compensation for the loss of females, the men of the patrilineage are given complete control or rights over their children. In patriliney, the father-son and brother-brother relations are of supreme importance, but a man's relationship to his wife cannot be ignored. Since only the acquisition of a wife or wives from outside the group makes it possible to have male heirs, marriage is of great significance in patriliney. Marriage also serves to establish alliances between groups that exchange women. This can prove useful in times of need and danger.

Women are circulated in several ways : two ways are graphically represented below:

a) direct or symmetrical exchange, by which two groups simply take wives from one another.



b) indirect or asymmetrical exchange, where women circulate in one direction only.



### 1.10.0 HUSBAND-WIFE INTERACTION IN A MATRILINEAL SYSTEM

In unilineal systems, socially significant relationships established by descent are those of an economic and political nature. This means that in a patrilineal system a son is aligned for political action with, and acquires land and other economic rights through his father and his patrilineal kinsmen. The rights that are established through the mother are not of the same kind as those through the parent of direct descent. A son has jural rights to assistance and support from his patrilineal kinsmen, but may obtain assistance and support from his mother's kinsmen only as an act of grace on their part. Similarly, in a matrilineal system, any child acquires rights through his/her mother and her matrilineal kinsfolk. It can claim assistance and support from his/her matrilineal kinsmen, but may obtain assistance from the father's people only as an act of grace and good will on their part. This implies that marriage in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies serves to determine what sort of rights and responsibilities are apportioned to different types of kinsmen.

The problem of descent in matrilineal societies, however, is somewhat different from that in patrilineal societies. The central problem in patrilineal descent is the uncertainty of paternity, and hence the necessity of institutional devices which unequivocally establish who the father of the child is. This derives from the necessity of determining the vitally important economic and political rights and responsibilities between the child and its father's people. Marriage is the device which achieves this.

In matrilineal societies, the question of paternity takes a different turn. There may indeed be the uncertainty as to who the child's father is. But there can hardly be any doubt about the identity of the mother, and that is all that really matters, since the most important rights and responsibilities are established through the mother. The question of paternity is of far less relevance.

In this sense, marriage is a formal device through which certain rights and responsibilities between defined categories of persons are publicly stated and subjected to control both by public opinion and the courts of law.

#### **1.10.1 Uxorial and Genetrical Rights**

In a marriage relationship we may distinguish between several categories of persons, and several categories of rights and responsibilities. Strictly speaking, we may distinguish between the relationships by marriage between the spouses and those set up by their kinsmen. Marriage brings the kinsmen of the spouses into affinal relationships so that they are required to adopt specific patterns of behaviour towards one another.

Specifically, the rights are clubbed together under two headings: the uxorial rights, which refer to the personal rights and duties of the spouses towards one another, and the genetrical rights, or the rights which an individual spouse, or the groups to which he belongs, may possess or acquire over the wife as the bearer of children.<sup>16</sup>

An important uxorial right is the sexual obligation of the spouses towards one another. From the wife's point of view this is usually expressed as the exclusive access to her by her husband. From the husband's point of view, this usually implies the obligation to beget children. The uxorial rights include the obligation on the part of the husband to support his wife economically, provide her with shelter, and protect her from harm. Likewise, the wife must perform a series of domestic duties for her husband, like cooking his meals, mending his clothes, caring for him when he is ill. By nature, the uxorial rights are the dyadic element in the conjugal relationship, and are personal and individual.

Genetracial rights are the rights over the children from the marriage. The children are affiliated to specific kinship groups. The parents and their kinsfolk are differently implicated in these rights and responsibilities.

In strongly patrilineal groups, rules of incest and exogamy demand that the males acquire formally the child-bearing capacities of women from groups other than their (males') own in order to continue their lineage. This implies that there will be legal arrangements whereby the reproductive capacities of women are transferred from their own groups to those of their husbands. The uxorial rights over the women will be held by a man individually, but the genetracial rights will be held by his lineage as a whole.

Considerations of levirate and sororate seems to fall in place. Levirate is a mechanism by which the uxorial rights on the death of a husband pass on to his younger brother or another man from the husband's lineage. The



rights of the husband's group on the woman's issue remain unaltered. In sororate, the rights over the generative powers of the man pass on to the younger sister of the deceased wife, or to another girl of the dead wife's lineage.

In matrilineal societies, the children are aligned with their mother and her brothers rather than with their father. This means that the genetracial rights of a woman are held in perpetuity by her male matrilineal kinsmen as a group. Whoever the father is her children have primary rights in and responsibilities toward, their mother's matrilineal kinsmen. The relationships between the spouses remain similar to those in patrilineal societies in that they have roughly the same duties vis-a-vis one another.

It seems logical to conclude that in matrilineal societies, marriage transactions establish uxorial rights between husband and wife, and in patrilineal societies, genetracial rights.

#### **1.11.0 WRONG ASSUMPTIONS**

Experience has shown that comparative references to patriliney and matriliney are generally fraught with some wrong basic assumptions. Some of such assumptions are the following :

a) Patriliney and matriliney are not the opposite of each other, but two systems that are different from each other. Or, "the matrilineal system is not a mirror of the patrilineal system; it is a different system in which

complicated mechanisms are involved. This complexity of the matrilineal system is a decided handicap when it comes to resisting radical economic changes."<sup>17</sup> "Though both matrilineal and patrilineal systems may share such basic structural categories, they differ significantly in the following aspects: in matrilineal systems, the ownership of property and the authority over the property group never rest in one person, as in the case of the father/husband of the patrilineal systems, and the succession to these two offices follows the female line (mother-daughter) and the male line (mother's brother-sister's son)".<sup>18</sup>

b) Patriliney is the prevailing system the world over. This does not mean that it is without flaw, especially in India. Apart from what has been said above, patriliney has the tendency to minimise the status of women.

Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born says that "patriarchy is the power of the fathers, a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male ..."<sup>19</sup> And Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy declared : "In India, women are considered to be slaves of men".<sup>20</sup>

c) Nor does it mean that patriliney is theoretically superior to matriliney. To think so is to go against the anthropological tenet of cultural relativism; both systems are a part of two distinct cultures. However, social, existential and political conditions can, in practice, make one more viable, and the other less.

d) A close look at the two graphic representations on page 27 dis-

closes one essential difference between patriliney and matriliney. In patriliney, all the three constituent elements, succession, inheritance and descent, are all vested in the father who passes them on to his sons and daughters. Matriliney, on the other hand, creates a dichotomy among the three constituent elements. Inheritance and descent are vested in the mother who passes on inheritance to all the daughters (only) and descent to all her children. Succession, however, is entrusted to the male (the uncle) who hands it on to his nephews. Apparently, the system has shared out the three constituent elements between male and female.

It follows logically then that patriliney creates the absolutely dominant male, as seen in most parts of India. Where there is the absolutely dominant male, there is patriarchy. Hence, for all practical purposes, patriliney is equivalent to patriarchy. However, there is no true matriarchy. There is only matriliney as there is no absolutely dominant female.<sup>21</sup>

#### 1.12.0 THE PRESENT STATUS OF MATRILINITY

Matriliney is, of course, more than the matrilineal system of inheritance. It is "a total system and consists of the combination of matrilineal ideology and those social actions and relations which are meaningfully informed by it."<sup>22</sup> The matrilineal ideology itself is "a folk-cultural theory of politics and economics,"<sup>23</sup> and consists analytically of three ideational phenomena:

- i) "kinship and descent principle,
- ii) kin categories, and
- iii) associated norms and values".<sup>24</sup>

Transmission of property through inheritance is the practice most obviously informed by, or embodying the matrilineal ideology in that it equates those who have the right to one another's property with those who share common substance. The defining feature is the assignment of individuals to culturally recognized categories whose membership is defined by descent traced through females.

"It is received wisdom that matrilineal systems are more liable to change than patrilineal ones when they are affected by modern economic development through absorption into the capitalistic market system".<sup>25</sup> This argument suggests that a change from production for subsistence to production for exchange is accompanied by the advent of competition for scarce resources, which militates against the wideranging characteristics of matrilineality.

This inevitably leads to the emergence of the individual family "as the key kinship group with respect to residence, economic cooperation, legal responsibility and socialization".<sup>26</sup> When wealth comes to be produced and controlled by the male head of an individual family, and when his own children contribute considerably to its production, it also tends to be passed on to them instead of to those outside the productive group, as is the usual practice under matrilineal inheritance.

The general doctrine of matrilineality seems to be based on some assumptions or presuppositions about the nature of social reality.

1. The first such assumption is that the regulation of economic relations is universally the most important function of a descent group.

The assumption has been challenged on the ground that there is no logical reason to assume that a change in the system of inheritance has invariably to be accompanied by a change in the conceptualization of descent. Some ask: why can men not inherit property from their fathers while considering themselves members of a category of people who are descended in the matrilineal line from a common ancestress? After all, the Tonga and the Minangkabau inherit privately earned property from their father without it affecting the tracing of descent in the matrilineal line.

2. The decline of matrilineality is the notion of the socio-cultural reality as a system of functionally or logically interrelated parts of a system of which the most important ones in this context are the matrilineal ideology or the notion of descent and the practice of the transmission of property through inheritance.

Matrilineality is not only a total system; it is a system that is riddled with contradictions, such as the following, which it perpetually tries to overcome :

a) contradiction between the individual family and the matrilineal descent group;

b) contradiction between marriage and sibling cohesion;<sup>27</sup>

e) contradiction in the allocation of authority resulting in the "matrilineal puzzle"<sup>28</sup> which rests on the division of a man's loyalties between his children and the members of his descent group.

d) more generally, the contradiction is between productive individualism and distributive communalism.

These contradictions make matriliney vulnerable in the face of modern economic developments and the capitalistic market system. Matriliney's inherent inability, upon entry into the capitalistic market system, to resolve these contradictions in favour of matrilineal descent group and its distributive communalism, is ultimately seen as the cause of its demise in the world today.

Since the structural contradiction between the individual family and the descent group has been posited as a characteristic feature of matriliney, the reasons for the weakening of the notion of matrilineal descent are already logically contained in the reasons for the strengthening of the individual or nuclear family. The reasons for the increased importance of the individual family and for the strengthening of the ties between husband and wife and father and children, then become explanations for the decline of the importance of the matrilineal descent group and the weakening of ties among its members. As the ties between the members of the individual family strengthen and gain in importance, the notion of matrilineal descent, through which the unity of the descent group is ideologically expressed is automatically affected negatively.

#### **1.12.1 The Rabhas**

A case in point are the Rabhas, a matrilineal group, spread over vast areas in Cooch Behar and outside. Manish Kumar Raha, who published

a book on the Rabhas (1989), classes them into two groups: the Forest Rabhas and the Village Rabhas. Both are moving towards patriliney from matriliney, but at two different rates with the Forest Rabhas lagging behind.

#### Forest Rabhas

1. Semi-isolated and closed
2. Moving slowly towards patriliney
3. Prevalent uxorilocal residence
4. Property :
  - movable : according to the matrilineal pattern.
  - immovable : from father to daughter's husband.
5. Place higher premium on baby girls.
6. Generally tradition bound

#### Village Rabhas

1. Open and exposed to and interacting with patrilineal groups since 1947, especially with Bangladeshi Hindus and the Rajbansis.
2. Moving very rapidly towards total patriliney.
3. Generally virilocal residence
4. Property :
  - Both movable and immovable according to the patrilineal pattern.
5. Place higher premium on baby boys.
6. Are changing fast.

#### Factors of Change

1. Hinduised and "patriarchalised"<sup>29</sup> by Rajbansis.
2. Rapid development of cash crops and marketing economy.

3. New administration.
4. New legislation, including land reforms.
5. Education and exposure.

#### **1.13.0 THE MARKET STRUCTURE OF MARRIAGE (Intra- and Inter-marriages)**

In a particular type of analysis, marriages may be divided into - preferential marriages and b) free marriage market although in most societies, marriages are negotiated by the elders, rather than freely arranged by the bride and the groom.

Ideal partners are not easy to find, and at the same time the elders are not ready to leave the young people unmarried simply because the preferred spouses do not exist, or are not available. Consequently, rules are sometimes ignored, or men become flexible in their observance of rules.

As a result, negotiations are entered into leading to acceptable marriages. Haggling and market-pattern bargaining become part of the marriage negotiations to see how much each is willing to sacrifice in order to obtain the other as a spouse.

This, indeed, is not always done with an eye on maximising monetary benefits. Instead, elders try to increase their political influence, achieve greater security or maintain relations with long standing friends and allies.

Parents usually see themselves as "seeking the best for their children". Nevertheless, whether in a system of relatively free courtship or one of carefully arranged marriage, people's actions show that they are guided, at least



in part, by an awareness of advantages and disadvantages.

### 1.13.1 Bargaining and Homogamy

It should be emphasized right away that all mate-selection systems, tend towards homogamous marriages, or union between people of about the same class level. One should marry a person of the same religion, race, caste, ethnic and social class.

In the simple supply and demand terms of the market economy, either through enquiries of elders who arrange marriages or through dating, people do find out how valuable they themselves are in the marriage market. They may initially aim higher or lower than other people believe they should, but aim they do. If they aim too high, their success will be less significant; if they aim too low, they will find far more candidates, and learn that they are worth more than they knew. From their friends they come to know whether their choices have been wise. Thus the gradual process of selection moves potential spouses towards others with similarly valued status or qualities.

Homogamy, that is, like marrying like,<sup>30</sup> is also supported by the rules of endogamy, especially because endogamy means simply marrying within the group, such as a religious faith, a caste, a tribe, or even a village. The rules of endogamy are one set of rules by which groups try to maintain their unity. People even exert pressure on one another to marry others like themselves. So homogamy is also achieved partly against some rules of exogamy, for all societies have both kinds of rules. The two sets of rules of exogamy

and endogamy, obviously refer to different kinds of groups. Most of the rules exogamy require that the individuals marry someone 'outside' or 'beyond' certain kinship boundaries, or outside the village. Incest rules, for example, are rules of exogamy, because they forbid a person to marry anyone within the kinship boundary of the immediate family, as well as some members of the kinship network farther out from the family. Where lineages are of important consideration, it is the rule that individuals cannot marry anyone from their own lineage.

All said and done, the value that is attached to various social traits or personal qualities differ widely among societies, and among individuals.

So, a rich woman who marries a lower-class man for his beauty is laughed at, and the young man may be looked upon as an unscrupulous fortune hunter. Such a union is known as a heterogamous marriage, or a union between 'unlikes'. The woman is said to be marrying hypogamously (marrying downwards), and the man, hypergamously (marrying upwards).

Research literature on homogamy and endogamy remind us that partners for marriage are chosen from a pool of eligibles who are much like each other, so that -- the rich seldom marry the poor, the whites seldom marry the blacks, the young seldom marry the old and the educated seldom marry the illiterate or drop-outs. The rules of homogamy apply also to cultural and religious affiliations to a certain extent. Within societies, homogamy and endogamy have the functions of maintaining the status quo and conserving familial and societal values and beliefs.

### 1.13.2 Reasons for Homogamy and Endogamy

Homogamy and endogamy are norms. Societal concerns focus more on variations from norms and on the differences than on the patterns of conformity. Around the world, mate-selection norms tend to grant greater approval to marriages among persons who are similar. The two universal exceptions to homogamy and endogamy are hetero-sexual marriage (male marrying female) and marriage outside the nuclear family (an incest taboo).

The following reasons have been brought up as explanations for homogamy and endogamy.

1) Socialization : It is a process of learning how to interact in society, learning what is correct, preferred, desirable and acceptable, and internalizing the rules, of expectations for behaviour in a given society. Members learn to interact with others in a given social context, usually in a community of family and friends who are very much alike. They learn also to be ethnocentric.

2) Ethnocentrism : This is the attitude and belief that one's own culture is superior to that of others, and one's own beliefs, values and behaviour are more correct than those of the other people. This is crucial to homogamy and endogamy. Preferred mate-selection is, therefore, to marry someone highly similar to oneself, since what one is, and believes and does is about the 'best'.

3) Propinquity : Propinquity is both spatial and temporal. It suggests that people meet and interact with those near them, and both are more likely to be similar to each other. Residential propinquity suggests that people tend to marry those living close to them. Residential propinquity is indicative also of class and status similarity.

4) Pressure from significant and influential people and from groups of reference. Both directly and via more subtle means, parents encourage and exert some pressure on their children to interact with people of their own kind, and discourage and disapprove intimate relationships and marital commitments to persons different from themselves. Extreme pressure is exercised through threats of ostracism, withdrawal of financial support, and the like. "... Brides and grooms tend to find each other within their own social class."<sup>31</sup>

5) Other reasons :

a) Race encourages homogamy, although cross-caste or class and colour intermarriages are on the increase;

b) Size of the group : A group is less likely to maintain its barriers against out-marriages if it is small, but a group can remain exclusive if it is large. That is, within a larger group of eligibles, the individual can find a potential spouse, that is, a person who is like him/herself in respect of wealth, education, economic power, political and social influence, etc. Members of a small group are more willing to allow exogamy or inter-marriages,

because of the shortage of eligibles. Instead larger groups have less reasons for leaving the group.

The outcomes also depend on the strength of in-group solidarity, the social rank of the group and the effectiveness of match-making processes. One observation come to the fore : heterogamous unions increase as the percentage of the population in each group decreases.

c) Religious barriers also divide people into smaller pools of homogamous eligibles.

However, it is doubtful whether religious exogamy is opposed merely on grounds of beliefs alone, or for the many social factors that have become associated with them.

Whoever crosses the cultural barriers are more likely to be those who are weakly attached to their own culture, and are culturally relativistic; and whoever crosses the barriers of one's religion tends to be less convinced of one's own religious commitments and be more eclectic.

### 1.13.3 Conditions supporting Homogamy

1. Class endogamy happens especially among the middle and higher class people. The conditions that support it include the desire to preserve the family inheritance, lineage and status.

2. The conditions that support racial endogamy include concern about offspring, and the rearing of children.

3. Religious endogamy is supported by concerns ranging from a lessening of commitment to the faith or religious group to the religious training of children.

#### 1.13.4 Heterogamy and Exogamy

Peter Blan *et al.* (Heterogeneity and Intermarriage, 1982) illustrate how marriages outside one's own group are caused by smallness of one's group in relation to other groups. In general, factors that foster intermarriages tend to be the factors that appear to be related to higher degrees of marital instability. The religiously less devout appear to be both likely to marry outside their group and more likely to exhibit lower patterns of marital stability.

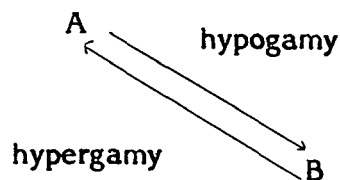
Those who rebel psychologically against their own group, have feelings of alienation. Those who are emotionally unprepared are more likely to marry outside their group and are more likely to exhibit lower pattern of marital stability.

Heterogamy very often begins with hypogamy. For example, a white woman marrying (downwards) a non-white man, or a white man marrying (downwards) a coloured woman. There are primarily two types : a) both parties have rejected the ideology of caste system, and both hold relatively advantageous positions; b) more commonly, a middle or upper-class white man marrying a lower-class white woman.

Analysis on the theoretical likelihood of this type of cross-caste marriage, done by Robert K. Morton, can be summed up in the proposition that in hetero-

gamy, intermarriages or cross-cultural marriages, one partner trade his/her class or economic power for the caste position or social status of the other partner.<sup>32</sup>

In cross-class dating, or in courtship, there is a pattern of bargaining and class influence. In such an instance, the dating pattern is something like the following :



Boys and girls tend to date within the same social class, same school, class, same faith, same or the adjacent age group. In cross-class line dating, boys tend to date girls in a lower social class (perhaps girls who are younger), and girls date upward, a class higher.

When boys date upwards, they are likely to have specially attractive qualities like being an athlete, a class or union leader, etc. to boost their class and enhance their self-image. These are assumed as advantages to offer in exchange for another valued trait. Girls, on the other hand, may trade their beauty, charm or popularity.

**Notes and References**

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2. Miller, E.S. and Weitz, A., 1979, p. 399.
3. Harris, M., 1975, p. 320.
4. Ibid., p. 323.
5. R.L. Beals et al., 1977, p. 391.
6. Ibid., p. 394.
7. In E.S. Miller and G.A. Weitz, 1979, p. 405.
8. Ibid.
9. "As the supreme ruler and the wealthiest in the kingdom, the monarch had hundreds of wives", R.L. Beals et al., 1971, p. 392.
10. R.L. Beals et al., 1977, p. 393.
11. Ibid.
12. R.L. Beals et al., 1977, p. 415.
13. Miller and Weitz, 1979, p. 376.
14. Miller and Weitz, 1979, p. 376.
15. Malinowski (1929), Quoted in Miller and Weitz (1979), p. 378.



16. Good, W.J. (ed.), 1964, p. 110.
17. Nakane, 1967, p. 143.
18. Ibid., p. 142.
19. Quoted by P. Senthilnathan in his "The Curse of Patriarchy", The Week, August 20, 1989, p. 5.
20. Ibid.
21. Broom, L. and Selznick, P., 1977, p. 306.

One cannot afford making the mistake of making 'dominant' into a sociological term and applying it to a few individuals who may be overly assertive. This term is used anthropologically. The graphic representation referred to above gives the meaning. In fact, etymologically, -archy comes from the Greek 'archo' meaning 'to rule', e.g., monarchy means ruled by one, or that all authority is vested in one, who is usually a king.

22. Poewe, K., Matrilineal Ideology: Male-Female Dynamics in Luapula, Zambia. London, Academic Press for the International African Institute, 1981, p. 55.
23. Ibid., p. 54.
24. Ibid., pp. 53-4.
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28. Richards, A.L., "Some types of family structure among the Central Bantu". In Radcliffe Brown, A.R. and D. Forde (eds.), African System of Kinship and Marriage, London, Oxford University Press, 1950.
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30. So far the term homogamy has never been associated with homosexuality. Hence "like marrying like" must be understood in terms other than sexual.
31. Goode, W.J., 1975, p. 35.
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## **Chapter II**

### **FAMILY : THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE**

## **2.1.0 INTRODUCTION**

At the present time, human beings appear to derive as much joy and sorrow from the family as they have always been, and seem as bent as ever on taking part in family life. Family does not seem to be a powerful institution, like the military, the church or the state, but it seems to be the most resistant to conquest and the efforts of people to reshape it. Individual families come and go, but the family system as a whole is tough and resilient.

### **2.1.1 The Centrality of the Family in Society**

In most societies, kinship patterns form the major part of the whole social structure. By contrast, the family is only a small part of the social structure of modern industrial societies. It is nevertheless a key element in them, specifically linking individuals with other social institutions, such as the church, the state, or the economy. The complex modern bureaucracy, the highly organized military system and the advanced technology could never survive without the support of this seemingly primitive agency.

Most importantly it is within the family, that the child is first socialized not only to serve its own needs but also the needs of the society. Socialization at an early age makes most of us wish to conform, though, both children and adults, are often tempted to deviate. The formal state agencies of social control, such as the police, can do no more than force the extreme deviants to conform. What is really needed is a set of social pressures that provide feedback to the individual whenever he/she does well or poorly and thus sup-

port internal control as well as the control of the formal agencies. Family usually takes on this task effectively.

Family, then, is made up of individuals, but it is also a social unit, and part of a larger social network. Families are not isolated self-enclosed social systems. The other institutions of society, such as the military, the church and the educational set up continually rediscover that they are not dealing with individuals, but with members of families. It is through the family that the society is able to elicit from the individual, his/her contribution. Family, in turn, can continue to exist only if it is supported by the larger society.

### **2.1.2 Theoretical Importance of the Family**

Family is the only social institution other than religion that is formally developed in every culture and society. Almost everyone is born into a family and later on in life finds one of his/her own.

Among the more important contributions of family to the larger society are: reproduction of the young, physical maintenance of family members, social placement of the child, socialization, cultural transmission and social control.

### **2.2.0 DEFINING FAMILY**

Family is not a single thing to be captured exhaustively by any verbal formula. The following list is not comprehensive, but it includes most of

the familial relationships :

- 1) At least two adult persons of the opposite sex reside together.
- 2) They engage in some kind of division of labour; that is, they do not perform exactly the same tasks.
- 3) They engage in many types of economic and social exchanges; that is, they do things for one another.
- 4) They share many things in common, such as food, shelter, residence, sex, and social activities.
- 5) The adults have parental relationships with their children, while assuming also some obligation for protection, cooperation and maintenance.
- 6) There are sibling relations among the children themselves with a range of obligations to share, protect, and help one another.

### **2.3.0 ADVANTAGES OF THE FAMILISTIC PACKAGE**

The above list is likely to make one forget that the modern domestic household is very much an economic unit even if it is no longer a farming unit. People are actually producing goods and services for one another. They buy objects in one place and transport them to their household. They transform food into meals. They engage in a wide array of services that would have to be paid for in money if some member of the family did not do them.

All the historic forms of family that we know offer continuity. Thus,

whatever the members produce together is expected to be enjoyed later together. Continuity has several implications. One such implication is that members do not have to bear the costs of continually searching for new partners. In addition, husband and wife, as well as children, enjoy a much longer line of social credit than they would have if they were making exchanges with people outside their family. This means that an individual can give more at one time to someone in the family, knowing that in the long run this will not be a loss as the other person will remain long enough to reciprocate at some point of time.

Another advantage of the familistic mode of living is that it exhibits a very short line of communication. Every one is close by, and members need not communicate through intermediaries. This enables them to respond quickly. A short line of communication makes cooperation quicker and easier. Secondly, within the familistic mode of interaction, members learn and adjust to each other's idiosyncratic needs more easily and surely.

Domestic tasks do not require high skills and expertise, and members learn to do them eventually, and by doing them, they benefit each other.

No other social and human institution offer such a wide range of complementarities, sharing and closely linked, interwoven advantages. It is also supported by widely buttressed norms, laws, and pressures. Members are even punished if they do not conform.

#### 2.4.0 FOUNDATIONS OF FAMILY

Spurred on by a growing body of knowledge about animal behaviour and by spectacular advances in genetics, chemistry and thermal dynamics, some biologists, even non-biologists, speculated on a new synthesis of ideas under the label of sociobiology. The general thesis is that far more of human behaviour is caused by biological forces than it was once believed. This is evidently true; after all, people marry in part because of their sexual drives. Reproduction is a biological process; social training, however, persistent, cannot transform a baby chimpanzee into an adult human being. Biologically, the human infant is helpless, and needs care to survive.

The broader claims of sociobiologists are based on much new research on both human beings and animals. First studies of the social life of animals in their natural habitats have revealed patterns of interaction very close to those of human beings (cooperation, mother's care of infants, adult males' protection of the group, deference, leadership). Since their family life is presumably determined by biology rather than culture, perhaps more of our behaviour is biologically inherited than was thought possible two decades ago. Second, just as the human infant seems to be neurologically 'programmed' or 'wired' for speech, so is it apparently programmed for maximising social interaction with whoever acts as parent. Third, studies of biochemical changes during physical growth, the effects of glandular secretions, and the effect of chemicals on both the mind and social behaviour suggest that the underlying physiological states of the human body shape some of the personality, sex,



role-behaviour and social action. Thus, what was thought to be caused by culture or social experience may instead be caused by biological processes.

The following are the biological factors that determine family behaviour:

1. The dominance of males over females, of husbands over wives.
2. The division of labour between husbands and wives.
3. The feminine role of caring for children, preparing food, and assuming responsibilities for domestic chores.
4. Male initiative in sexual activities, polygyny, and male promiscuity; female coyness, resistance to sexual overtures, and attempts to ensure large male investment in domesticity before agreeing to mate.
5. Sacrificing oneself for a member of the kin group or tribe, even if they are not one's own sons or daughters.
6. Emphasising territory rights, defence of such rights, and war between societies.
7. Male jealousy.
8. Rules against incest.
9. The organisation of males into dyads or larger groups - male bonding.
10. Willingness to kill other human beings, or engage in war.

Human family patterns are surely determined in part by the peculiar task imposed on them; it is the only social institution charged with transforming a biological organism into a human, cultural being. On the other

hand, this very special kind of animal is the result of millions of years of evolutionary development. The human animal and its culture have been adapting to each other for at least three to five million years.

More precisely, it is likely that human biological patterns adjusted long ago to something unique in the history of the world: environment and cultural problems began to be solved mainly by social and cultural innovations (stone tools, sharper arrowhead), and not by genetic changes that carried in themselves solutions in an automatic biological response (the infant monkey's ability to cling to its mother when she moved about through the trees).

#### **2.5.0 THE INTERACTION BETWEEN BIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS**

Human beings depend much more on learning culture than any other animal, and they cannot develop normally without social contacts. Family is then the cultural invention of man that copes with the task of transforming a biological potential into a human, cultural being. Most of the initial learning takes place in the family and that is where the infant experiences the social interaction that furnished the content of learning. What the family does, how it operates and how much it achieves, tells us something about the contribution or the strain created by the physical qualities of human beings when they are pressed into the cultural mould. Both sets of factors interact with one another in complex ways, sometimes in harmony, at other times in great tension.

Indeed, both impose limits upon each other. One simple limitation that

human organic traits place on culture and family is that the society cannot ask the biologically impossible from its members. So, for example, a certain religious system may define some people of a tribe as members of the Tiger totem. But whatever the effectiveness of the religious ceremonies and whatever the spirituality of the system, man can never effectively turn into tigers, or, men can never bear children.

Another aspect of the necessary but partial harmony between biological factors and the human family is evident from the fact that society and family must assure adequate conditions for replacing each generation. Food must be processed and distributed, individuals must be protected from marauders and diseases. These tasks are the social responsibilities of the family.

#### **2.6.0 BIOLOGICAL TRAITS RELEVANT TO FAMILY**

The following biological traits would seem to be the most important for shaping human family roles and social structures :

1. A long period of helplessness of the human infant.
2. Lack of instincts.
3. A complex brain that creates symbols and abstractions.
4. Sexual characteristics.
5. Sex differences.

### **2.6.1 Helplessness of the Human Infant**

Because the newborn human infant is helpless at birth, and remains helpless till a few years afterward, some kind of social unit is a must if the species is to survive. Such a unit must be stable over some years to carry out the task over the years. Its members must have an emotional or economic stake in the child, so that they are willing to invest years of care in its survival. They must feel some affection for it, since adequate socialization will not occur without love. It must also be a productive unit, so that its members can satisfy their physical needs.

Cultures have universally created family units for carrying out these tasks. How these units are structured is not prescribed by biological traits. Many different kinds of families, with varying allocations of duties among members, can accomplish these duties equally well.

### **2.6.2 Complexity of the Human Brain**

From one point of view, the peculiar human brain is a biological invention to compensate for the lack of instincts. This fact has already been discussed earlier. It does not specify what each family role will be, but it permits human beings to adjust themselves to the wide range of roles that societies create. It can develop complex techniques to cope with harsh or benign physical and social environments. Because it can make symbols (make one thing stand for another - the word tree for the real physical tree. The German swastika for Nazi power) it can link almost anything to family roles.

Thus, it can link the symbol of family life with a biological drive (e.g. wedding ring with sex), just as it can limit the situations in which biological needs are permitted to be satisfied (incest taboos and social manners).

While biological needs are themselves culturally shaped, it is precisely this supreme adaptability of the brain that makes it unnecessary for human biological traits to determine specifically what the family rules of behaviour will be. The brain can continue to follow new patterns whenever it finds a new social invention appropriate or needed. It is also the brain that is responsible for the large variety of family types.

### **2.6.3 Human Sexual Characteristics**

The sexual characteristics of human beings are more specific in their impact on family roles. Perhaps, the following are the most important :

1. Constancy of the sex drive.
2. High sexual level of human beings.
3. Heterosexuality.

A major part of human sexuality parallels the anatomical and physiological traits of other higher animal, from the parts of the genito-urinary system to the hormonal system that regulates sexual desire. It is, again, difficult to point to biological traits that directly explain the special forms sexual activity takes in human courtship and marriage. No other animal has ever spent any of its time making rules about whether, how and when

to engage in sex.

Two specially human biological characteristics also have a more direct effect on family behaviour. Human beings, far more than their near cousins, the anthropoid apes, have a relatively high and constant sex drive. Their behaviour is more pervasively sexual. They are far sexier than is needed for births to keep up the population. This has many consequences. First, it means that males and females seek each other's company or that both male and female welcome the attention or even advances of the other sex. In turn, human ingenuity has worked out rules for controlling and regulating sexual behaviour.

Because it is a potential source of pleasure, human beings build sexuality into ceremonies, symbols and even amorous chores. It has made it a recurring human "Bait" disguised in hundreds of ways. Its neural connection with the human brain also means that wide range of repressions and distortions can also come between desire and fulfilment. All cultures frown upon complete or excessive hedonism in sex, and instead attempt to confine most sexual pleasure to social roles that contain the other duties of adulthood, parenthood and maintenance of a family. On the other hand, because of the strength of this drive in human beings, social attempts at restraint fall considerably short of the prescribed propriety.

#### **2.6.4 Sex Differences**

Part of the concept of sex difference is susceptible to change. For

example, the idea of child rearing as a typically feminine task is fast disappearing in many societies. In any event, the question is to what extent any such differences directly shape the family roles the two sexes play. The most relevant traits are probably these :

1. Menstruation, pregnancy and lactation of females.
2. Sexual dimorphism and the greater strength and aggressiveness of males.
3. The need for orgasm in male if fertilization is to occur; the higher sexual capacity of females.
4. Sex differences in mortality.

Females menstruate, bear children and give them suck on their breasts, while men cannot. This does not establish any biologically necessary connection between menstruation, child-bearing, lactation and child rearing. Hence it does not warrant a necessary supposition. There is, however, a socially recognised link. If all these facts imposed on women were set in biology, there would be little need for society to spend any time preaching to women about their 'womanly' duties. Nevertheless, it is likely that in the period immediately after child-birth, hormonal processes in females do induce in them an increase of nurturant behaviour, along with the flow of milk. In most of human history, women have breast-fed their infants because the act releases breast tension and is an easy and natural mode of feeding. The interaction, together with the "Burrowing" and nursing reflexes of babies, intensifies the psychological bond between the mother and her infant. Infants

need "mothering" too.

Men and women do not differ very significantly in average size. The dimorphism of human beings is modest, about midway between the extreme differences, between male and female gorillas, and the near equality among gibbons. Nevertheless, the human male is stronger and more aggressive than the female and that is perhaps one major biological source of dominance of males in all family systems. Wives are rarely stronger and more aggressive than their husbands.

There are also situations in which women are physically weaker but more aggressive than the men. This may happen more frequently in matrilineal societies where women receive support from their cultural practices. This fact can lend itself to a certain suspicion that cultural strength may be superior to physical strength.

Men have generally enjoyed the sociocultural support of social pressure and norms that prescribe their dominance. They have enjoyed two additional advantages based on this biological superiority. When engaged in combat or hunting or navigating treacherous waters, the greater biological effectiveness of men would make them natural candidates for such high-risk ventures. This slight edge has had the effect of giving men a near monopoly in such pursuits. Finally, since all young boys were seen as destined eventually to take part in such activities, they were given the training in the appropriate skills, while young girls were not. In the recent years, especially when feminism is strong and loud, women seem to be catching up with man everywhere.



Nevertheless, it seems, it can be quite safely presumed that catching up can take place only where there is social or cultural discrimination or prejudice, and not where there is biological differences.

Although both men and women are capable of coital orgasm, only the male orgasm and ejaculation are strictly necessary for conception, barring the need for women to be in her time of fertility. That is, only the male desire is sufficient for the continuation of the species. This is probably not even the main cause of the difference of views that human societies have had of male and female sexuality. In most cultures, it is the males who has more freedom and take the initiative in courtship. Of course, another reason for this is the fact that the female has to bear all consequences of any sexual activity; the male can always (physically) get away. This is probably another reason for women being considered as sexual chattels and subjected to various surgical manipulations such as clitoridectomy (excision of the clitoris<sup>1</sup>) and infibulation (sewing up of the vagina). Chastity belts<sup>2</sup> of the crusaders and others in the Middle Ages especially in Europe could be seen in the light of these facts. All these seem to have been done as a symbolic and silent denial of the importance of female sexuality.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, such operations reveal a widespread fear that the female sexuality is somehow dangerous, and has to be controlled. This fear is partly based on a reality, which a few cultures have guessed - the multi-orgasmic capacity of women.

There is yet another male-female sex difference which has been utilized in several cultures: men can continue to impregnate women almost until the end of their (men's) life, while women's fertility drops sharply after menopause. Consequently, older men in many societies have continued to acquire new wives and to sire additional offsprings if their economic and political rank permitted them that luxury.

Finally, there is also the male-female difference in the mortality differential. From womb to tomb, men are more vulnerable biologically, except in societies where the birth rate is very high and childbirth itself is dangerous for women. Although both sexes live longer now because of modern infant care and more effective medical facilities, women have increased their life expectancy more than men have. Males suffer more than females from a large number of biological defects, including a lesser resistance to diseases.<sup>4</sup>

One consequence of this sex difference in mortality is that though males outnumber females (in the ratio 103:100)<sup>5</sup>, the two sexes come near equal at the time of marriage.

### **2.7.0 BIOSOCIAL FACTORS**

Sociobiologists consider certain factors as obviously biological. However, they have not succeeded in locating the neurological or hormonal pathways that determine the execution of these patterns, several of which might really have resulted from social interaction. They are found also among other social animals, as well as in human families. The factors concerned are:

1. Territoriality and spacing,
2. K - strategy of reproduction,
3. Hierarchy,
4. Jealousy.

### **2.7.1 Territoriality**

Researches over the past two decades have disclosed that all family groups occupy definite spatial confines, large enough for an adequate food supply. Large predators occupy larger places; otherwise the rules seem to be an inverted food supply and space ratio.

Invasion and defence usually consist more in threatening behaviour rather than in actual combats, although, in case of serious attempts at intrusion, defenders turn into fierce combatants. Usually the adult male or males engage in the defence of the territory.

It is quite evident that biological needs are closely linked with the needs of the family unit. Ecologists have pointed out that this need for territory and its defence results in the spacing of animals in such a way that it promotes the survival of their species over a long period of time, though simultaneously it may push less aggressive groups into environments which are not suitable for survival.

Among the anthropoid apes, gibbons are known to be the most aggressive in their defence of territory. Human beings exhibit similar territory

defence habits and this resulted in the dispersion of population over wide areas. On the other hand, modern studies of housing conditions seem to show that human beings can adjust to extremely small living areas.

### **2.7.2 The K-Strategy**

Human beings, like most large animals, have been following the K-strategy of reproduction. That is, instead of producing a large number of offspring (like salmons) who are then left to fend for themselves, the larger animals produce a much smaller number of offsprings who are comparatively better cared for. Humans, as a rule, reproduce an infant at a time. Obviously, family life, organizations and relationships would have been very different if each pregnancy resulted in litters of infants.

### **2.7.3 Hierarchy**

Both within the family unit and within small or large societies, the social interaction of human beings create a pattern of hierarchy. This pattern is found also among other social animals. In some it takes the form of a 'pecking order' : animal A dominates animal B, who, in turn, dominates animal C, and so on. Among most mammal groups, the dominant animal is invariably the adult male.

Changes in the rungs of hierarchy occur from time to time as a result of old age or crucial fights. Some females are more dominant than some or most males; dominant females are likely to rear male offsprings who become

dominant in turn. Of course, an adolescent subordinate male may eventually become dominant.

Although some part of this hierarchy results from the greater fighting capacity and aggressiveness of particular animals, it is also the result of learning and social interaction. In its very crude form, a particular animal may learn the hard way that if he stands his ground or will not yield a bit of fruit or meat, he will have got the wrong side of a more powerful male, and be slashed and pummelled by it. By being put in his place, he is taught order and submission, even if there is less justice.

Needless to say, the ability to win a physical battle is not to be confused with the culturally approved authority patterns of the human society, although at no time should the biological factors be ignored. Social order in the family is partly the result of the fact that parents are supported by other adults, who are guardians of the cultural system, even if individual parents are themselves ineffective at physical combats. So children are taught to pay respect to parents, as females are taught to defer to males and wives to husbands, whatever the specific fighting ability of each. Nevertheless, there seems to be enough grounds for supporting the view that even if there were no such cultural patterns, some form of hierarchy would evolve all the same and in most cases the dominant individual would be the male parent. Naturally, no social value patterns would permit the dominant male to use all the possible force in subduing the other members of the family. The beauty of it all is that the dominant male enjoys the authority derived from cultural norms

and social supports, but is, at the same time, restricted, by the very same norms and supports in the use of coercion and physical force in controlling the other members of the family. The apparent reason for this seems to be that all authority is not vested in physical strength of an individual, but is posited in and derived from the group as a whole, and all cultural norms and practices are ordered to orient the group towards its survival and growth.

#### 2.7.4 Jealousy

Whether jealousy is biological in its origin or not is unclear even today. Different cultures vary widely in their acceptance of or attitudes towards jealousy. In many peasant societies in different parts of the world, it was and still is taken for granted that justified marital jealousy excuses or even justifies murder. That is, if a young adventurer soils the honour of a young girl, the adults in her family have the right to kill him, and the adults in her society may even sanction the murder of the offender. An erring wife could be killed along with her intruding lover,<sup>6</sup> and infidelity was, perhaps, the most widely accepted justification for divorce.

In some other societies, jealousy is looked upon with a mixture of amusement and condescension. Modern marriage counsellors often teach their clients that they need not make themselves so psychologically dependent on their spouses, nor exhibit extreme possessiveness. In polygynous societies, often wives become jealous of each other, and in polyandrous groups, men become jealous. Our anthropoid cousins differ widely among themselves.

Gorillas exhibit very little jealousy, but both male and female gibbons are known to be savagely jealous.

The importance of jealousy for the family system is that each society defines what degrees of intimacy permit or justify jealous reactions. Both cultural norms and social pressures enforce, to some extent, the range of such responses. Even if the underlying emotional response has strong psychological roots, the expression of it is very much conditioned by cultural norms and social pressures.

#### 2.8.0 FORMS OF FAMILY

Talcott Parsons looked on nuclear family as a "social group composed of spouses and immature children".<sup>7</sup> Naturally, some ask, what are the criteria for immaturity?

Richard Cheever Wallace and Wendy Drew Wallace instead believe that marriages form the basis of family. Two or more people related by marriage, blood or adoption who live together and share economic resources for an extended period of time form a family.<sup>8</sup>

The general view of anthropologists is that a family is "a group composed of a woman and her children and at least one adult male through marriage or blood relationship".<sup>9</sup> A family comprising a man, his wife and their children is known as a nuclear family. It is also called the conjugal family which may be, as has been seen in the previous chapter, monogamous or polygamous.

The family pattern that is based on blood relationship is called consanguine family. It usually consists of a woman, her brothers, and her children born from a man who does not share her residence, but only comes in as a visiting husband. Such men spend their lives in the family in which they grew up (or family of orientation), and only commute for the sexual services of their wives. This practice was prevalent among the Nayars, the Khasis and Pnars in the days gone by.

Nuclear family has been considered to be the ideal type. It is not considered desirable for young people to stay on with their parents beyond a certain age; nor is it necessarily their moral responsibility to take in their aged parents.

Nuclear families are found also in areas of harsh environments as the North Pole (Eskimos). Such families have to fend for themselves.

The extended family is a combination of the conjugal and consanguineous families which might include grandparents, father, mother, brothers and sisters, their wives or husbands, nephews and nieces. Usually the oldest male is the head in patrilineal families. All hands are united in the work in the farm. The Tanola of Madagascar have this system. In India, this used to be known as Joint Family.

Extended families living together in single households were the most important social units among the Zuni Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. Their society being matrilineal, the head of the household is a woman. The married daughters, their husbands and their children, live with her. The woman own the land, but it is tilled by the men folk, usually the husbands. Women usually



performed household tasks.

Of a different type is the extended family as found among the Chukchi people of North-Eastern Siberia who live by herding reindeer. Their families consist of about ten couples of about the same age. The group is formed by the males who are not related to each other by blood, and live in different camps. Marriages of the groups are ritualised in a ceremony in which a reindeer is killed and the male folks anointed with its blood. The men are called "companions in wives", and protect each other. Exchange of wives are usual and common. Such exchanges are believed to strengthen the bonds among the folks.

A final variety is the extended family that is experimented by young men who find the nuclear family inadequate. Their families are groups of nuclear families who own property in common and live together. The life-style of these modern families emphasise the kind of cooperative family ties. These families provide man-power pool for the many tasks for economic survival.

Another way of speaking about family is to distinguish between the family of orientation, and the family of procreation. One's family of orientation is the family in which one is socialised. It generally includes the parents and siblings. The family one creates through marriage and become a parent is called the family of procreation.

## **2.9.0 FUNCTIONS OF FAMILY**

Functionalists have offered the following characteristic functions of

family :

- a) providing for human reproduction;
- b) caring for and socializing the young and other dependents;
- c) allowing the growth of intimate and enduring relationships;
- d) passing on social status from generation to generation.

Conflict theories do argue that human reproduction often takes place outside the family structure and the families are not always pleasant places for dependents or fostering intimate relationship. In fact, family is often the hotbed of conflicts of interests.

Family also confers status on children. Children take on the social status of parents and generally retain a similar status in their adult years.

### Notes and References

1. The practice of clitoridectomy existed in many societies earlier. Today it is practised in some. Some African and West Asian tribes believe that excision, of which generally involves the removal of the clitoris and sometimes also the small labia, "purifies" the woman. "Despite growing efforts by officials and support groups, the law of silence still tends to reign over the practice of excision of young girls in France's immigrant African community. Though illegal in France, excision clearly continues. Even the courts hesitate to come down hard on an age-old tradition among the communities that are caught between two cultures." (The Telegraph, 10 July, 1990, p.3 "Africans 'Purify' Girls Despite French Ban').
2. Before setting out on long journeys or expeditions, noblemen were known to fasten specially contrived iron belts on their wives. These belts could be locked. This was to prevent wives from being unfaithful to their husbands while the latter were away. Many of these belts can still be seen in museums in Europe.
3. This also may explain in part the phenomenon of female infanticide that be found among the Todas, and many other societies even today. For example, see "Cruel Parents" (The Meghalaya Guardian, 1(200), 25 July, 1990, p. 3).
4. Goode, W.J., 1987, p. 28.

5. Ibid.
6. For example: On 9th May, in a bizarre courtroom drama, Harihar Thayal walked into the district court, carrying the heads of his wife, Pritilata and of Buddhiram, his cousin and her paramour, and demanded "justice" from the judge, Mr. Niranjan Sengupta. The court was in uproar.

Harihar had the heads wrapped in a gamcha (cloth towel), and was carrying a bloodstained weapon. On 6th, he had chanced upon the couple making love in the forest near his village, Dhabanisel, and despatched them summarily with the same weapon. "Man in Court with Wife, Lover's Heads". The Telegraph, 11 May, 1989, p. 5).

The above is a case of manly jealousy. The case of Mrs. Dhiar Kharbihkhiew below is one of womanly jealousy.

As recently as October 1, 1990, Mrs. Dhiar Kharbihkhiew seriously injured her husband, Mr. Kian Warjri, whom she "found in the intimate company of another woman". The incident took place at Umkdait, near Nongmensong, Shillong. The ill-fated husband was rushed to the Civil Hospital where he is today, 4th October, 1990, nursing his wounds and mending his ways. (The Sentinel, VIII(166), 3 October, 1990, p.3).

7. Paul close and Rosemary Collins, 1985, p. 14.
8. Richard Cheever Wallace and Wendy Drew Wallace, 1989, p. 334.
9. Haviland, W.A., 1974, p. 363.

**Chapter III**

**METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

### **3.1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The different techniques of data collection for this study were designed in such a way as to achieve the objectives spelt out at the very outset of this study.

### **3.2.0 OBJECTIVES**

1. To assess the impact of changing norms brought about by intercultural marriages on the family organization of the Khasis.
2. To understand whether these changes are trend-setters, and to analyse the possibility of these changes continuing to happen.
3. To identify the changes that inter-cultural marriages bring on inter-personal relationships between the non-Khasi wives and their husbands' clan members.
4. To identify the factors that are responsible for such changes.

### **3.3.0 SOURCES OF DATA**

In the present study, data have been collected from three different sources.

#### **3.3.1 Secondary Sources :**

Literature available on the Khasi matriliney and customary practices is an excellent source of information. They are precious records of thought

and its development from the past up to the present. Ideas change with time. A hundred and fifty years ago oral tradition was the only vehicle for cultural transmission among the Khasis. The modes and ethos of the developments prior to 1841, the year Rev. Thomas Jones introduced the Roman script into the Khasi language, have not been recorded and remain unknown to us. What we know today is only what writers have put into writing.

Literature can be classified as follows :

- a) i) Traditional literature, as the writings of Sib Charan Roy, C. Lyngdoh, Dr. Homiwel Lyngdoh, etc., who wrote in the first decades of this century. They are more traditional in their outlook.
- ii) Current literature, like the writings of T. Phanbuh, S.A. Kurbah, Krieshon Raptap and the rest of the columnists and contributors to Dongmusa, Batemon, etc. They are our own contemporaries, and their ideas and outlook have been affected to a great extent, by the winds of change.
- b) i) Khasi writers, like D.T. Laloo, Rev. Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh, Sr. Philomena Kharakor, Darningh Stone Lyngdoh, etc. Being indigenous writers, have incomparable advantage of going deeper than the words into the thought-content. They know what exactly they are talking about.
- ii) Non-Khasi writers, like P.R. Gurdon, Soumen Sen, J.N. Choudhury, etc., who have to rely on translations and interpreters. They are handicapped by the fact that translators most often translate the

raw words, and not ideas, or the thought-content, and are liable to be inadequate or even misleading.

### 3.3.2 Primary Sources :

The primary sources comprise the people who are the subject of the study and who gave personal information about themselves.

Population : The population for this study comprises all couples who are inter-culturally married. In each case, one of the partners should be a Khasi. The following are the two possible combinations :

- a) KO = nKΔ - a Khasi woman married to a non-Khasi man
- b) KΔ = nKO - a Khasi man married to a non-Khasi woman.

Cases of Khasi women married to non-Khasi men are a widespread phenomenon. They are easy to come by. Such marriages, however, have not brought about significant changes in the cultural practice nor in the family set-up, except that they are cross-cultural. The only deviation is that in each case a Khasi woman is married tribe exogamously. The matrilineal character of the system is left undisturbed, and quite strictly adhered to. These marriages are not the focus of this enquiry, though some cases have been studied for the sake of comparison. Variations are taken into consideration.

Of special interest to this study are the cross-cultural marriages where Khasi men are married to non-Khasi women. Many of the male partners



in these marriages entered into such unions with a certain ideology, and most of these cases have brought about considerable changes in the cultural practices and organisation of these individual families. There is a significant tilt towards the patrilineal system.

It is thus not the cross-cultural marriages per se that this enquiry is interested in, but in their consequences, in the concomitant changes, or deviations from the traditional norms and values, in the changes in perception and cultural practices.

In marriages where Khasi men are married to non-Khasi women, cultural deviation is, for most part, on the part of the man. Many of the non-Khasi women come from patrilineal contexts, and so, as far as they are concerned, things are as they should be. It is their Khasi husbands who undergo changes both mentally as well as in real life situations. Most of the men are prepared for such changes.

Logically, then, this enquiry should interest itself also in a third type of cases which are also found but are not so common as yet :

KΔ = KO - both husband and wife are Khasis, but have adopted the patrilineal pattern of family.

From the above description of the population, the following categories are derived :

- 1) (a)  $KO(m) = nK\Delta(p)$  - Khasi women married to non-Khasi men from patrilineal cultures, with uxori-local residence.
- (b)  $KO(m) = nK\Delta(m)$  - Khasi women married to non-Khasi men from matrilineal cultures (e.g., a Garo), with uxori-local residence.
- (c)  $KO(m) = nK\Delta(p)$  - Khasi women married to non-Khasi men from patrilineal cultures, with viri-local residence.
- (d)  $KO(m) = nK\Delta(m)$  - Khasi women married to non-Khasi men from matrilineal cultures, with viri-local residence.
- 2) More weightage has been given to the following categories, because they have a direct bearing on the problem of this study.
- (a)  $K\Delta(m) = nKO(p)$  - Khasi men married to non-Khasi women from matrilineal cultures (e.g., Garos, Tiwas), with uxori-local residence.
- (b)  $K\Delta(m) = nKO(m)$  - Khasi men married to non-Khasi women from matrilineal cultures (e.g., Garos, Tiwas), with uxori-local residence.
- (c)  $K\Delta(m) = KO(m)$  - both husband and wife are Khasis, but follow the patrilineal pattern of residence descent, inheritance and succession.

Sample : The sample comprises couples taken at random from the population described above :

- a) 15 couples were taken -
  - from Shillong and around to study cases 1(a) and (b);
  - from Guwahati, Dimapur and Kohima to study cases 1(c);
  - from Tura, William Nagar, Resubelpara and Umswai to study cases 1(a).
  
- b) 59 couples were taken -
  - from Shillong, Dimapur, Kohima, Calcutta, the Bhoi area and Cherrapunji to study cases 2(a);
  - from Tura, Resubelpara, William Nagar, Umswai to study cases 2(b);
  
- c) 14 couples were taken mostly from Shillong to study cases 2(c).

### **3.3.3 Personal Factor**

The investigator's the inside knowledge of Khasi matriliney has been a good source of information and guide to its interpretation. The fact that he does not have to rely on interpreters and translators gives him that kind of advantage which cannot be ignored or belittled.

### **3.4.0 TOOLS**

For the purpose of data collection, two tools were used : a Questionnaire,

and an Interview Schedule.

The questionnaire was designed to discover the hard facts of cross-cultural marriages, and certain conditions like religious or educational or occupational parity and origin of parents, which could be facilitating or deterring cross-cultural marriages. The questionnaire is reproduced in the Appendix.

**3.4.1** The interview schedule was designed to generate information on 11 items which are pointers to :

- a) the type and the extent of change in the family system;
- b) deviations from traditional practices that cross-culturally married couples might have gone through;
- c) the adaptation these couples have made to these changes.

The interview schedule is reproduced in the Appendix.

**Chapter IV**

**THE KHASI MATRILINY**

#### **4.1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The present chapter aims at a broad-view description of both marriage and family from the Khasi perspective. The Khasi society being matrilineal, this chapter has been titled KHASI MATRILINY.

Discussion on Khasi matriliney begins with a clarification of some misunderstandings and difficulties that have arisen out of the attempts, particularly by non-Khasi enquirers, to study and interpret the Khasi concept and practice of matriliney. That clarification is followed up by a glossary of some primary and secondary concepts on the basis of which Khasi social and family systems can be understood.

#### **4.1.1 Clearing the Decks**

1) While reviewing the literature available and relevant to this chapter, it became evident that the different writers belonged to several categories.

a) The insiders are those writers who are from one of the sub-tribes of the Khasi people. It is far more likely that they have first hand knowledge of what they are writing about. Their works are far more reliable than those who are writing from outside the culture.

b) Different writers interact with "word" differently. We shall see shortly that the spoken word is of paramount importance and significance in most tribal societies. Some writers can interact with the tribal "word" very superficially, entirely through the medium of interpreters, whose media-

tion is often through literal translation of the words. This may lead to inaccurate rendering of the tribal spoken word.<sup>1</sup>

c) When people talk or write about Khasi matriliney, it makes one wonder whether they are talking or writing merely about the mechanics of the system, and not about the dynamics of it. Many writers cannot go beyond the mechanics of a culture. All they see is the Khasi matriliney as a mechanical system that is made up of separate, distinct and interrelated parts. What happens, then, is that one can do no more than merely scratch the surface. To get to the bottom of Khasi matriliney or other cultural systems, one has to delve deep into the dynamism and the inner life-force of the system. Jacob Aluckal's "Marriage Among the Khasis or Hynniew-Treps",<sup>2</sup> for example, is a dry, lifeless and mechanical description of Khasi marriage.

2) Among those writers, who are 'insiders' and have written something about Khasi matriliney, and have put forward arguments for or against it, are themselves confused.

There are those who write for or against matriliney from an emotional point of view.<sup>3</sup> There are also those who speak from the level of cool reason. They are more logical and articulate.<sup>4</sup> There are those who are facile, simplistic and naive.<sup>5</sup> There are those who genuinely look for solutions to problems by begging the question, or getting enmeshed in cyclic arguments.<sup>6</sup> There are writers who approach the problem as a matter-of-fact.<sup>7</sup> But there are

also those who moralise too easily.<sup>8</sup>

There are some writers who fail to make the distinction between what is traditional (often perceived as sacred, ideal and unchangeable) and what is modern or current (considered volatile and versatile).<sup>9</sup> Such writers fail to see that change in one part of a system brings about corresponding changes in other parts. These authors find it difficult to take stock of the changes that are brought about by existing circumstances on the practice of matriliney.

Khasi matriliney has undergone tremendous changes over the last 100 years, with the result that what is found today is far removed from what it should be. Similarly, there are several who cannot distinguish between cause and effect.<sup>10</sup> They seem to confuse between matrilineal descent, which is the cause, and incest, which is the result.

A mistake that most commentators on Khasi matriliney make is to make a list of words and misinterpret them through a literal translation of them. In the process, they miss the entire wealth of the inner, finer and subtler thought-content. They cannot but misrepresent the system. There isn't, for example, anything more alien to the Khasi matriliney than the idea of "priestess" that Nalini Natarajan<sup>11</sup> speaks about. However, we cannot blame her entirely because even A.S. Khongphai says: "Ka khadduh (youngest daughter) obtains her important position as the family priestess, ..." <sup>12</sup>. The difference lies in the fact that Nalini Natarajan seems to think of a priestess performing the religious rites instead of a priest, whereas Khongphai points to the "position" of "ka khatduh" as the custodian of the family religion.



Khongphai knows too well that there has never been a priestess. Hence it is not only that "generally" priests are male but always "priests are male".<sup>13</sup>

Part of this confusion can be attributed to the inability on the part of those who express an opinion on the Khasi matriliney either verbally or in writing, to distinguish between human nature which is universal, and human culture which is particular and specific. It is quite wrong, for example, to suppose that in Khasi matriliney, the name or the title is matrilineal only because it is the mother who conceives and gives birth to children, goes through the ordeal and pangs of childbirth, suckles the children, etc., as A. Nengnong and H.S. Nongkynrih,<sup>14</sup> H.O. Mawrie,<sup>15</sup> and quite a number of others suggest, don't mothers in patrilineal societies go through exactly the same experience ? And hence T. Phanbuh asks: Is it only for that reason?<sup>16</sup>

3) Before speaking about Khasi matriliney, two sets of glossary of the basic concepts, or tenets, as R.T. Rymbai calls them, will be of help to know their thought-content which may elude verbal explanations.

Upto 1841, when Rev. Thomas Jones of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission, introduced the Roman script,<sup>17</sup> Khasis had no script and no written records of their own. Cultural life of the people depended on the strength of the oral tradition from one generation to the next. As in most tribal cultures, the 'word' acquired very extraordinary importance and significance. The entire philosophy of life and the outlook on life are embodied in the spoken word.

We must again distinguish between 'Word' and words. The 'word' belongs

to the dynamics of the Khasi concepts and philosophy of life; the words express the 'word', and belong to the mechanics of that philosophy. The following glossary is meant to help one go through the words of the 'word', from mechanics to the dynamics.

#### 4.1.2 Primary Concepts

R.T. Rymbai says that the "whole gamut of a Khasi culture stems from the three basic tenets of his religion" : i) kamai ia ka hok; ii) Tipbriew tipblei, and iii) Tipkur tipkha.<sup>18</sup>

In view of the inclusion of one or two additional entries in Rymbai's list, the investigator prefers the term 'concepts' to Rymbai's 'tenets'.

Lyngdoh, a learned District Judge, way back in 1938, pointed to the supremacy of religion "...a Khasi is a Khasi because of his religion (Niam) more than anything else. This is a great fact. To understand him therefore one has got to go deep down into the very root of his religion. It is religion in the sense of his 'Niam', which regulates all his thoughts and activities. Forget his religion and you will never understand a Khasi".<sup>19</sup> Religion is the 'deciding factor'.<sup>20</sup>

R.T. Rymbai analyses the word and the thought-content of the word 'Niam' (religion). He says it is a (conceptual) combination of two words - Nia which means 'Reason' and Im which means 'Living'. So "Niam" means "Living Reason".<sup>21</sup> Nia does not mean only 'Reason'; in fact, as a plain man's language, it means argument, or argumentation.

The essence of the religious conviction, or the philosophy of life of a Khasi is spelt out in a few key concepts.

i) Longbriew manbriew : briew = man, human nature, human beings; long = to be, to exist; man = to become, to grow, to develop. It is not enough to be or to merely exist; one becomes truly human, truly a man only when one develops and becomes fully human according to one's nature.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, we have the concept of longrynieng, which means one's stature as a developed (in all aspects) human person.

ii) Kamai ia ka hok = to 'earn righteousness',<sup>23</sup> to live up to one's dignity and destiny as a human person and member of one's family and clan. that is achieved through being "fair in all his dealings, pure both in thought, action or inclination".<sup>24</sup>

iii) Tipkur tipjait : Tip = to know; kur and jait = clan, identity (surname). The kur (clan) is made up of all the members who belong to the jait (family title). The basic idea is that one should admit and recognise the fact that man is not alone in the world, but in a group (clan), that one interacts with every other one, and all are responsible to and for the other.

iv) Tipkha tipman : Kha is the short form of meikha, niakha, and anyone else belonging to one's father's kur or jait (clan). It also means 'to bear', 'to be born'.<sup>25</sup> Through one's father, his clan is considered responsible for one's being born into life, not merely 'to be', but 'to become', not merely 'to exist', but to grow, develop and become fully human. One must recognize the relationship and responsibility one has to those who caused one's existence.

v) Tipbriew tipblei : briew = man; Blei = God. A constant conscientiousness is an infallible guide to one's earthly existence and relationship spelt out in "tipkur tipjait" and "tipkha tipman", are included in tipbriew, and the relationship with God, tipblei.

vi) Ka sang ka ma : ma = dangerous, frightful, dreadful; sang = incest. Ka sang does not mean only taboo<sup>26</sup> as we have been wont to say. As children we were taught not to look at anyone who is relieving himself. And if this was not followed, we were threatened with total disaster to our parents. That is a taboo.

Perhaps the thought-content of Ka sang is also more than that of "crime" as mentioned by Juanita War,<sup>27</sup> or that of "sin" as R.T. Rymbai<sup>28</sup> says. The true reason why Ka sang is "unforgivable"<sup>29</sup> or dangerous, frightful or dreadful is because it is a sacrilege against one's sacred ties or bond with the Kur or the Kha.

#### 4.1.3 Secondary Concepts

The following are some additional or supplementary concepts :

i) Shongkha shongman : It is equivalent to marriage. Shong means to live, to stay. The concept is appropriately applied only to man who, in matrilineal systems, comes to live with his wife to cause birth and generate offsprings. A man's mandate is not only to bring forth offsprings (kha) but also to make them human.

ii) Ka ling ka sem : The traditional meaning of it is family, a home, or even a house. ling and sem being only imitatives, like 'bed and board' or 'high and dry'. It is also used, though rarely, to refer to the two families to which a man belongs :

Ka ling is his family of orientation, or of origin. Another term used is ling Kmie or family or house of his mother, or lingkur, family of his clan members.

Ka Sem = literally refers to farm sheds or cow- or horse sheds, or chicken roost. If applied, it means the man's family of procreation.<sup>30</sup> The word sem has the nuance of something that is temporary, uncertain, unstable, indicating a man's position in his family of procreation in a matrilineal system. The family of procreation is also referred to as ingkhun, the family where man begets offsprings or the family of his children.

iii) Jutang, jubanlak : Jutang = a covenant, a solemn or sacred agreement. It usually takes place between God and man. Jubanlak is one's word of honour, a solemn or sacred promise, made usually to God.<sup>31</sup>

iv) Niam Khasi or Khasi Religion is a family religion. Originally, no one outside one's family could participate in any religious function of the other. It is the seniormost uncle of the family who performs the religious acts for his own family consisting of his brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces. Ka Niam-im is for the living and Ka Niam-iap is for the dead.

v) Ka pap ka sang : Ka pap is sin or crime and Ka sang is sacrilege or desecration. The Khasi concept of sin is bound to a person's attachment to his clan. Sin is always something that is committed directly or indirectly against the interests, well being or destiny of the clan, and as such, sin is always social, not personal or individual as it is in Christianity.

There are other concepts that touch on the Khasi philosophy of life. They will be explained as they are met in the course of this chapter.

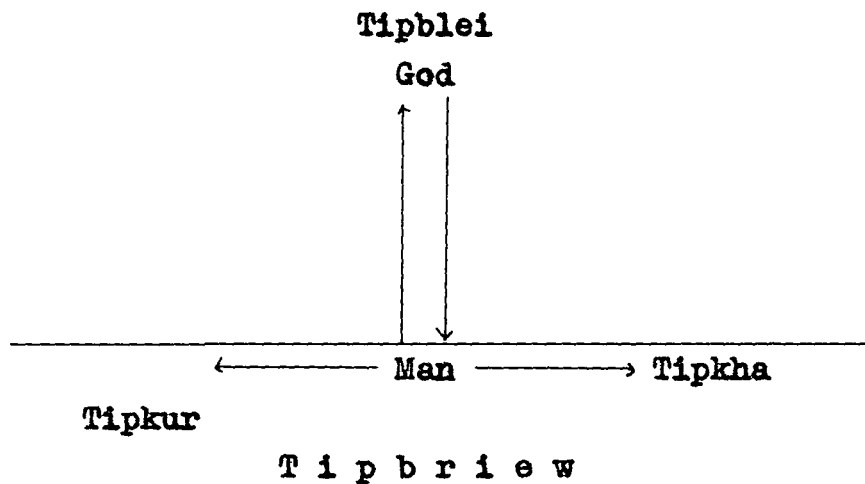
#### 4.1.4 The Kur and the Kha

The Khasi concept of religion is a horizontal-vertical one. On the one hand, there are two fundamental human relationships: ka tipkur and ka tipkha. Every person embodies within his existence, personality and identity these are two inalienable sides-of-the-same-coin. He is the combination of these two relationships. On the other hand, there is man's dependence and relationship with God, ka tipblei. This is the "foundation and the basis on and around which the religion, the family, the society and the economic and political structure of the race is built."<sup>32</sup> A man has obligations both to his kur (maternal clan) and to his kha (paternal clan). The obligation, Kynpham Singh says, is separate and distinct. No man is separable from his kur and his kha. He has his duties towards his kur, and his obligations towards his kha.<sup>33</sup>

A true Khasi has tremendous respect and regard for his meikha (paternal grandmother) and niakha (paternal aunts) and his paternal uncles.<sup>34</sup>

H.D. Mawrie writes that the meikha is "like a goodess to his (the man's) children."<sup>35</sup> Quoting Fr. H. Elias, SDB, L. Gilbert Shullai says that the Kharkongor clan members hold their Khas in high esteem and affection. The khas are said to be the source of their existence and personality-stature.<sup>36</sup>

An illustration would be something like this :



"The two concepts in Khasi religion and Khasi thinking are indicative of right relationship between man and man and between man and God. The stress, therefore, was on the social as well as the spiritual."<sup>37</sup>

#### 4.2.0 THE KHASI MATRILINY

In the past, scholars, missionaries and administrators have confused between matriarchy and matriliney. This confusion was more prevalent among the earlier writers. P.R. Gurdon (1990, pp.76-78) wrote that Khasis are "a people who observe the matriarchate."<sup>38</sup> Capt. Fisher was quoted by P.R. Gurdon as reporting in 1840, "the prevalence of Matriar-

chy or mother kinship"<sup>39</sup> among the Khasis. In 1938, C. Lyngdoh mentioned the existence of this matriarchal system among the Khasis,<sup>40</sup> and the fact that "amongst Khasis cognates get the preference over agnates".<sup>41</sup>

Hipshon Roy Kharshiing did declare that "the one great confusion that has persisted about the Khasis is that they are a matriarchal society; they are not so, they are very much matrilineal ... It is a beautiful and correct observation on one of the basis structures of a Khasi way of life ... is not matriarchal but a matrilineal society ..."<sup>42</sup> The reason for asserting that the Khasi family system is not matriarchal but matrilineal has been already discussed in Chapter I.

#### **4.2.1 Marriage and Family**

A Khasi believes that every individual comes to the world to a particular clan, with a purpose and a mandate from the creator, to contribute to the continuity and growth of the clan and the race. This is the duty and obligation that Kynpham Singh spoke about.<sup>43</sup>

The desire to prolong one's life, and experience, says A.S. Khongphai, is universal.<sup>44</sup> and since man cannot live on forever, he achieves this by continuing his life and existence through his children, or perhaps through nephews and nieces.

Like Khongphai,<sup>45</sup> many others believe that marriage is the foundation of religion and has been in part, responsible for the survival of the race. But even more than them, Sr. Philomena Kharakor considers marriage (in



the sense that a Khasi understands it) "the crown of (or the vital point, the supremacy, etc.) of the race."<sup>46</sup>

H.O. Mawrie<sup>47</sup> thinks that at present both traditional and "western" forms of marriage practices are found in the Khasi society. There are at least three factors that are responsible for the above differences :

a) People in the rural areas are simpler and more traditional than the urbanites.

b) Those who are outside any religious affiliations are more liberal than those affiliated to some religious groups.

c) There are those who promote the traditional way of life (like Ka Seng Khasi), and are quite different from those affected by modernity in their marriage practices. It may be presumed that Mawrie's "western" can be understood as "modern".

Generally, Khasis hold their marriages in high regard; it is something sacred, willed, and blessed by God as part of His plan for man. A.S. Khongphai says it is "holy" and "permanent".<sup>48</sup> It is a "civil contract"<sup>49</sup> which is at the same time a sacred and solemn agreement ("juban jutang Blei").<sup>50</sup> Marriage is also permanent. It is entered into with the intention of making it a permanent, and life-long commitment.<sup>51</sup> In fact, Mawrie says that in a traditional marriage ceremony, on the way to the marriage, the groom "never turns back towards his own house."<sup>52</sup> As in any human arrangement, accidents do happen. What is important is that it is not intentional or pre-

mediated. The sacredness and permanence of marriage is also apparent in the fact that :

a) A great deal of careful and detailed enquiry is carried out by the parties concerned before any commitment is made. It is never done haphazardly.

b) On the part of the parties concerned, everything is open above board. There is nothing to hide, no ulterior motives (khlem "buhrieh") and everything is in the knowledge of all concerned (khlem "lyndet").<sup>53</sup> The uncles of both parties are the intermediaries.

Mawrie, however, believes that "the institution of marriage is neither a covenant nor an agreement or a contract, but is a mutual adventure between a woman and a man in a harmonious blend of mind and thought to establish a family." This statement itself is some type of an adventure, which, perhaps, does not deserve to be taken seriously. However, Mawrie's reason for saying so is that, "contracts and covenants are legal arrangements, and they cannot be dissolved without going through the due process of law - whatever that process might be; but a Khasi marriage is not thus bound by law".<sup>54</sup>

A.S. Khongphai infers that marriage does have an aspect of social sanction, and even legal binding. It is a "civil contract", and marriages should be "registered" in court, a "marriage certificate" should be obtained.<sup>55</sup> These three give marriage a legal standing and without them marriage would indeed be a squandering "adventure", as Mawrie prefers it to be.

Norbet N. Nongrum<sup>56</sup> too disagrees with Mawrie. Marriage is sacred, a covenant made before God Himself, even as Khongphai says, "Our ancestors regarded marriage as very sacred, and not only a civil contract ... Khasis consider it as a holy covenant."<sup>57</sup>

Chie Nakane reported in 1967 that the common practice of finding a marriage partner was through "personal choice" of the man who "proposes to the girl".<sup>58</sup> It is, therefore, not to be wondered at the many people, as does K.C. Lyngdoh,<sup>59</sup> who believe that marriage is totally an individual and personal affair, involving no one else but the two parties.

Sr. Philomena Kharakor is very articulate in this, she says that marriage is a matter not only of the two individuals involved, but also of the clans to which the two parties belong. So it finally involves the two individuals ("ki arngut"), as well as the two clans ("ki arkur")<sup>60</sup> through their spokesmen and intermediaries, the uncles.

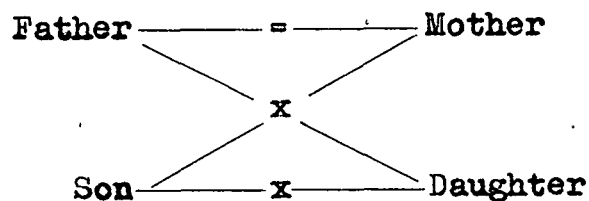
A.S. Khongphai does not commit himself fully. Marriage, he says, is the business of the two individual persons, the man and the woman; but their kurs must know and can interfere or even intervene.<sup>61</sup> That is, as it sounds, speaking legally. He ultimately agrees with the opinion of Sr. Kharakor. The traditional practice reported by H.O. Mawrie seems to confirm this fact. Before leaving his house to go and live with his would-be wife at her house, the groom is anointed and blessed by his parents. On his arrival at the girl's house, he is reverentially welcomed. On her first visit to her in-laws after the wedding, the bride is similarly anointed

and blessed by her mother-in-law. She is then taken to the kitchen garden where she is made (symbolically) to dig a hoe or two, or to weed the garden, signifying economic cooperation.<sup>62</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Ka Sang (Incest)

A marriage may turn out to be unhappy, or mismatched. But there isn't anything that is so sacrilegious and desecrating as incest. Chie Nakane reported in 1962 that an incestuous marriage "is considered as the worst kind of sin; a Khasi Christian intellectual said to me that it was worse than homicide."<sup>63</sup> Incest, as discussed in Chapter I, prescribes that marriages should be exogamous. The greatest sin that a Khasi can commit against his clan is to profane and desecrate it by having sexual union, whether in or out of marriage, with a member of his own clan (Ka Kur ka Jait). Clan exogamy<sup>64</sup> is the rule and the law.

The universal rule of incest forbid sexual intercourse between members of the nuclear family excepting the father and mother. Following is an illustration of this rule.



Generally, grandparents and parents-in-law are included within the illustration.

The Khasi rule of incest is more serious to a Khasi mind, and is a little wider in extension.

First Degree Incest :

i) Sexual activities with any immediate member of one's own clan (the near members of one's kur);

ii) With the immediate members of one's father's clan or kur, i.e., one's immediate kha.

Incest of primary degree is the most serious sacrilege and profanation of oneself and his clan. This is the "worst kind of sin"<sup>65</sup>, the "unforgivable sin", and there is no forgiveness for the one guilty of Ka sangiap sangim (primary degree incest) because one defiled, desecrated and profane, has cursed one's own existence by committing the most serious, hideous sacrilege against the two sources of one's existence and personality.

Ka sangiap sangim : Sang = incest, sacrilege, profanation, desecration, serious defilement; iap = death; im = life. It has the meaning of being unforgiveable even after one's death.

The Khasi term for incest is sang. A.S. Khongphai equates its meaning with "sacrilege, taboo".<sup>66</sup> The meaning that Sib Charan Roy gives to the term sang is "Sah ka ang".<sup>67</sup> Khongphai further explains : Sang = "sah-ang; sah = remain; ang = gaping, i.e. to remain gaping".<sup>68</sup> The idea is that

one is utterly shocked and left gaping and speechless.

Second Degree Incest :

Sexual relations with any mediate or distant members of one's clan, or with any of one's own distant relatives within the forbidden degree. The secondary degree sang is forgivable through sacrifice, divination and mediation.

Besides the sangiap sangim, there are at least four other types of sang which are slightly less in gravity.<sup>69</sup>

1. Ka sang synrih forbids a man to marry a niece or a cousin sister of his father.
2. Ka sang sohpetkha forbids all sexual activities between paternal cousins, i.e., between two whose fathers are blood brothers or very close cousins.
3. Ka sang syngkenkha forbids sexual activities with any of one's own kha, i.e., the sisters or nieces of one's own father.
4. Ka sang sohmynting forbids a man to return to his wife after she or he or both has/have committed adultery, or are remarried, particularly if the wife has had issue(s) from other husband(s).

Incest is always severely punished by being disowned, ostracised and excommunicated<sup>70</sup> or even by being clubbed to death. Fr. Sngi S. Lyngdoh, one of the recognized authorities on Khasi culture, makes certain concessions in this matter which may be shocking to a few. As editor of Ka Sur

Shipara, a weekly, Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh answered a barrage of questions by S. Lyngdoh and P. Lyngdoh.<sup>71</sup> Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh certainly would never encourage unions between persons of the same kur or clan. Neither would he be too harsh or hasty in condemning such unions as ka sang if they fulfill the following conditions :

a) If there is no direct link between the two families to which the parties belong, i.e., if they belong to two clans that happened to go by the same name. There could indeed have been a direct link between the two clans, but the link is buried in the distant past.

b) If the two parties are at least three generations apart.

c) If the two parties concerned and their respective families arrive at marriage arrangements honourably, and are duly blessed by pastors or priests, in case they are Christians.

S. Kharjarin found the opinion of Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh totally in consonance with sound reason, and heaved a sigh of relief for the many such unions at Lawbyrtun (West Khasi Hills) who could, from then on, be considered spared of the scourges of ka sang.<sup>72</sup>

U Bah Baielit explains that the concept of Kur or the true kur includes only the following two categories of lineages of the kurs.

a) Those who still participate in and partake of the same family sacrifice (keeping in mind that the Khasi Niam or religion is a family religion). However, the term family here is not restricted only to the nuclear family,

but the meaning of the term is extended.

b) Those who have the right to a fair share of the wealth and property of any deceased male who is of the same lineage as they are. They are expected also to look after the orphans of their lineage.<sup>73</sup>

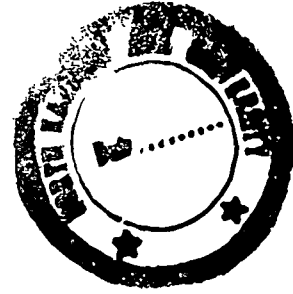
It may look strange that father-daughter,<sup>74</sup> mother-son, brother-sister, uncle-niece or aunt-nephew incests have not been enumerated among the sangs. These are the most serious cases of incest. So serious are they that in the traditional Khasi thought one does not expect them to happen.

#### 4.2.3 Clarifying Some Misunderstandings

Popular jargons have led to a lot of misunderstandings of the concept of kur. There is a family of the Mawlein clan. At some point of time in the recent past, they put away the title Mawlein and adopted the title Wahlang. They are, therefore, pseudo-Wahlangs. Krieshon Rapthap, therefore, rightly asks, how could the marriage between the pseudo-Wahlang and a true Wahlang be an instance of sang.<sup>75</sup> The fact is that the pseudo-Wahlang marrying a true Wahlang is not an instance of sang. But the pseudo-Wahlang marrying a Mawlein is an instance of sang because the concept of kur, is not merely a matter of title but primarily a matter of birth.

Another misunderstanding arises from situations such as the one brought up in Ka Sur Shipara.<sup>76</sup> Lyngdoh and Syiem are not clan titles but are indicative of executive functions. Lyngdoh is a priest and Syiem is a king. Lyngdohs and Syiems can belong to any clan. And if a Lyngdoh Mawphlang





marries Lyngdoh Thalang it is not a case of sang. What distinguishes them are the clan titles, Mawphlang and Thaiang, but both perform the Lyngdoh (priestly) functions. Similarly, if a Syiem Twa marries a Syiem Marwet it is not a case of sang. The misunderstanding is due to the practice of reducing the family title merely to Lyngdoh and Syiem. In reality, there are no lineage titles such as Lyngdoh or Syiem without the accompanying specification.

If a Kharshrieh marries a Kharpiria there is no sang. Although both titles begin with "khar", "shrieh" and "piria" distinguish the two clans, and their common "khar" is only indicative of the fact that the first ancestresses of these two clans were non-Khasis. The confusion arises when people reduce their titles to "Dkhar".

Majaw and Syngkli claim to be of the same kur as Kurbah, Rapsang and Hynniewta, because somewhere in the distant past, the first ancestresses of these clans are said to have been daughters of the same mother. Now, if Kurbah/Majaw marries a Syngkli/Rapsang, is it an instance of sang? It is a potential moot point, though many people are ready to consider such unions as incestuous.

#### 4.2.4 Purpose of Marriage

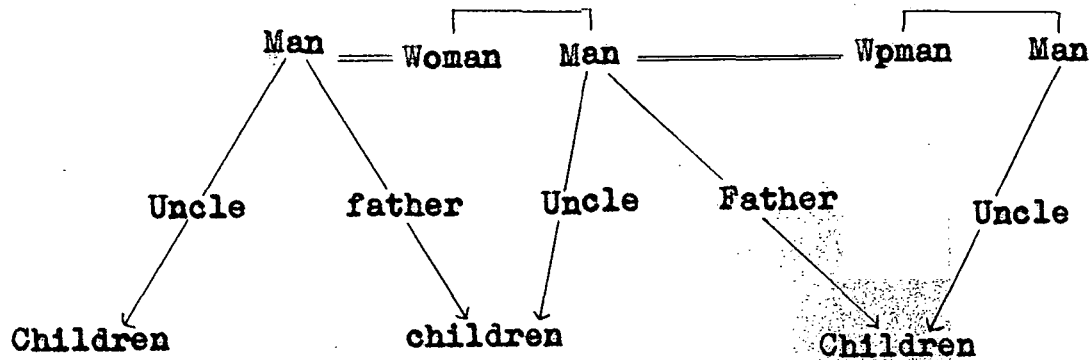
As discussed earlier, Khasis believe that a man is born into the clan/family with the mandate from the Creator that he should contribute to the maintenance and continuity of the clans/families. The biological mechanism

through which every culture and race achieves this is marriage.

Children are the foundation of family<sup>77</sup> and race, because they are visibly the future life, the prolongation of the family, of the clan and of the race. This fact should be understood from two complementary points of view :

a) From the point of view of the children : In the original Khasi matrilineal family, especially at the time when the system of visiting husbands was prevalent, the father was responsible for the biological existence of children in his family of procreation, but the uncle was responsible for their upbringing and socialization in their society, in their clan and in the family of orientation. The uncle takes over from the father after the conception of the child. So, from the children's point of view, both the father and the uncle are responsible for them; the former for their biological life and the latter for their social life.

b) From the point of view of man : Man is father in the family where he has caused the existence of offsprings. The same man is uncle in the family where someone else has fathered the children, who are his nephews and nieces. Here the woman (if there is) of the older generation is not his mother-in-law but his mother. The woman of his generation who is the mother of the children present there, is not his wife, but his sister.



Thus, Khasi matriliney gives man a double identity and responsibility of being father to one set of children and uncle to another. Similarly, the children also have a double identity and obligation of being sons and daughters to one man, and nephews and nieces to another. Both identities of man come into play in the consideration of children as the continuity of the family, clan and the race, except in cases of unlimited promiscuity.

This is the mandate to man : beget children, have nephews and nieces, in order that the race may continue and grow ("parum pareh").<sup>78</sup> It is no wonder, then, that :

a) Sterility and barrenness are sufficient reasons for divorce.<sup>79</sup> The traditional concept of marriage is that it is entered upon for the supreme purpose of begetting children. Little or no consideration is given to the satisfaction of sexual needs.

b) The greatest punishment for a Khasi family is not be blessed by the Creator with the presence of children. "The foundation of the family ... is not the parents, but the children. A couple without issue cannot, under any circumstances, build a family".<sup>80</sup> S.J. Duncan's drama, Ka Tiewlarun

(1968), is on this theme. U Hat, the hero of the drama, is all anxious to see his sister, Ka Shatal, blessed with a family embellished by children.

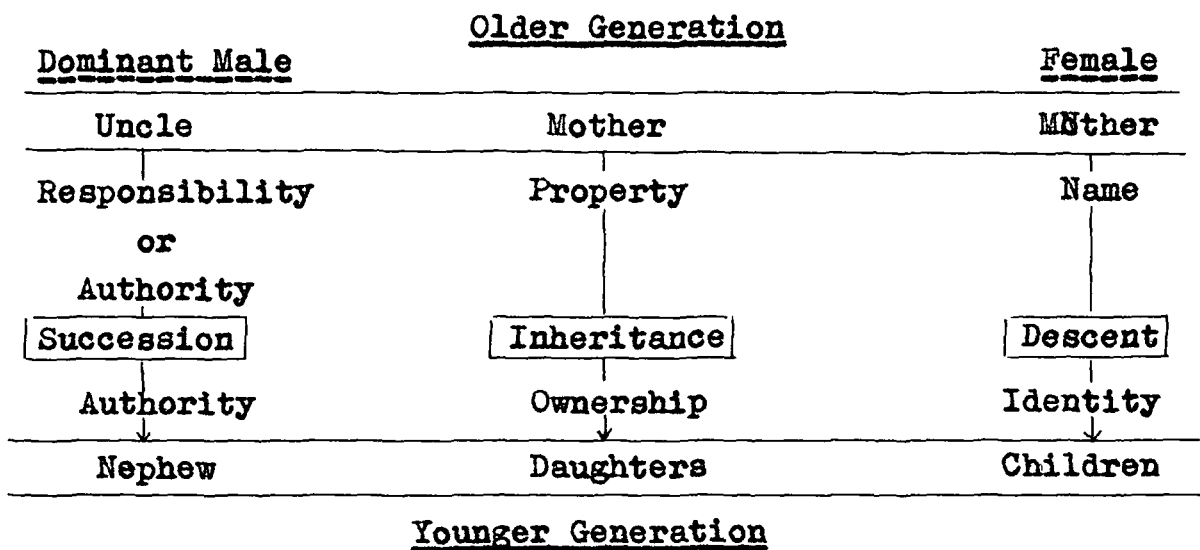
c) Sr. Philomena Kharakor should call marriage 'The Crown<sup>81</sup> of the Race'.<sup>82</sup>

It is not quite true to say that marriage, in the traditional concept, is for "procreation" as Jacob Aluckal thinks.<sup>83</sup> To say that is to miss the vital point. Even if that is happening today, it was not the case in the early days, as Nalini Natarajan<sup>84</sup> said. This is the result of getting stuck at the mechanics without being able to get to the dynamics of a culture.

If procreation is for its own sake, it can be done without marriage. If at all it is entered upon, it is required only as a legalizing factor.

#### 4.3.0 THE KHASI MATRILINEAL SYSTEM

At the beginning of the discussion on Khasi matriliney, it will be well to recall the graphic representation of the system given in Chapter I.



The illustration carries the essential features of matriliney. Two of the three constituent elements of matriliney, inheritance and descent are reckoned along the female line, and the third essential ingredient, succession, is reckoned along the male line on the maternal side. Naturally, there are also the concomittant features in the system.

**4.3.1 The Visiting Husband** is a common feature of most, if not all, matrilineal systems. Gurdon reported in 1906 of the presence of this practice among the Khasis.<sup>85</sup> Mawrie says that traces of it can still be found among the Pnars. He says that a "married man stays in his mother's house after marriage until his wife has borne him an issue or two, and then only he goes to stay permanently with his children. During the time that he stays in his mother's house, the married man works and earns for his mother's house, and should the children be in any difficulty due to their poverty, he would feed them. During this time he works and eats in his mother's house and only during the nights he goes to his wife and children."<sup>86</sup>

The practice of visiting husband could have been co-existing with village endogamy as Krieshon Raptap believes it was.<sup>87</sup> If a man married a little far away from his home of origin, he would find it difficult commuting between his mother's house and his wife's.

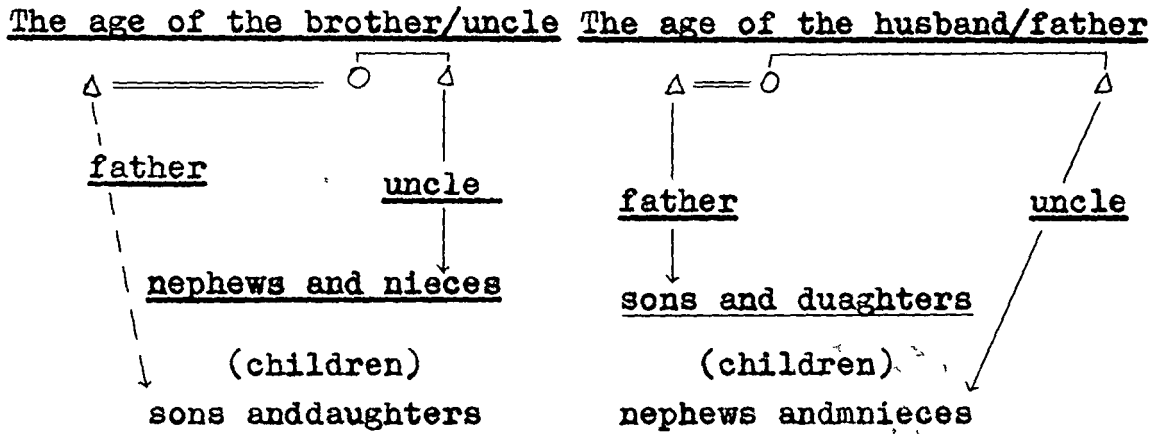
The weakening of the Khasi matrilineal system started with the gradual disappearance of the visiting husband. Usually, if a man married a little too far from his mother's house, he would find it difficult commuting between

his mother's house and his wife's house. Eldon Rapphap has recorded that it was Thomas Jerman Jones who, more than a hundred years ago, persuaded the Pnars to turn away from the practice and advised them that the men should live with their wives and children.<sup>88</sup>

The age of the visiting husband was the age of U Kni, the Uncle. With the gradual passing out of the practice of visiting husband, and with the advent of the nuclear family, the Kni distanced himself more and more from his nephews and nieces and was reduced in importance, but still exercise authority over them. The image of the father is becoming more and more defined in the family where a man lives with his wife and children.

The dual identity and function of man as husband to his wife, and brother to his sister(s), and as father to his children and uncle to his nephews and nieces, is nothing new. It is a universal fact. The cultural differentiation lies in the stress and significance on the one hand, and the functions and the authority on the other. When the practice of visiting husband was prevalent, the image of man as brother to his sister and uncle to his nephews and nieces was most significant; his image as husband and father was minimal.

With the disappearance of the visiting husband and the advent of the nuclear family, man's image as husband to his wife and father to his children is becoming more and more marked. The following illustration may be of help.



When the age of the brother and uncle moves out to give room to the age of the husband and father, two kinds of changes are seen to take place. :

a) Three primary changes :

i) The position of man shifts to the right; the husband-and-father comes into the family of his wife and children and evicts the brother-and-uncle.

ii) The status of the man changes significantly from being a brother-and-uncle to being a husband-and-father.

iii) The locus of his authority changes from his family consisting of his sister, nephews and nieces, where he exercises his authority as brother-and-uncle, to another family, consisting of his wife and sons and daughters, where his authority is that of husband-and-father.

b) Two secondary changes :

i) The locus of the woman remain constant; it is the man who shifts. Her relation to the children remains constant, but her relation to the man in the family changes from that of a sister to that of a wife.

ii) The position and role of the children in the family remains unchanged. However, their identify in respect of the male in the family may be altered from being nephews and nieces, to being sons and daughters.

There is a considerable change in the orientation of the socialization of children. Under the authority of the uncle, socialization is maximum towards the cognates, the Kur. In the presence of the father, socialization goes also towards the agnates, the Kha.

#### 4.3.2 Man : Uncle and Father

In Khasi matriliney, the identity of man being at the same time a father and an uncle was all right when the matrilineal system was strictly adhered to. He was the uncle and he exercised full powers over his family consisting of his sister and his nephews and nieces; he worked for them and their well-being. The changes that started more than a hundred years ago, and which have been gathering momentum since the last few decades, have badly affected the system and man has ended up being a split personality. At present he is neither one nor the other, precisely because he tries to be both. He is a man in two worlds,<sup>89</sup> the world of his family where he is the father and the world of the family where he is the uncle. He has very aptly been compared to the colussus of Rhodes<sup>90</sup> which was bound to fall. He is torn



between the "conflicting obligations towards the iing of his sister and the iing of his wife".<sup>91</sup> His position and authority as the kni climbed down rapidly.<sup>92</sup> This would not have affected his position so badly if he was only advisor, as C. Lyngdoh seems to believe.<sup>93</sup> As things stand, he is a man of divided loyalties<sup>94</sup> and it is here that his middle begins to show.

### 4.3.3 The Matrilineal Puzzle

Matriliney is a system which differs from patriliney in that in patriliney the three constituent elements, succession, inheritance and descent are all conveniently vested in the father, whereas in most matrilineal systems, inheritance and descent are vested in the female, and succession is vested in the male and female on the mother's side. This is shown in the illustration on page 104.

Popular writers and columnists have not been able to appreciate the significance of the division. Our ancestors (Longshwa-Manshwa) have been praised for their singular wisdom, by many like E.L. Lyttan.<sup>95</sup> After all, Khasis are said to be ancestor worshippers (even more than hero-worshippers) and hold their ancestors in awe and special reverence, as Hipshon Roy says.<sup>96</sup>

But when we find that this is not only about Khasis, then we begin to wonder whose ancestors these columnists are praising.

What must be realized soon enough is that in matriliney transmission of property and the principles of descent are usually in the hands of women. Property is handed on from the mother to the daughters. Descent is traced

from the mother to her children. For one reason or another, both in patriliney as well as in matriliney, wisdom has always entrusted authority to males. It is exercised by the dominant male and passed on from him to the next dominant male. In patriliney, it is passed on from father to son, and in matriliney from the maternal uncle to the nephew.

The why and wherefor of this separation have not yet been clearly known. But the opinion that "transmission of property through inheritance is the practice most obviously informed by, or embodying, matrilineal ideology in that it equates those who have a right to one another's property with those who share common substance"<sup>97</sup> sounds viable enough. It also becomes logical that descent should follow inheritance.

#### **4.3.4 Inheritance and Descent**

Khasi thinkers are conscious that both inheritance and descent are vested in the women and many a man is groaning under the system. Before attempting an answer to the question why inheritance and descent are matrilineal, the question whether inheritance follows descent or is it the other way around, has to be disposed of.

If we call inheritance the material or visible substance, and descent the invisible substance, it does seem likely to stand to reason to suppose that human prudence would base the family system on the visible substance. Human survival depends primarily on the material support. Therefore, at the level of an intellectual exercise, we may conclude that descent follows

inheritance. At the same time, Ladislav Holy's finding is that "there is no logical reason to assume that a change in the system of inheritance has invariably to be accompanied by a change in the conceptualisation of descent".<sup>98</sup>

Inheritance is matrilineal, because :

1. It was the instinctive wisdom of our ancestors.<sup>99</sup> Our system is "unique";<sup>100</sup> it is a wise institution of our ancestors, so it cannot be changed,<sup>101</sup> because it will lead to incestuous unions. Matrilineal inheritance brings about and reinforces "matrilineal solidarity".<sup>102</sup> Joplin Nongdhar, a staunch feminist, goes even beyond the ancestors to God the Creator Himself; it was his wisdom.<sup>103</sup>

One cannot help asking what is unique about the Khasi matriliney. The world over, there are hundreds of matrilineal societies. Are the ancestors of all patrilineal societies wise? Is God wise only because he has ordained our society to be matrilineal?

2. Inheritance was originally reckoned along the male line. D.T. Laloo<sup>104</sup> says that it was because of the bravery of women who defended their honour, territory and property against a plundering chief from the plains while the menfolk were out hunting, that men entrusted to their women their children, land and property. Men's activities often required them to be away from home.

C. Lyngdoh supposes that matrilineal inheritance is the result of the

guilt feelings of the men who, "like David of old, their hands were full of blood" because of "constant warfare and bloodshed". So they thought it best to leave religion, their children and property "in the hands of their womenfolk".<sup>105</sup> Similarly, S. Nongneng and H.S. Nongkynrih impute the system to the fact that men were warriors and the womenfolk remained at home.<sup>106</sup> Many of the men died in the battles and raids, leaving their children fatherless.

The Khasis were warriors is a fact. Gurdon described them as "troublesome marauders, whose raids were a terror to the inhabitants of the plains".<sup>107</sup> Lindsay, in his accounts, quoted by Gurdon, called Khasis "a tribe of independent Tartars".<sup>108</sup>

Hamlet Bareh<sup>109</sup> narrates a similar "fable" or "folk-tale" as he calls it. On their migration from Tibet, the Garos were being pursued and harassed by the Koches. The Garos appealed to the Khasis who had settled in an area the centre of which was the Kamakhya hill near Guwahati. In their defeat, the Khasis abandoned their kingdom and migrated. In the battle, the king fell by the sword and the crown was offered to his commander-in-chief, who refused it because he felt he was unworthy of the office. So the crown was offered to the maternal nephew of the king, and the boy accepted it. The "from uncle to nephew" procedure developed into the matriliney that Khasis have.

3. Many people like Fabian Lyngdoh, feel that matriliney is entirely

in tune with nature. God the Creator has ordained for all creatures that the young should be cuddled "close to the heart of the mother".<sup>110</sup> They are her "flesh and blood"; she is the nest builder, while the man is the bread winner.<sup>111</sup>

The traditional Khasi understanding of "flesh and blood" has a peculiar connotation which is not necessarily scientific. It is believed that both father and mother contribute to the biological conception of their children. A child is considered the result of a combination of ka ksuit from the father and ka snam from the mother. Ka ksuit really means the puss; it refers to the semen which, in appearance is very much like puss. Ka snam means the blood of the mother. The inference is the cyclic menstrual flow of women, which, however untrue, readily lends itself to the conclusion that blood is the mother's contribution to the conception of a child. What is more important is the concomittant belief that Ka snam ka kham rben ban ia ka ksuit (the blood is thicker than the puss) is that the relationship of the children with the mother is stronger and far more vital and important than their relationship with the father. Whenever a Khasi speaks of ka snam and ka ksuit, he knows exactly what he means, and what is implied.<sup>112</sup>

This is another point of difference between Norbert N. Nongrum and H.O. Mawrie. Mawrie calls the children the flesh and blood of the mother,<sup>113</sup> while Norbert calls them the flesh and blood of the father.<sup>114</sup> And yet both say the same thing and are both right. It does seem a contradiction to the special love and reverence that a Khasi has to his Kha.

Finally, Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh<sup>115</sup> agrees with the supposition that matri-

liny is in consonance with the ways of nature, because :

a) Even mother earth nurtures the seeds planted in her till it is fully grown. The fruits and flowers return to the earth.

b) The vapour rises up from water as cloud, and returns to the earth as rain.

c) The young ones of the animals follow the mother and cry for her when they are hungry or in danger.<sup>116</sup>

4. Another source of support for matriliney comes from those who say that the mother is the one who conceives and nurtures the child within herself for nine months, goes through the ordeal of childbirth and fondles and suckles the infant after it is born.<sup>117</sup> This sort of reasonings contain high emotional charge.

Evidently, there is a confusion between nature and culture. Mothers of all times, places and cultures, and bear, dandle and suckle their children in the same way. Yet more than half of the mothers in the world are not from the matrilineal system which is purely a cultural mechanism. Rightly then, does T. Phanbuh challenges the above stand.<sup>118</sup>

5) Another alleged cause for matriliney is the uncertainty of fatherhood.

It is not that matriliney causes the uncertainty of fatherhood which can be as uncertain in patriliney, nor that patriliney is anymore solution to the problem than matriliney. But matriliney is seen as a design which takes care, not of the certainty of fatherhood, but of the consequences of sexual activity, whether

or not intended, Khasi matriliney accepts and cares for all the children whether they are born within the wedlock or not. There are no "illegitimate children."<sup>119</sup> It is not in the sense that fatherhood is automatically certain, but that children are not unclaimed because matrilineal descent legitimizes them into the clan. This is both an advantage as well as a disadvantage.

6) "... The human male is stronger and more aggressive than the female, and that is very likely one major biological source of the dominance of males in all family systems".<sup>120</sup> Khasis have another way of saying the same thing. They call man man u khatar-buit u khatar-bor, he is warrior, and the woman is ka shi-buit ka shi-bor :<sup>121</sup>

buit : a) sagacity, practical wisdom, shrewdness, acumen; b) means, resources, ways and means.

bor : power, strength, authority, influence.

khatar : literally, it means twelve (12); figuratively, it signifies fullness, abundance, or plentitude.

shi : literally, means one, single; figuratively, it indicates paucity, inadequacy, exigency or indigence.

Miss Nycil Mon is the only one who likes to differ from that universal and time-hallowed piece of wisdom. Her equation is : Man is 1 buit + 12 bor and Woman is 12 buit + 1 bor. Man is powerful, but not cunning; woman is weak and dependent, but full of craftiness, seductiveness, treachery and guile. She is a Delilah. Nycil Mon's experiential conclusion is devastating indeed :

"Therefore, Man falls to her charms, crumbles under her spell, and is destroyed, 'as Samson was', by her seduction, treachery and deceit".<sup>122</sup>

Evidently, Miss Nycil is tuning on the wrong wavelength. What is meant is not the mutual conquests of man and woman through power and authority on the one hand, and guile, seduction and betrayal on the other; but the natural endowment to man and woman.<sup>123</sup> After all, the maxim that the strength of the weaker sex lies in the weakness of the stronger sex for the weaker sex is being proved more and more true day by day. M. Deva Santhanam has something very interesting to say in this connection.<sup>124</sup>

Matriliny is supposed to compensate womankind for the lack of natural endowment. Matriliny also protects womankind from being exploited, mal-treated and unduly harassed by the in-laws when they are married into patrilineal families.<sup>125</sup> Mr. Subash Sangma, with whom the investigator had a discussion, believes that patriliney means also virilocal residence. In India, we are not unfamiliar with stories of bride-burning. Matriliny protects woman by keeping her in her own house.

7. Matriliny has an intimate relation to agriculture. On the one side, matriliney is an aspect of the agricultural economy. Agriculture, the "bounty of the soil",<sup>126</sup> is believed to have been discovered by woman. Womenfolk band themselves together in cooperative work in farms. Women came to be compared to the earth and this gave rise to the emergence of the garden concept of marriage and womanhood.



Several people write and talk of marriage and womanhood with reference to the garden concept, but the most articulate has been Snenglem A. Kurbah.<sup>129</sup> The others are Dr. Homiwell Lyngdoh,<sup>128</sup> H.O. Mawrie,<sup>127</sup> Joplin Nongdhar,<sup>130</sup> T. Sohtun,<sup>131</sup> Dolin Mallai,<sup>132</sup> among many others.

The garden concept of marriage and womanhood was developed by Walter Trobish<sup>133</sup> in the 1970s, based on the book Marriage : East and West by David and Vera Maces. The garden concept of marriage or womanhood is based on unscientific assumptions. It conceives man as the sower of the seed, and woman as the soil, or the earth, or the garden. Man plants his seed in the woman, whose body receives and nurtures the seed just as the soil does to the grain of rice. Just as the plant grows out of the grain, the child grows out of the seed of man.

The garden concept in its totality is a patrilineal ideology, the whole of which cannot be transferred to and fitted into the matrilineal system. The patrilineal system looks at the concept from the vantage point of man as the owner of the field, the sower of the seed, and the owner of fruits. Matriliney looks at it from the point of view of the woman as the field and recipient of the seed. The seed once sown belongs to the woman. It is something like "Goods once sold cannot be taken back", or reclaimed.

#### 4.3.5 Inheritance

Inheritance according to the matrilineal principle is from mother to daughters. The War people along the southern and south-western border of Meghalaya

are known to practice bilateral inheritance, that is, from both parents to sons and daughters.<sup>134</sup>

Property is divided into :

(a) ancestral property which, "from its very nature, denotes jointness. It is supposed to be held in common by every member of the family. It was never meant to be sold or disposed of."<sup>135</sup> Ancestral property is called Ka Nongtymmen. Khongphai defines it as "the property one inherits from one's parents or grandparents."<sup>136</sup>

(b) Self-acquired or separate property (Nongkhynraw) is "the one which one earns while living or earning alone,"<sup>137</sup> that is, before marriage. Traditionally, self-acquired property is never owned by the individual alone. Presently, there are several cases of unmarried young men and women who earn, and are even encouraged by their parents to keep their earnings as personal.<sup>138</sup> However, when self-acquired property is owned by the clan, or more often, by the family of orientation it becomes Kamai iingkur.

(c) Kamai iingkur is the "property one acquires while living with his mother, brother and sister ... or property belonging to his mother, that is to his clan".<sup>139</sup>

Kynpham Singh is of the opinion that children cannot acquire the wealth and property belonging to the father before marriage.<sup>140</sup>

(d) Kamai iing-khun iing-tnga consists of the "property one acquires after marriage".<sup>141</sup> This property goes to the man's family of procreation. A man can take to his wife's home only his personal effect which must be returned

to his kur on his death.<sup>142</sup>

Matrilineal inheritance has two outstanding features :

(a) according to matrilineal descent, inheritance passes on from mother to daughter(s),

(b) among the daughters, the youngest gets "the lion's share".<sup>143</sup>

Back in 1938, C. Lyngdoh, probed deep into this practice and answered, among others, two relevant questions.

(i) "Why women and not men are holders of properties? The answer is, I believe, because like David of old, their hands were full of blood - constant warfare and bloodshed - they thought it best to leave the religion in the hands of their womenfolk."<sup>144</sup> One thing becomes abundantly clear : C. Lyngdoh started out with the question on "properties" and ended with "religion". It means that religion was considered by him to be part of the inheritance, or/and that religion is intimately linked to inheritance.

(ii) "... How is it that in the case of all ancestral property, the Khatduh (youngest daughter) gets the largest share of the property?" Lyngdoh started answering this question by clarifying a misunderstanding of most non-Khasis:

a) Ka Khatduh succeeds not to the property but to the office as custodian and keeper of it.

b) She does not own the property, she is only the custodian of it on behalf of the family.

c) She cannot dispose of or transfer or alienate it. She is the custodian;

but in all matters, she has to consult her brothers and sisters, and above all, she has to take only their "advice", as C. Lyngdoh says; but the final authority lies with the seniormost uncle or the one after him. This is not only because she is the "least experienced", but also because females inherit and the ownership resides with the entire clan, both males and females, and the controlling authority lies with the males. This constitutes one of the inherent contradictions of matriliney.

Commenting on the opinion of C. Lyngdoh, Hipshon Roy further quotes him, "it is a Khasi sentiment that the first daughter should be married first and so on according to the order of seniority. Each daughter when she gets married is given a separate house inside the ancestral land. By this process of elimination the last daughter is naturally the last to remain in the house and she is, therefore, left incharge of the properties belonging to the family".<sup>145</sup>

Ka Khatduh is the custodian of the family property and the family religion. "Being in charge of the properties," says C. Lyngdoh, "she has also to look after the religion of the family. To be more correct, she holds the properties because she holds the religion of the family."<sup>146</sup> The ancestral or parental house which passes on to her custody is also the house where the family religion is maintained and is continued. It is the house in which any member of the family may take shelter in moments of personal difficulty.

Ka Khatduh is entrusted with the maintenance and safe-keeping of the family property, religion, name and the security of all the members. She has the duty to care for all the orphans of the family and the members in distress.

Mawrie says that the khatduh "judges and arbitrates over whom to pull up and whom to give the necessary help."<sup>147</sup>

Corresponding to these obligations, she is also given the means to enable her to discharge her duties,<sup>148</sup> each of which, can involve a lot of money. Then again, she is not the owner, but the custodian for and on behalf of the family. Kynpham Singh puts that across very clearly : "... nowhere in the teaching of the Khasis is it indicated that the woman, whether she be ka khun mihiing<sup>149</sup> or ka khatduh is the absolute owner of the wealth or property and that hers and hers alone is the right to dispose, transfer or alienate. A woman inherits her position in the kur with the responsibility reposed thereon but not the property."<sup>150</sup>

Kynpham Singh also confirms that the plots of land allotted to daughters other than the khatduh are given only for use and occupation. The ownership residing with the kur. The senior-most male, the uncle or the eldest brother advises, directs and controls all the affairs of the kur, whether material or religious.

Reportedly, the long-standing and widespread misunderstanding of the position of ka khatduh began in 1918 when the British Government legalized position of the youngest daughter as the hieress to all the family wealth and property. In that instance, inheritance was distinguished and separated from religion.<sup>151</sup>

Changes have been rapid and the question of inheritance is one area where people are still very susceptible. They have been quick to take advantage of

the spirit of change whenever they can bypass the responsibilities. The "special status"<sup>152</sup> of ka khatduh gradually emerged as the heiress, and her image as the custodian faded into the past. As it has been pointed out earlier, today many parents share the property among all the daughters, and even among sons.

Norbert N. Nongrum<sup>153</sup> is one of those who feels that self-acquired property of the father should be passed on to the son(s), and no longer to the daughter and, through her, to the son-in-law. C.B. Iawphniaw and Pyniarbor Syiem, go even further in their claim that all the children have an equal right to the wealth and property of their parents.<sup>154</sup> Eldon Rapphap alleges that male inheritance had its precedents even in the time of Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy.<sup>155</sup> The movement gathered momentum and gained the support of eminent persons like the members of the TWADAM and Mrs. Maysalin War, Mrs. Bon Marbaniang and others who spoke very positively about the movement in the meeting in the Dinam Hall, Shillong, on 25 July, 1980. Mrs. Tri Shadap instead had already been more vocal and convincing in her language of deeds. This is still a sensitive issue, and, quite naturally, politicians, as a matter of convenience, were cautious and slow to commit themselves lest they affected their vote banks.<sup>156</sup>

#### 4.3.6 Separation and Divorce

The *raison d'etre* of marriage as it has been said earlier, is the begetting of offsprings for the purpose of continuity of the race. Therefore, if, for any reason, on the part of either partner, that primary purpose is not achieved,

a particular marriage need not continue. H.O. Mawrie says that children are a man's fulfilment as father, a woman's fulfilment as mother, and a bond of unity between the parents and the clan.<sup>157</sup> Thus, barrenness and sterility justify separation and divorce.<sup>158</sup>

Another cause of divorce is infidelity on the part of the woman. The Christian and legal understanding of infidelity and adultery is different from the understanding of it by a traditional Khasi.<sup>159</sup> The Khasi understanding of adultery or infidelity is especially on the part of the woman who has not honoured her word, her sacred covenant with her husband by going for illicit sexual intercourse with a man other than her own husband, either in his lifetime, or after his death, but before the prescribed period of time has expired, usually a lapse of one year following the death of the husband. Before the woman is allowed by customary laws to remarry, she is required to return to his clan the bones of the deceased husband. Until then she is not considered free of her obligations to her husband and his clan.

The sin of a woman consists in this that she breaks her solemn promise, her sacred covenant and profanes the sacred marital ties. The covenant is not only between her and her husband, but also between her clan and his.

Gurdon mentions incompatibility<sup>160</sup> as another reason for separation. Incompatibility only means that the two cannot live peaceably and cannot get on well with each other.

Customary laws do not allow a man to divorce his wife during her pregnancy; he must wait till she delivers.<sup>161</sup>

As in other family systems, the rule of adultery is much more strigent on the woman who is the home-keeper and nest-builder, and lenient on man who is the bread-winner, for obvious reasons. This is particularly so in patrilineal cultures. Couple no.S-P:1 is a case of separation subsequent to the infidelity of the woman. The man left the first wife and then remarried.

Khasis regard marriage as a sacred institution, and divorces were few till the time of the British rule.<sup>162</sup> The Native Converts Marriage Dissolution Act XXI was passed in 1866, and the Indian Divorce Act IV in 1869. These two Acts were included in the powers of the District Commissioner who was made the District Judge Under Act IV of 1869. In 1883 the legal procedures of divorce were universalised in India. Assam further tightened the rules in 1895, and by 1897 court divorces had become a matter of fact.

#### **4.3.7 Position of Man and Woman**

When considering the position of man within the Khasi matriliney, we may begin with the time when man was based in the mother's household, and as uncle held all authority. As father, he was only the procreation. To his wife, he was only her visiting husband. In the second stage, when the husband started living with his wife and children, his status and role as husband and father became more pronounced. His authority as uncle started to wane as a result of the fact that he no longer lived side by side with his sisters, nephews and nieces. Thus the mighty Colossus shifted his weight from one leg to the other, from the right that had been hitherto firmly planted in his family of origin



to the left in his family of procreation. However, in the second phase, he is only gradually building up his status to the measure of that which he had previously. The statement made by P.R. Gurdon in the first decade of this century that "in his wife's clan he occupies a very high place, he is second to none but u kni, the maternal uncle, while in his own family circle a father and husband is nearer to his wife than u kni",<sup>163</sup> must be understood in this sense and within this context. H.O. Mawrie says that "a father's status in the family is unique. He is the main pillar supporting and sustaining the family."<sup>164</sup>

Another factor that affects the status of a Khasi man is the status of his wife. If he is married to a woman other than the youngest daughter (Chie Nakane calls her non-heiress), he is "respected and honoured as a father in his family for the rest of his life. By this type of marriage the man's status is firmly established. It is, therefore, a more secure form of marriage ..."<sup>165</sup> Kynpham Singh confirms Nakane by making the man the "head of the family".<sup>166</sup> On the other hand, if the wife is ka khatduh - a heiress - his position is precarious. He usually lives matrilocally, that is, with his wife, her parents, her unmarried brothers and sisters. His "life after marriage under such circumstances require great adjustment and endurance. The husband's status is especially weak when a male member of the wife's kin lives in the same household... The tie between the uncle and the nephew is so strong that the father is rather an additional member of the household",<sup>167</sup> he is only an appendix.

The fragile position of man is, thus, the result of the conspiracy of two

independent factors: a) the loss of authority in his family of orientation which loss is not compensated for by his authority in his family of procreation; b) the position of his wife as heiress or non-heiress.

Whereas the status of man has grown downwards, the position of women has been rising steadily. P.R. Lyngdoh, in her speeches and writings, has given more than the following four opinions about the Khasi woman of today:

a) Khasi women are comparatively more free. "To the fair sex of the world who are fighting for women's lib, here we offer the best example, a society in which the women are held in high esteem and regard and hold a dignified position."<sup>168</sup> However, by what criteria does she judge that this is the "best example"? What are her terms of comparison?

b) "... Khasi women are not aggressive and do not think themselves superior to men. In fact, the married woman is subordinate to her husband in all respects."<sup>169</sup> That the Khasi women are "not aggressive" and do not "think themselves superior to men", and their subordination to their husbands, are all small mercies to men, or are they so by propriety and nature?

c) Even in the Khasi society (which has been traditionally quite a female-centred society), women have been systematically excluded from the exercise of political or administrative authority. Hens do not crow, but if they do, it is a sign that the world is tumbling to its end, goes a Khasi saying.

d) The youngest daughter (ka khatduh) is the custodian of the family religion, but priesthood has always been the privilege of menfolk.

Nallni Natarajan points out that education has greatly enhanced the status of women.<sup>170</sup>

The female-centric characteristic of Khasi matriliney has given rise to centripetal tendencies among men. Natarajan makes an observation that a Khasi is deeply attached to his land and his kin.<sup>171</sup> Ten years earlier than Natarajan, Chie Nakane had taken note of men's "strong tendency to spend most of their time at their sister's house".<sup>172</sup> Then she concluded: "Thus the strong matrilineal structural principle tends to orient a man towards his own descent group, the iing"<sup>173</sup> (house), where he is secure and feels more truly a man.

The centripetal tendency lends itself to some domestic aberrations both for the man, and for the woman.<sup>174</sup> Excessive attachment to one's family members, on the part of either partner in life, is often the cause of difficulties, tensions, or even break-up of marriages.

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96. Kharshiing, H.R., "Ka Shim Jait na ka Kmie bad ka Khein Kur Khein Kha", Dongmusa, IV(24), 19 June 1988, p. 4.
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98. Holy, L., 1986, p. 2.
99. Lyttan, E.L., "Ha ka Jingiohi Jongnga", Dongmusa, IV(30), 21 July 1988, p. 4.
100. Lyngdoh, P.R., loc. cit., p. 11.
101. Lyngdoh, P.R., "Ka Jingshim Jaid na ka Kmie bad ka Kam ki Kynthei ha ka Kam Sain Hima Sima", unpublished Seminar Paper, Shillong (ICSSR), 27 May 1988.
102. Nakane, C., op. cit., p. 124.
103. Nongdhar, J.M., "Ka Kynthei ha ka Imlang Sahlang", Batemon, 2(6), September, 1989, p. 23.
104. Laloo, D.T., "Balei Aijaid Sha ka Kmie", Dongmusa, IV(9), 6 May 1988, p. 4.
105. C. Lyngdoh, loc. cit., p. 9.
106. Nongneng, S. and Nongkynrih, H.S., "U Khasi bad ka Jingshim Jait", Dongmusa, IV(38), 15 August 1988, p. 4; Mawrie, H.D., 1981, p. 72.
107. Gurdon, P.R., op. cit., 1990, p. xvii.
108. Ibid.
109. Bareh, H., Khasi Fables and Folk-Tales, Calcutta : Firma KLM, 1974, p. 48ff.
110. Lyngdoh, F., "Pynneh ia ka Riti Shimjait na ka Kmie", Dongmusa, IV(43), 20 October 1988, p. 4.
111. Mawrie, H.O., 1981, p. 72.

112. For example, Kyndiah, P.E., "Ka Shongkha-khleh ka pynjah ia ka Jait-byriew", Dongmusa, IV(33), 14 August 1987, p. 4; R.S. Berry, Quoted by Kharshiing, H.R., "Ka Shimjait na ka Kmie bad ka Khein Kur Khein Kha", Dongmusa, IV(24), 19 June 1988, p. 4.
113. Mawrie, H.O., 1981, p. 72.
114. Nongrum, N.N., op. cit., p. 30.
115. Lyngdoh, H., Ka Niam Khasi, Shillong: U George M. Lyngdoh, 1970 (2nd edition), pp. 140-41.
116. See also Nikhla, B., "U Khasi-Pnar u ai Jaid sha ka Kynthei - Balei"? Dongmusa, IV(39), 22 September 1988, p. 4.
117. Nongneng, S. and Nongkynrih, H.S., "U Khasi bad ka Shim Jait", Dongmusa, IV(38), 15 September, 1988, p. 4; Lyngdoh, H., op. cit., p. 141; Myrthong, B., "Ka Riti Khein Jait Ai Jait ki Khasi-Pnar", Dongmusa, IV(46), 10 April 1988, p. 4; Mawrie, H.O., 1981, p. 72.
118. Phanbuh, T., "Ka Shim Jait na U Kpa", Dongmusa, IV(49), 1 December 1988, p. 4.
119. Lyngdoh, P.R., 1985, loc. cit., p. 12.
120. Good, W.J., 1987, p. 27.
121. Nongrum, N.N., op. cit., pp. IV, 2; Myrthong, B., "Ka Riti Khein Jait Ai Jait ki Khasi-Pnar", Dongmusa, IV(46), 10 November 1988, p. 4; Kharakor, P., 1988, p. 44, among many others.
122. Nongkynrih, N.M., "U Rishot ha u Khiew Khyndew", Dongmusa, IV(20), 13 May 1988, p. 4.
123. Most people subscribe to this belief. In fact, the interviewee couples S-Ls:1, S-Jo:1, S-Lab:1, S-B:19, S-Mk:15, did say that they will give more property to their daughters because "they are weaker". This is an additional advantage of being weak.

124. Deva Santhanam, M., "Woe Unto Him Who Abuses Her:", The New Leader, 80(21), 1 November, 1990, p. 30.

Did Adam sleep like a log  
 Before he met his help-mate;  
 Before the Potter moulded his rib  
 Into a weaker Eve?

He didn't wave his omnipotent wand  
 And say, 'FIAT HOMO'  
 Clay He took; put His nimble fingers  
 To squeeze out Adam but not a dame  
 Curse upon him who calls a woman weak  
 For she is made of a sublime substance  
 A bone of contention?!

Man is sodden and so he dissolves  
 While even a 'femme fatale' is nobler  
 Mysterious than the mystical rose  
 Womb is she of man and wooed  
 Woe unto him who abuses her.

Man is a cur who wags his tail  
 Shoots his tongue and pants, prowling.  
 A bone, a walking bone...  
 Would he pounce on a bone  
 Having nibbled for long?

A dog cannot eat and digest bones  
 A bone only mars, only bruises.  
 Can't he learn this?  
 Why did the Potter create dogs and  
 Why bones?

125. See, for example, Nongrum, N.N., 1989, p. 33.
126. Sen, S., 1985, p. 91.
127. Kurbah, S.A., "Shano ka Jaitbynriew Nylla u Khasi", Dongmusa, 1 May 1987, p. 4; "Thung da u Khaw-Khar mih hi u Khaw-Khar", Dongmusa, IV(20), 13 May 1988, p. 4; "Balei ki Khra ki Pait", Dongmusa, IV(21), 20 May 1988, p. 4; "U Khasi un Poi Shano?", Dongmusa, IV(24), 19 May 1988, p. 4.
128. Lyngdoh, H., op. cit., p. 141.
129. Mawrie, H.O., op. cit., p. 66.
130. Nongdhar, J., loc. cit., p. 24.
131. Sohtun, T., "Haba Shim Jait na ka Kmie", Dongmusa, IV(32), 4 August 1988, p. 4.
132. In a conversation with the investigator on 10 October 1987.
133. Trobisch, W., I Married You, Bombay: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974, p. 29.
134. Kharakor, P., p. 4; Lyngdoh, P.R., loc. cit., p. 13.
135. Lyngdoh, C., loc. cit., p. 10.
136. Khongphai, A.S., 1970, p. 13.
137. Ibid.
138. Kharakor, P., 1988, p. 103.
139. Ibid.
140. Chattopadhyay, S.K., 1985, p. 131.
141. Ibid.
142. Ibid.
143. Lyngdoh, P.R., loc. cit., p. 13.

144. Lyngdoh, C., loc. cit., p. 9.
145. Kharshing, H.R., loc. cit., p. 36.
146. Lyngdoh, C., loc. cit., p. 10.
147. Mawrie, H.O., 1981, p. 58.
148. U Rabon Singh, Ka Kitab Niam-Khein ki Khasi, Shillong: Khasi Jaintia Press, 1972, p. 58.
149. Daughters other than ka khatduh.
150. In Chattopadhyay, S.K., 1985, p. 124.
151. Raptap, K., "Ka Jingkhylllem ka Bor u Kni", Dongmusa, IV(50), 8 December 1988, p. 4.
152. Lyngdoh, P.R., "The Position of Women in the Matrilineal Society of the Khasis", St. Mary's Past Pupils' Association, 1985, p. 14.
153. Nongrum, N.N., 1989, p. 35.
154. Iawphniaw, C.B., "Kumno ki Pynkam ia ka Ai-Pateng Ioh-Pateng", Dongmusa, V(33), 17 August 1989, p. 4; Syiem, P., Weng noh syndon ia ka Klam ka Ngoh Kynsha", Ka Sur Shipara, 8 July 1978, p. 3.
155. Raptap, K., "Hato ka Jingkylla Jait ka Pynjah ia ka Jaitbynriew", Dongmusa, IV(38), 15 September 1988, p. 4.
156. Ka Sur Shipara, 2 August, 1980, p. 3. It reported that B.M. Pugh and M.N. Majaw were unwilling to interfere with the traditional Khasi law of inheritance lest they made a mistake. S.D. Nichols Roy was for the status quo, for the time being, as the people at large were not yet aware of the need of the hour. The Editor answered S.D. Nichols Roy, forthrightly that leaving the matter of sharing self-acquired property to all children optional to parents would lead to discriminations either against the other children in favour of ka khatduh, or against the sons in favour of the daughters.

157. Mawrie, H.O., 1981, p. 54.
158. Gurdon, P.R., 1990, p. 79; Kharakor, P., 1988, pp. 49-51; Lyngdoh, P.R., "The Position of Women in the Matrilineal Society of the Khasis", St. Mary's Past Pupils' Association, 1985, p. 12.
159. Kharakor, P., 1988, p. 52.
160. Gurdon, P.R., 1990, p. 79.
161. Ibid, Kharakor, P., 1988, p. 50.
162. Kharakor, P., 1988, pp. 50ff.
163. Gurdon, P.R., 1990, p. 79.
164. Mawrie, H.O., 1981, p. 57.
165. Nakane, C., 1967, p. 125.
166. Kynpham Singh, loc. cit., p. 127.
167. Nakane, C., 1967, p. 125.
168. Lyngdoh, P.R., loc. cit., p. 11.
169. Ibid., p. 13.
170. Natarajan, N., 1977, p. 163.
171. Ibid., p. 160.
172. Nakane, C., 1967, p. 126.
173. Ibid., p. 127.
174. See letter to the Editor Ka Sur Shipara, XXVI(23), 21 August, 1989, p. 3.

**Chapter V**

**ANALYSIS OF DATA**



### 5.1.0 Introduction

The analysis of data has been done keeping in mind all the 11 items listed in the interview schedule. These items are pointers to :

- a) the type and the extent of change in the family system;
- b) the deviation from the traditional practice that cross-culturally married couples might have gone through; and
- c) the adaptation that these couples have made to accommodate themselves to the changes.

Each couple is given a code number, indicating the region or the area, the place or locality, and the serial number; e.g., S-Ma:1 for Shillong-Mawlai:no.1; or G-Tu:2 for Garo Hills-Tura:serial number 2.

In the course of collecting information, the investigator received every cooperation from heterogamous couples in which the husbands were Khasis, and the women were non-Khasis, and also from couples where both husbands and wives were Khasis but following the patrilineal pattern of family. Instead, among couples the women are rather reticent and unwilling to give any personal information about themselves. In one case in Tura, a young woman even refused to come out to be interviewed.

### 5.2.0 RESIDENCE

#### Group A

KΔ=nK0 --- KΔ=nK0

In Group A where Khasi men (K $\Delta$ ) are married to non-Khasi women (nKO), the distribution of residence is as follows :

Virilocal	84.75%
Uxorilocal	13.56%
Neolocal	1.69%

Group B

K $\Delta$ =KO --- K $\Delta$ =KO

In Group B, where both husbands and wives are either both Khasis, or from matrilineal societies, the distribution of residence is as follows:

Virilocal	92.86%
Rented	7.14%

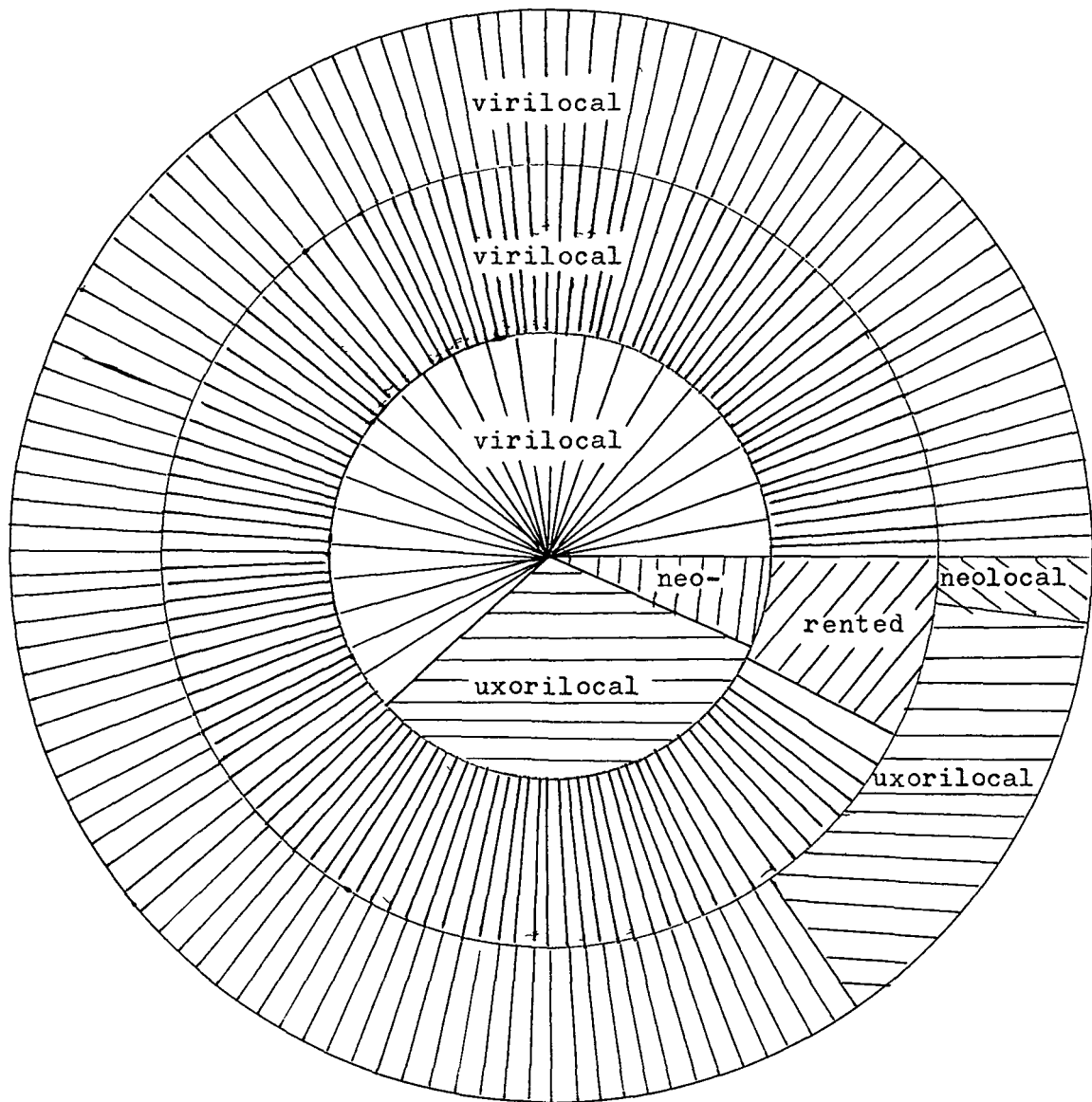
Group C

nK $\Delta$ =KO --- nK $\Delta$ =KO

In Group C, when non-Khasi men, generally from patrilineal societies, are married to Khasi women, the distribution of residence is as follows:

Virilocal	62.5%
Uxorilocal	31.25%
Neolocal	6.25%

The high percentage of virilocal residence is due to the fact that



Pie diagram no. 1

Three concentric circles showing the distribution of residence in cross-cultural marriages.

The outer circle shows the distribution of residence in the  $K4 = nKO$  type of marriages.

The middle circle shows the distribution of residence in the  $K4 = KO$  (pat.) type of marriages.

The inner circle shows the distribution of residence in the  $nK4 = KO$  type of marriages.

there were many couples in Guwahati, Tura and Resubelpara, where husbands are sons of the soil (see pie-diagram no. 1).

### 5.3.0 DESCENT

#### Group A

#### K<sub>1</sub>=nKo

a) In Group A, where Khasi men are married to non-Khasi women, the pattern of descent was found as follows:

a) Patrilineal	74.59%
b) Matrilineal	16.96%
c) Both	1.69%
d) Title of a friend	1.69%
e) New title	1.69%
f) Not yet	1.69%
g) Changed in 1987 from matrilineal to patrilineal	1.69%

b) In the case of couple no.S-La:2, the mother is a Naga by birth who was saved and adopted by a Khasi nurse at the time of birth. She grew up in her adopting mother's residence and has her title. The adopting mother has no children. All the three children of the adopted woman, one by a Mizo husband who abandoned her and two by a Khasi man who died in 1988, have the title of the adopting grandmother. They will also

get her property through their mother. In this case, descent remains essentially matrilineal.

c) The children in one case, coupled no. S-P:2, were found to have adopted the titles of both the father and the mother, Ranee-Raulim. Ranee from the father, and Raulim from the mother. There are more cases of such combinations, such as Shadap-Sen. So someone asked : "Balei Das-Swer?" (Why Das-Swer?)<sup>1</sup>.

d) In one case, the man is married to a Naga woman and living in Nagaland, but not in the place of his wife. For fear of losing the educational benefits and other facilities for his children, the man refused to give his title to his children, and so did the wife. As a way out of the dilemma, the man gave his children the title of one of his close friends, who readily agreed to it.

e) In another case, the man is married to a Nepali woman who grew up in Shillong and was thoroughly 'Khasiised'. He is Nongrum, and she is Chetri. The man refused to give his children his title as it is against the tradition. He gave his children the title of Kharnongrum.

Couple No.S-Ma:2 is a case in which a Khasi man is married to a Bodo girl. He gave his children his title and no one had any difficulty. But when his mother refused to accept her son's children as members of her clan (kur), the man asked his wife to give them her title, but she refused. He finally chose his father's name as the title of his children.

f) Had no children till the time of enquiry.

g) Couple no.S-Mk:5, in which a Khasi man is married to a Nepali woman since 1969, had been living uxorilocally, with the parents of the wife. The children lived like Nepalis and had the title of their mother. In 1987, the house was razed to the ground by a fire. Then the family of the man came and lived virilocally and changed over from matriliney to patriliney.

Group B

KΔ=Ko

In Group B, where both partners are Khasis, descent was found as follows:

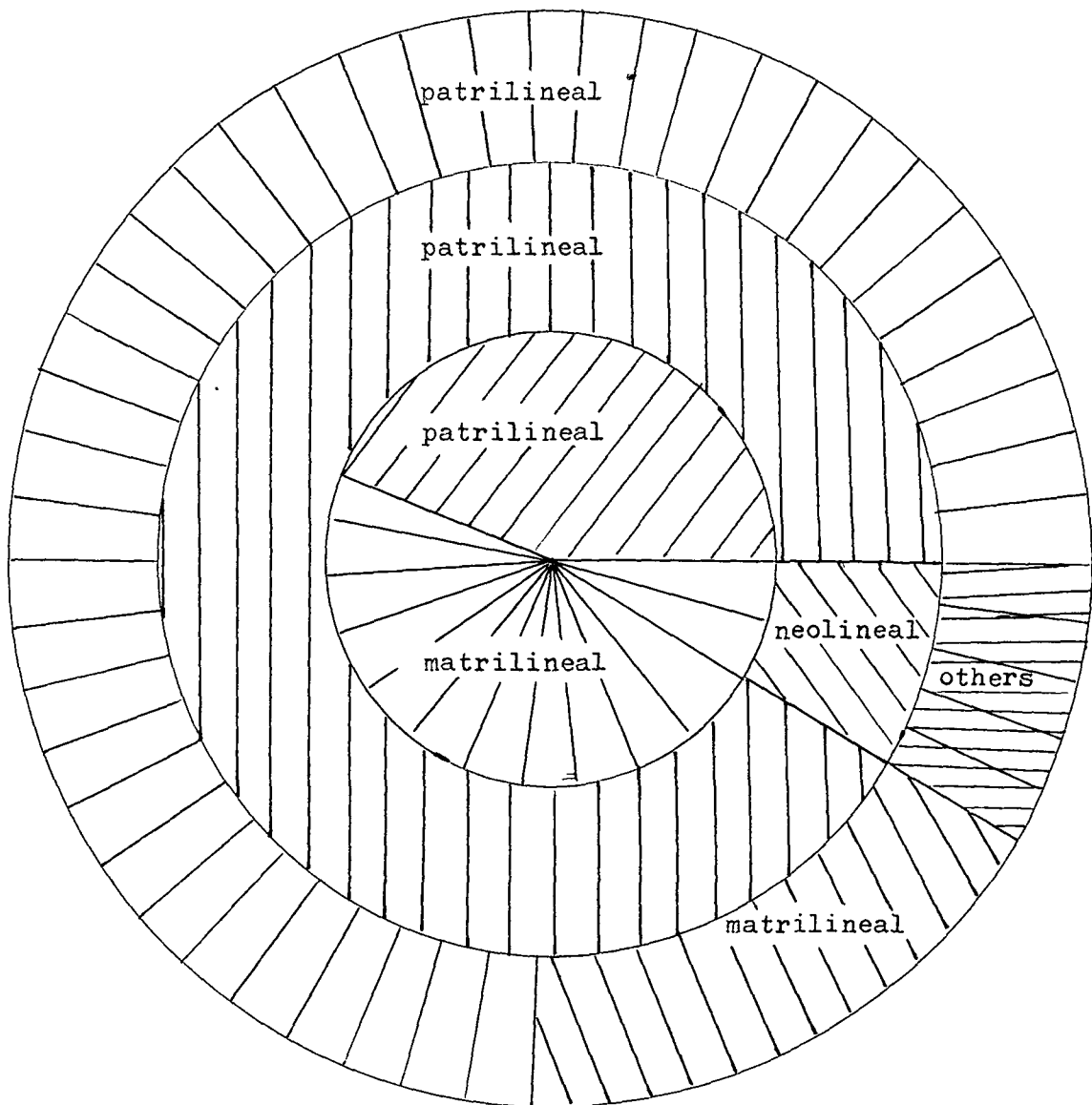
Patrilineal	91.67%
New	8.33%

Group C

nKΔ=KO

In Group C, where non-Khasi men are married to Khasi women, descent followed the following pattern:

Patrilineal	43.75%
Matrilineal	56.25%



Pie diagram no. 2

Three concentric circles showing the distribution of descent in cross-cultural marriages.

The outer circle shows the distribution of descent in the  $K\Delta = nKO$  type of marriages.

The middle circle shows the distribution of descent in the  $K\Delta = KO$  (pat.) type of marriages.

The inner circle shows the distribution of descent in the  $nKA = KO$  type of marriages.

Couple no.G-Tu:2, a Khasi woman is married to a Garo, and living with him in Tura. The husband is a Marak. To fit into the Garo moiety system, the woman abandoned her title Diengdoh, and adopted the title Sangma, which title she passes on to her children. One reason for her doing so was to keep the matrilineal practice, and get the benefits of living in Tura. (See pie-diagram no. 2).

#### **5.4.0 REACTION OF CLAN MEMBERS**

One of the interviewees expressed his opinion that, in general, rural people are less enlightened than the towns people and more resistant to cultural changes and innovations, such as cross-cultural marriages and their consequences.

When speaking about the reaction of the clan members, one has to clarify whether the reaction is due to the heterogamous unions, or to its consequences - the identity of children, or the matters of inheritance. Since, choosing one's mate is very much a matter of choice of any adult individual, parents ultimately do not have any real say in the matter. The discussion in this section will be about the reaction of clan members to the consequences of cross-cultural marriages. Secondly, the discussion will be limited to those heterogamous couples where the men are Khasis and the women are non-Khasis, and to those tribe-endogamous marriages in which both partners are Khasis, because :



a) These are the primary interest of the study;

b) In all the cases of cross-culturally married couples where women are Khasis, with their residence in Shillong and were interviewed, follow the matrilineal pattern. In the course of the enquiry, I came across two families that had been following the patrilineal system, but had changed over to the matrilineal system. The case of one Basaiawmoit in 1982, and the case of one Kharbuki in about 1988, and another in which one Bareh back-tracked to Ngapkynta, because Bareh was his father's title are examples of such change over. In Tura, there is a family where the mother is a Sun and the father a Shira. The children follow the matrilineal system.

c) In cases where the men are patrilineal non-Khasis and the family lives in virilocal residence, the system has been found to be patrilineal.

1) In Group A, where the men are Khasis and married to non-Khasi women, the reactions of the parents and the clan members are as follows:

- a) 69.57% are either positively or tacitly in favour;
- b) 26.09% are not in favour;
- c) 4.34% are undecided.

2) In Group B, where both partners are Khasis but follow the patrilineal system, the reactions of parents and clan members are as follows:

- a) 60% are either positively or tacitly in favour;
- b) 30% are not in favour;

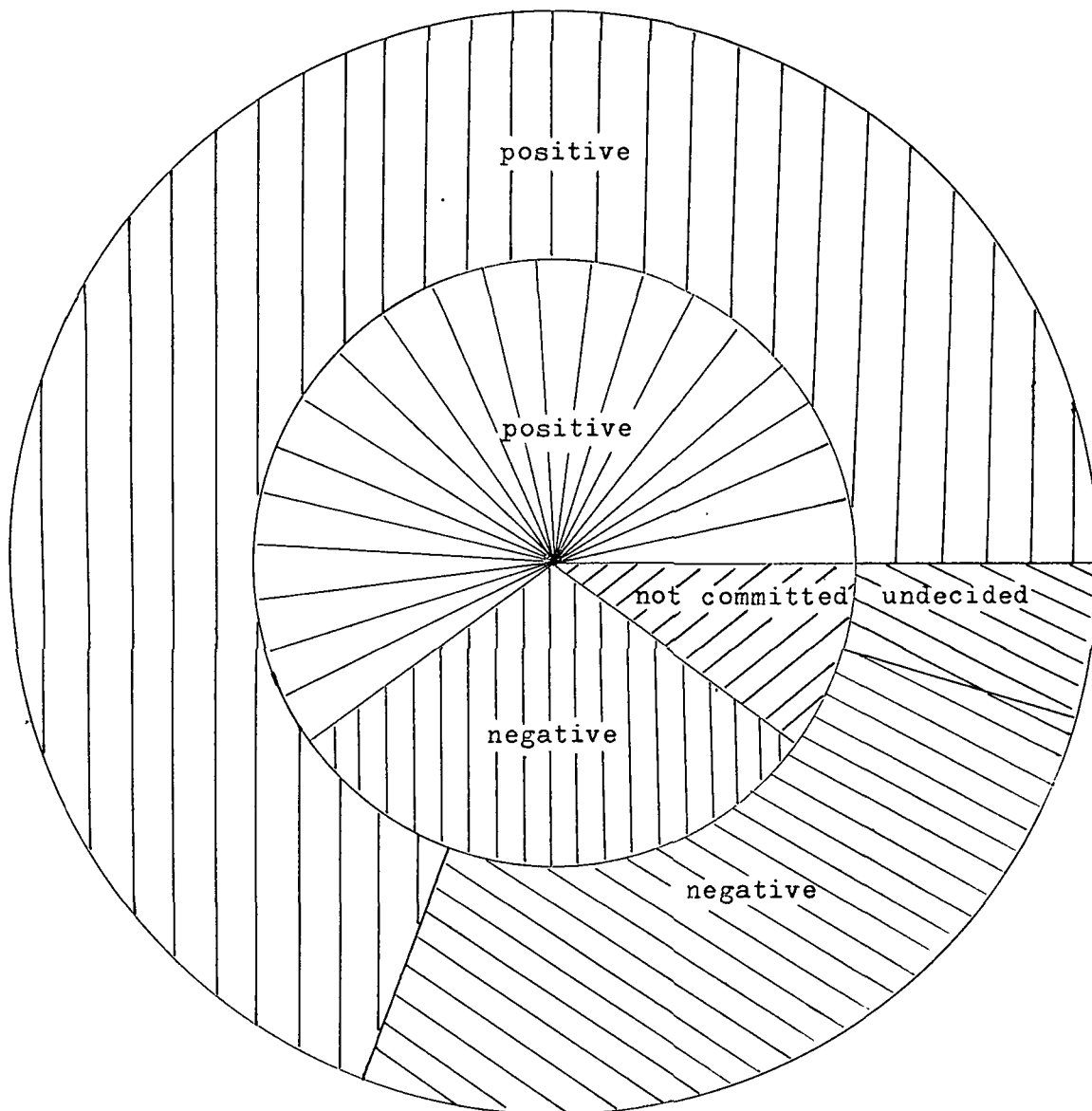
c) 10% are undecided.

a) 69.57% and 60% of the parents and relatives respectively of the above groups are either positively or tacitly in favour of the patrilineal pattern of family. Two couples were blessed and encouraged by their parents, and in the case of one couple, the choice had been entirely left to the man. Generally, children of the couples are accepted into the clan. In one case, the match had been made with the knowledge, consent and cooperation of the parents of the boy. Another man married against the wishes of his parents. Naturally, his parents are still not happy with the match, but accept the children.

There is an interesting and peculiar case of an IAS officer who is married to a non-Khasi lady. His original title is Laloo. But at school where he studied as a boy, he and his brother were registered under the father's title, Lyngdoh. His brother reverted to Laloo; but he keeps on to Lyngdoh, partly for convenience's sake.

b) Those who are opposed to such cultural deviations are 26.09% and 30% respectively. One man married a non-Khasi, against the advice of his parents because they felt it is "against the Khasi cultural practice; they do not understand each other's culture or language." The parents are to date against the marriage. In fact under such restrictions, it happens that the couple elopes. (See pie-diagram no. 3).

To those who argue that such unions are "against the Khasi cultural



Pie diagram no. 3

Two concentric circles showing the distribution of reactions of clan members to cross-cultural marriages.

The outer circle shows the distribution of the reactions of the clan members to the  $K^A = nK^O$  type of marriages.

The inner circle shows the distribution of the reactions of clan members to the  $K^A = K^O$  (pat.) type of marriages.

practice; they do not understand each others' culture or language", one can ask :

i) What is against the Khasi cultural practice, the marriage per se or its consequences?

ii) If one of their daughters is married to a non-Khasi, is that marriage also or its consequences against the Khasi cultural practice? Do they understand each others' culture and language?

In another case a Khasi man is married to a Nepali lady whose title is Sunar. The parents and the clan refused to accept the children into their Marbaniang clan. All the same the man gave the children his title, Marbaniang, but adds the wife's initial "S" for Sunar. Similarly, in couple no.G-Tu:7, the wife, a Diengdoh, is married to a Bodo man, a Narzary. The children are Diengdoh, but the man is keen on adding an 'N' to their title.

A more peculiar case is couple no. S-Ma:2 where a Khasi man is married to Bodo girl. Initially no one raised any objection. It was only when the first child came that his mother objected to his giving the child the mother's title, Duia. The man asked the wife to give her title to the child but she refused. With the understanding of his father, the man gave his child his father's name Dliton as his child's title.

In another case, a Khasi man is married to a Naga lady. He lives in Nagaland and is not sure of how his relative would accept his children.

For that reason he has not given them his title, but that of a friend. He is afraid to bring his children to Shillong, lest they be rejected by his parents and relatives.

Some parents have not consented to cross-cultural marriages, and more especially K4=KO marriages with patrilineal characteristics, for fear of Ka Sang, that is, of future possible forbidden unions that may arise out of ignorance of one's original and true descent. Couple no. S-So:1 is a case in point. A Marbaniang is married to a Kaur, a Punjabi girl. His family follows the patrilineal principle. One of his sisters is married to a Khasi, and her family is matrilineal, while another of his sisters is married to an Assamese and the family follows the patrilineal system. He has a brother who is married to a Khasi and gave his children his title, Marbaniang. Later their mother forbade him to do that for honest fear of Ka Sang. So the family reverted to matriliney and children are now Nongrum. The entire thing is a bit of a mix-up; but what one wonders at is the fact that the mother forbade the second son to give his children his title for fear of forbidden unions later. Why did she not forbid her second daughter from going patrilineal for the very same reason? Why is it Ka Sang only for the boy and not for the girl?

Again, a case is that of a Government officer who had been posted in U.P. where he married a girl from U.P. and lived at Nainital. The children are Lyngdoh. The father, the link man, died a few years ago. The children want to come and live in Shillong with the relatives of the father. The

clan members are not so keen on their coming; they are not sure a) of their responsibility towards those children, b) what work they (children) can do.

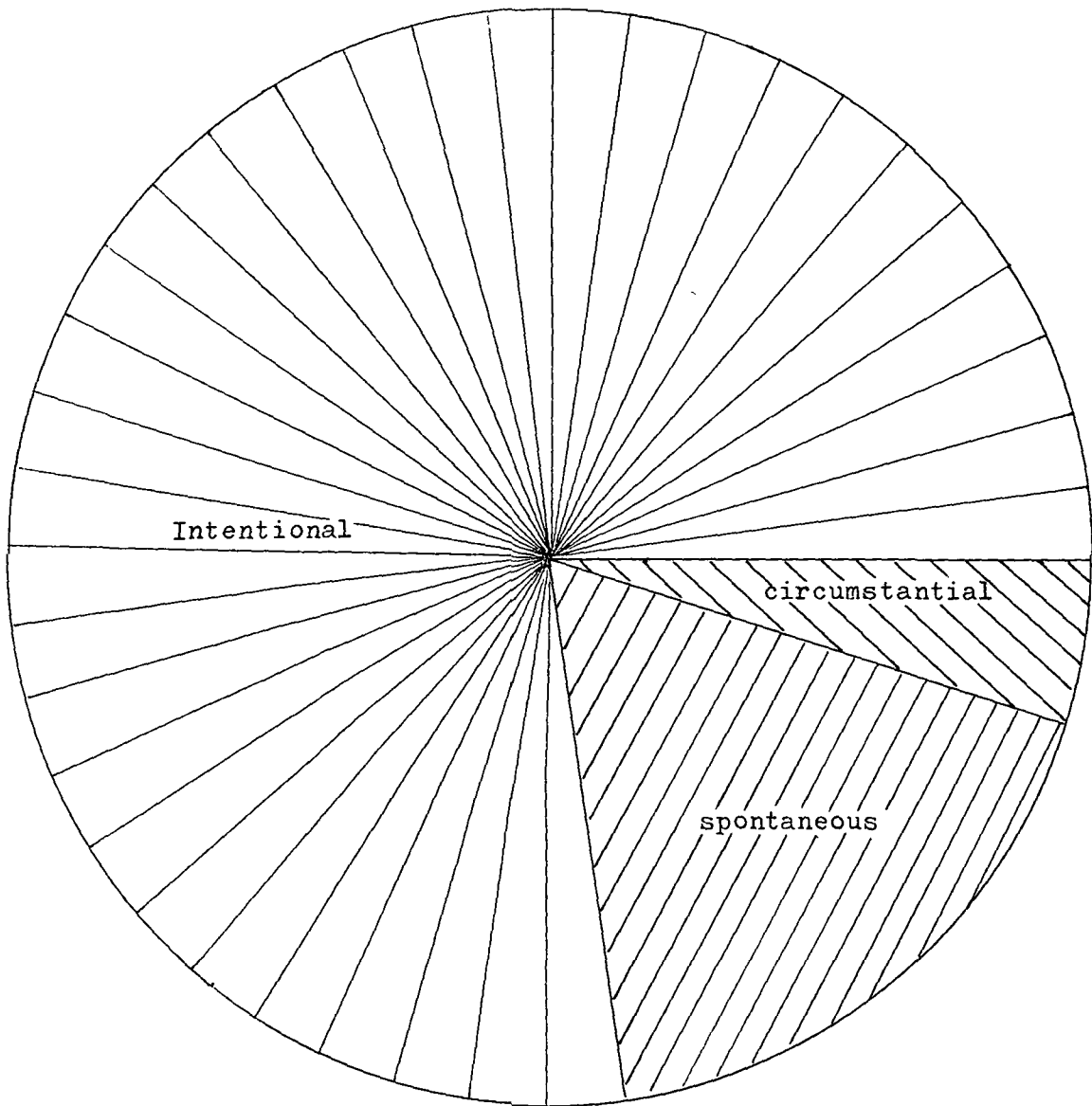
A second notable case is that of a Nepali couple who had a baby girl. Shortly after, the mother went mad. The father of the baby abandoned the wife and left the child in the care of the Sisters of a convent. Later the child was adopted by a Khasi couple who had no children. They loved and looked after the child as their own. The adopting mother Khasiised the girl and gave her her own title, Warlarpih. Years afterwards, the girl grew to a marriageable age and did marry a Khasi boy. It was then that the clan objected to her keeping the title of her adopting mother for obvious reasons. The lady changed her title from Warlarpih to Kharlarpih, and her children too are Kharlarpih.

### 5.5.0 INTENTIONALITY

In the case of K $\Delta$ =KO families following the patrilineal system, the marriage was always intentional, and the change from matrilineal to patrilineal pattern was deliberate.

In the case of K $\Delta$ =nKO couples, wherever the system changed from matrilineality to patrilineality, the intentionality has been found as follows:

Intentional	77.27%
Spontaneous	18.18%



Pie diagram no. 4

Pie diagram showing the distribution of intentionality of the K4 = nKO type of cross-cultural marriages.

Circumstantial

4.55%

(See pie-diagram no.4).

The people who intentionally went for cross-cultural marriages, or where both parties are Khasis, with a view to adopting the patrilineal system, expressed a variety of motives and intentions.

1. Among S-B:--- couples, the majority married cross-culturally and adopted the patrilineal system in order to be able to stay in their own homes and look after the parents, the younger brothers and sisters, and to keep the parental property intact. One boy is the youngest in the family, and everyone else is already married. His parents expressed the desire that he stayed at home. They asked to marry outside the tribe and bring the wife home which he did in order to look after his parents and inherit the property. In another case, the boy is the eldest, and his father had died earlier. He felt obliged to look after his mother, younger brothers and sisters, and the family property.

2. Two cases mentioned that they wanted the title to themselves and thus increase membership of their own clan. Some felt that their children should be truly theirs.

3. Eight men were very explicit in their intentions in going for patrilineal arrangements either through cross-cultural marriages or even through homogamous marriages, and that intention was that each one wanted



to be the master of his own house and family.

4. In one case the man had gone in for cross-cultural marriage for no special reason but sheer preference for a non-Khasi.

5. A young man had been in love with a Khasi girl. He had been living with and brought up by his grandmother. But he wanted a companion for his grandmother and so married an Assamese Muslim girl.

6. a) Khasi women : Several interviewees feel that Khasi girls and women are too bossy, too dominant, whereas the men concerned believe they are the ones who should be masters of their own houses.

In case one, the young man's mother encouraged her son to look for a non-Khasi girl, because "our girls go about too much and too freely".

At least 3 men interviewees were very explicit in the expression of their doubt of the reliability and virginity of Khasi girls of today in general. They are too absorbent, taking in just anyone at all along the way, thus making themselves cheap and easy. Khasi girls too easily allow themselves to be exploited.

b) Khasi men : Several of the men who were interviewed feel the system has been unfair to them, they are made to feel that they are nobodies. It is quite natural that Khasi men should be irresponsible and divorce their wives too easily.

Quite naturally a new generation, with a new self-consciousness

and new awareness is appearing. Three interviewees did say that they aimed at being responsible men in their families and society. One said that the life and death of his family are in his hands. Many feel that the patrilineal arrangement is an excellent opportunity for preserving self acquired property.

The man in couple S-Lab:1 holds an MBBS degree. In his family he has seen things of which he would never approve, and which he did not want to be repeated. There were seven brothers and sisters, born of one mother and several fathers.

7. Quite a few did view the Khasi matriliney as a system riddled with weaknesses. The man in couple S-Mk:18, for example, is very unhappy with the way things are going in his mother's house. His mother had died several years ago. It pains this man to see the family property being recklessly squandered by the husband of his younger sister.

8. Seven men, including an IAS officer, married heterogamously, or homogamously but with the patrilineal mode of living, in order to get away from the undue interference of the in-laws. They felt that a man is both the procreator and provider for his family; it contravenes the law of nature not to have authority over their own children. Couple S-Mk:13 feels that too many Khasis do not care to respect their in-laws who come into their house.

### 5.6.0 PROPERTY DECISIONS

In couple no.P-J:1, the man holds an MBBS degree and got his share of the parental self-acquired property, but his non-Khasi wife, also an MBBS, brought only herself and her education.

In couple no. S-Lab:1, the husband is an MBBS. To-date he has not been offered any share in the parental property. He feels that his education is given to him by his parents. He does not expect anything more. If he is offered, he will accept; but if he is not offered he will have no hard feelings either. His non-Khasi wife is from a patrilineal society, and did not bring anything.

In couple no.S-Mk:14 - the husband is an IAS officer. His parents had divided the entire property equally among the sons and the daughter. The officer's non-Khasi wife comes from a patrilineal society and brought her share of the property in case and kind.

Couple no. S-Mk:4 - the young man is not certain of getting any share in the property of his parents. His non-Khasi wife comes from her patrilineal society empty handed.

In couples no. S-Mk:13 and 18 the men are Government servants and their wives are non-Khasis. The man got a share of the inheritance, while their non-Khasi wives, from patrilineal societies, brought nothing.

In couple no. S-Mk:20 - the man is engaged in business. He is keeping the family business that was started by his father on a brisk pace. His

father had promised all the children a share in the property. His non-Khasi wife from a patrilineal culture brought no inheritance.

In couple no.S-B:19, both husband and wife are Khasis, but the family has adopted the patrilineal pattern. According to Khasi customary laws of inheritance the lady should have had a share in the parental property. As things were and are, the lady had not been offered any share in the inheritance, and she does not expect it either because she has opted for the patrilineal pattern of residence and descent. The man, instead, has received a part of the parental inheritance and has also built up a sizeable amount of property through his own industry. The same is true of couple no.S-La:7.

Couples nos.S-B:1 to 20, are all from one area. In each case, the husband has a just share of the inheritance. Several of the couples were married as the result of the desire and suggestion and encouragement of the parents. Their wives are all from non-Khasi patrilineal societies and none of them brought with them any property.

In the case of couple no.S-P:1 - the wife is a Nepali, Thapa; she is an orphan who had been living with her uncle. At the boy's request, the parents went to the girl's uncle and asked for her hand on behalf of their son. The match was struck. On leaving her uncle to join her would be husband, the girl was stripped of every and was let go only in what she had on. All that was, as she said, because she married outside the

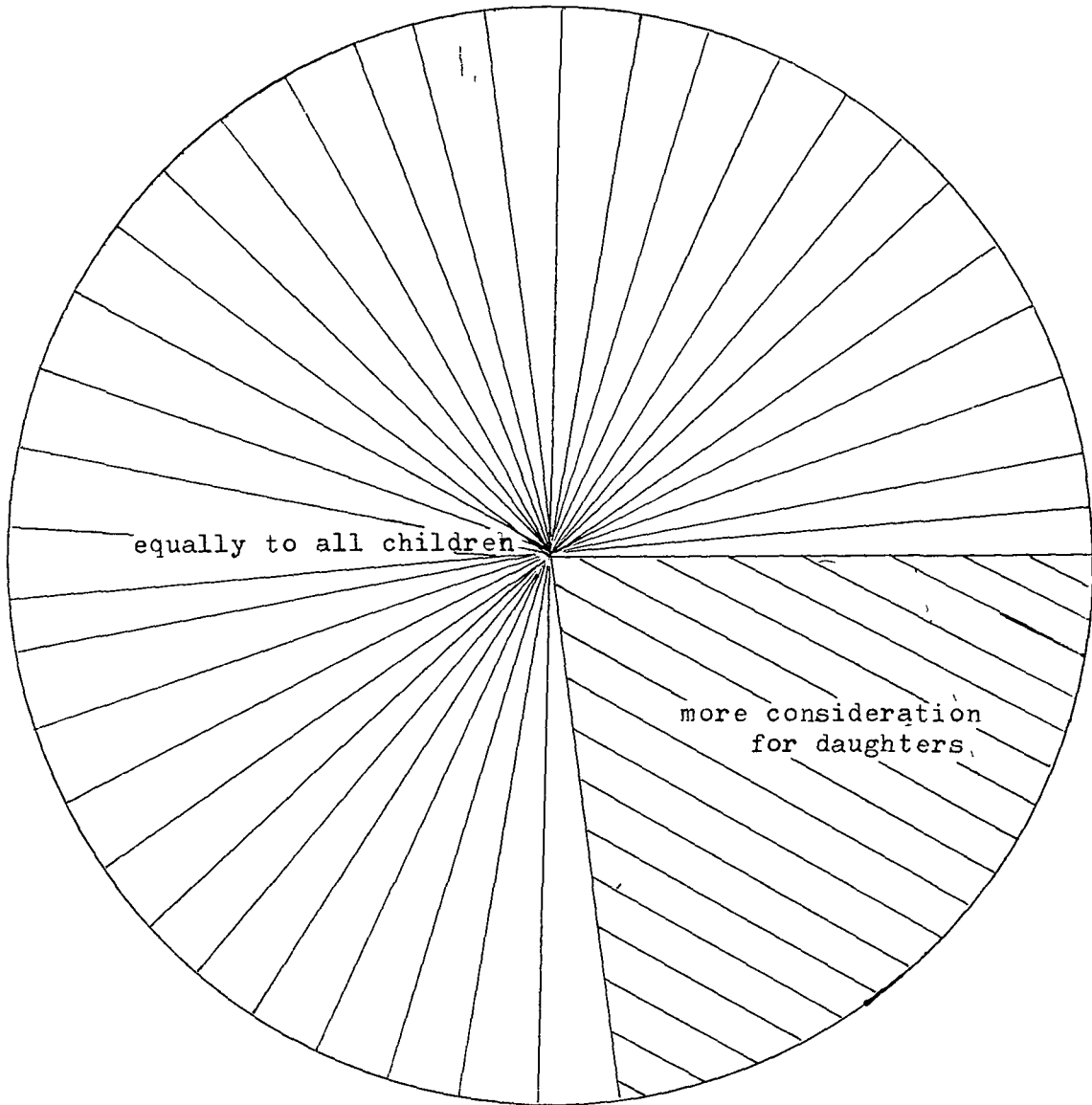
group. All that the family has today is the boy's share of property and what the man acquired by his own work. The same is true of couple no.S-Mk:4, where the girl is an Assamese Muslim.

Most of the remaining who, either by choice or by necessity, went in for the patrilineal pattern of family, have had to begin from the scratch, with the sweat of their own brow. The man in couple no.S-Mk:15 refused to have any share from his wife's side so as to avoid any sort of mix-up, to offset any claim on his children or his property, so that he would be the sole master in the house.

In the consideration of property decision among their children, 76.92% of the couples have decided to share all their property equally among all their children. Probably the word "equally" is to be understood as meaning something like "appropriately", as some couples seemed to suggest and that "appropriately" will be guided by norms other than the traditional customary laws of inheritance.

23.08% of the couples were inclined to be more considerate towards their daughters, but the motivation for that consideration is not guided by matrilineal traditions, but by reasons like the following :

Daughters are by nature the weaker sex and need more parental support; sons instead can survive better. Some couples will give the house to their daughters. It is generally believed that the Khasi customary laws give more responsibilities to girls, hence they deserve more consideration



Pie diagram no. 5

Pie diagram showing the distribution of decision on property sharing.

(see pie-diagram no.5).

The father in couple no.P-J:1 wants to give his sons a place each within the same compound.

Couple no.G-T:15 has decided that the sons will share equally the father's property in Shillong and the daughters, the mother's property in Tura.

Another couple was prepared to make some compromises on the Khasi customary laws of inheritance with boys getting their share of the property, but the youngest daughter getting more than the rest.

In couple no.S-Ma:6, the man is married to a Nepali. The father has divided the property and wealth among his children, and fears that after his death, his kur (clan) may claim all the property. The reason behind this fear is that according to the traditional practice, the children belong to the wife and not to the father's clan.

Couple no.S-Lab:1 want to provide for all the children equally, so that the boys are well equipped, and the daughters should be well provided for, so that they would be independent of their husbands in case of maltreatment.

Couple no.S-Mk:5 want to provide for all their children. Succession will be to the eldest son, he will look after the others and will get the house.

Couple no.S-Mk:19 will provide for all, but the house will go to the youngest daughter. Instead another couple feel that they should provide for all equally and the house would go to anyone of their children.

Couple no.S-Mk:21 are waiting for time to advise them on what they should do. The man feels that if daughters marry outside the group and if the sons marry inside the group, they should not receive any share in the property.

#### 5.7.0 SUCCESSION

The question of succession to authority does not seem to have bothered the interviewees. Only couples nos.S-Mk:5 and 19 were very explicit that they wanted their eldest sons to succeed their fathers and look after the other brothers and sisters.

The man in couple no.S-Mk:20 is the eldest in the family. For all practical purposes he has already succeeded his father in power and authority. He controls his brothers and sisters, and the business of the family.

Couples no.S-Mk:15, P-J:1 and S-La:7 would like to see their eldest sons succeeding their fathers in their families.

In 1961, an association came into existence at Sohra (Cherrapunji) by the name of KA SENG IKTIAR LONGBRIEW-MANBRIEW, under the inspiration and leadership of Dr. A. Lyngdoh, M.B. The declared intention



no.1(b) of the association was to promote social support for the succession of the father by the eldest son. The association is thought to be the fore-runner of KA SYNGKHONG RYMPEI THYMMAI of recent origin.

### **5.8.0 STATUS OF HUSBAND, WIFE, SON AND DAUGHTER**

Interviewees did not seem to have calculated what kind of treatment to dole out to their wives, or their children. Things are quite spontaneous with the broad guideline of equity. Most of the wives are from patrilineal cultures, and came with an undeclared readiness to submit. Only in the case of couple no.S-Mk:19, the wife, a Nepali, declared, "I have surrendered myself to him."

Apart from the fact that the men considered themselves masters of the house, they took their wives as partners in life on par with themselves. Reportedly, one is a wife-beaten, his wife having had to run away to her parents in Assam several times; and another one, some say, is hen-pecked.

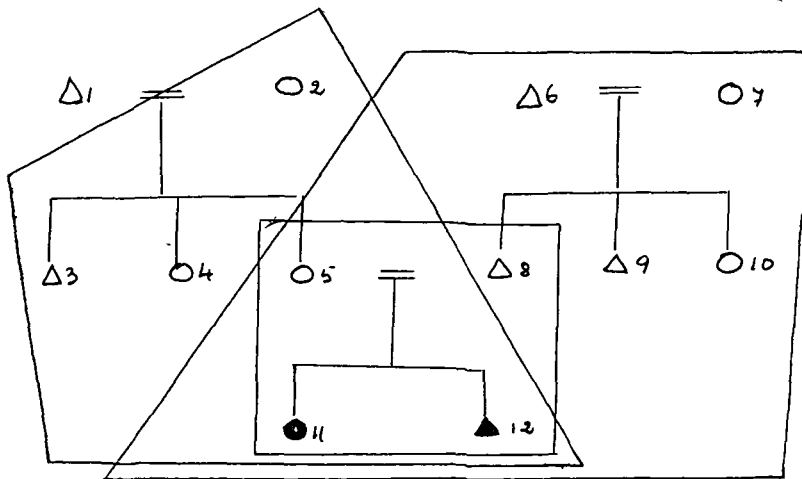
In general, however, the status of the male, the father and the son, seems to have been enhanced, and his status rising, while that of the female, mother and daughter, has not diminished. Wives are happy, and some of them did suggest that they received a fairer deal than they would have otherwise.

### 5.9.0 STATUS OF U KNI (THE UNCLE) AND OF U KPA (THE FATHER)

The uncle in the clan is respected, but in general people do not attach to him any longer all that importance he used to be given. Marriages are arranged, if at all, by parents. The uncle is, at the most, informed, not consulted. In these families the father gradually evicts the uncle.

### 5.10.0 KINSHIP TERMS

The perception of relationship is often recognized in the type of kinship terms that are used in respect of particular relatives. The swing from matrilineal to patrilineal pattern of family brings about changes in the relationships between the children and the kins on both sides.



In the above figure, 8 and 5, husband and wife form a family unit with their children 11 and 12 (black rectangular). Both are Khasis. The green enclosure

is the matrilineal clan, and the red enclosure is the patrilineal one.

If the black enclosure is a matrilineal family, then :

1) All who are included within the green enclosure belong to the same kur.

2) 3 is the uncle of 11 and 12.

3) 4 is the sister of 5, and share in the motherhood of 5, and is called younger or older-mother by 11 and 12.

4) 9 is the brother, and share in the fatherhood of 8, and is called younger or older-father by 11 and 12.

5) 2 is the mei-ieid (grandmother), 1 is the pa-ieid (grandfather).

6) 7 is the meikha (father's mother) and 11 is the kha (father's sister) of 11 and 12.

Instead, if the black rectangle follows the patrilineal pattern, then:

1) All who are included within the red enclosure belong to the same clan (kur).

2) 9 becomes both the uncle of 11 and 12 (because they belong to the same clan) and also younger or elder father who shares in the fatherhood of 8.

3) 6 and 7 become the grandparents (pa-ieid and mei-ieid), only if the relationship is calculated on the basis of clan title.

4) There is a confusion as to how to address 1,2,3,4 and 10.

Hitherto relationship is perceived on the basis of:

a) Title : - the title of the mother, indicating the clan to which the children belong; they are the kur; the title of the father, indicating clan to which he belongs; they are the Kha;

b) generation of the one who addresses and generation of the one who is addressed.

Kinship terms express two things :

a) Biological reality - the source of one's own existence, father and mother.

b) Social perception and the expression of the relationship.

When a family changes from matrilineal to patrilineal pattern, the biological reality remains unchanged, while the social perception undergoes changes. This fact is the present confusion from this fact. For example, to-date if one hears a boy addressing a man as pasan, one immediately understands that the addressee is the elder brother of the boy's father and that the two (the boy and the pasan), do not belong to the same clan. Instead, if one hears the same boy addressing the same man as maheh, one understands that the man is the elder brother of the boy's mother, and that the two (the boy and the maheh) belong to the same kur. Thus any kinship term is descriptive of both the biological reality and the social perception of the relationship.

When a family switches over from the matrilineal to the patrilineal

system, kinship terms may indeed remain unchanged but the thought content may have undergone a change. The adjustment is not easy because whereas the biological reality remains constant, the social perception is no longer the same, so that the boy may still use the term maheh to mean mummy's elder brother, but the uncle is not of the same clan as the boy; whereas now the term pasan means more than merely daddy's elder brother; he is also of the same clan as the boy.

Generally, the children in these families follow the matrilineal types of kinship terms, as in couples no.S-B:19 and S-La:3, couples no.S-La:5 and 6 say that they are the matrilineal kinship terms also because they are all living under the same roof. The children of couple no.S-Mk:15 are spontaneous and use whatever type of kinship terms they like.

#### 5.11.0 RELIGIOUS DISPARITY

One of the questions put to couples who were from different religious backgrounds was if religious disparity was something they had to reckon with. In such instance, religious disparity was certainly a question that couple could neglect or bypass. But it did not seem to have ever become a major issue since it was quite easily overcome by temporary or permanent cohabitation, or an eventual changing over of one of the other partner.

In couple no.S-La:5, the wife came over to Christianity only after the birth of the fourth child. However, they all seemed to agree that religious uniformity is preferable. The wife, a Nepali, in couple no.S-Mk:19, for

example, said: "How can he go one way I go another way?".

### 5.12.0 KA SANG

The question of Ka Sang is a sensitive issue, because it is not only a question of convenience, but of taboo that can affect the social as well as the moral integrity of the family. Hence, 35.27% of the parents were against their sons marrying cross-culturally for fear of the possibility of inadvertent forbidden marriages in the future.

Concealed behind this objection is the implicit belief that even when a family where both parents are Khasis and have adopted the patrilineal pattern of family, the children do not, in reality, belong to the clan of the father, but to that of the mother, and the children later may inadvertently marry another one from the clan of the mother. Hence, before launching into either cross-cultural marriages or before switching over from the matrilineal pattern to the patrilineal, the parties concerned did have that question very much in mind. How did they take care of that question?

One man in couple no.S-Mk:15 dismissed the question aside with one sweep of the hand saying that "it is all rubbish." He wants his children to "have a broad outlook." Others, like couple no.S-La:7 say they will instruct and warn the children. Couple no.S-B:19, said that they will inform the children and leave them to decide. Couples no.S-La:5 and 6 believe in ka sang (incest taboo) only up to the third generation, after which one

should feel quite free. They will instruct their children accordingly.

In one case, the man is the product of a cross-cultural marriage between a Khasi woman, a Suting and a non-Khasi. Later on in life, the man himself married another Suting, a close relationship of his mother. The man's escape device was to adopt the title of his father.

This opposition is often seen to be stringent on boys than on girls. There are boys who are married to Khasi girls and want to adopt the patrilineal way of life. They get their parents against them, for fear of ka sang. What about girls who marry non-Khasis and who, whether willingly or by force, surrender their titles to their husbands: isn't there equal possibility of Ka Sang in what the boys do as in what the girls do? Why do not parents raise a hue and cry against their errant daughters also?

The family of the man in couple S-So:l is again a case in point. A Marbaniang boy is married to a Kaur, a Punjabi girl. His own family follows the patrilineal principles. One of his sisters is married to a Khasi and her family is matrilineal, while another of his sisters is married to an Assamese and her family follows the patrilineal system. He has a brother who is married to a Khasi and gave his children his title, Marbaniang. Later their mother forbade him to do that, for honest fear of Ka Sang.<sup>2</sup> So the family reverted to matriliney, and the children are now Nongrum. The entire thing is a bit of a mix-up; but what one wonders at is the fact that the mother forbade the second son to give his children his title for

fear of forbidden unions later. Why did she not forbid her second daughter from going patrilineal for the very same reason? Why is it ka sang for the son only and not for the daughter also?

### 5.10.0 TREND-SETTERS?

Are the cross-cultural marriages, or the homogamous marriages with patrilineal principles, sporadic cases, or are those the initiators of a new trend? Are the parties concerned interested in the trend to continue after them? Would they encourage their children, their sons, to do as they have done, to keep the ball rolling?

The men in general 56.72% would like to see their sons follow their example. Couple no.S-La:5, for instance, expects his sons to do as he has done; couple no.S-La:6, has 3 daughters only; but if he had sons he would want them to do the same as he himself. Instead couple no.S-La:7 is not sure of what his children will do; he will leave them free. No.S-Mk:17 will encourage his sons, but he will not force them. No.S-Mk:15 feels sure that his sons will follow his example; about his daughters ... "it depends".

No.P-J:1 wants to give as many members to his clan as possible. So, he wants his sons to marry non-Khasi girls, and his daughters, to marry within the tribe so that all his grandchildren, from his sons and daughters, will belong to his clan. In fact, he had made up his mind that he will not give any share of the inheritance to any of his sons who marry within the



tribe, and to any of his daughters who marry outside.

#### 5.14.0 EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Regarding the general educational level of the people in the social contexts where the  $K\Delta=KO$  and the  $K\Delta=nKO$  types of matrimonial alliances with patrilineal principles, are found, two situations are noted :

1. The situation where, except for the rising generation, people are either illiterate, or with basic literacy. The older ones have not gone beyond the primary school level. There are indeed a few boys and girls who are attending High School. The people have enough exposure to influences from patrilineal groups. The one forceful compelling reason for the deviation was circumstantial necessity.

Of the 20  $K\Delta=nKo$  couples, the men did have more education than the women, most of whom have never been to school, or gone beyond primary school education. Only in one case, the woman was matriculate, and the man was only a class-VI pass. In the two cases of  $K\Delta=KO$  families with patrilineal principles, the men have had more education than their wives.

2. The second situation is found in towns where people are well informed and are educated. They were exposed to cross-cultural influences either because of education or physical contiguity. Generally, the men in the  $K\Delta=nKO$  and the  $K\Delta=KO$  types of marriages with patrilineal principles have had better education. In one case of the  $K\Delta=KO$  type, the woman

was more educated than the man.

### 5.15.0 CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS

One of the questions that were raised in the pre-submission seminar discussion was about the constitutional implications of the  $K\Delta=nKO$  type of marriages with patrilineal pattern of family. Are the children Khasis?

A.S. Khongphai's "Non-controvertial definition of a Khasi" is that a Khasi is "a person born of a Khasi mother irrespective of the fact whether the father is a Khasi or a non-Khasi."<sup>3</sup> Khongphai specified further that "Khasis reckon their jait from the mother, and cannot take the jait of the father."<sup>4</sup> What then is the status of the children of  $K\Delta=KO$  patrilineal families?

Interesting and relevant as this question is, it cannot be discussed at length in this paper simply because the question has never been asked seriously before. At best, the subject is likely to be a moot point.

However, it may be noticed that the question is a two-sided reality.

a) The legal biological reality is that a Khasi is one whose mother is a Khasi. (Incidentally, the Jews have this same way of establishing their identity. Yet their society is very much patrilineal). The  $K\Delta=nKO$  type of marriages falls short of this requirement.

b) The social reality is that a Khasi is a Khasi if he takes for him or herself the title of his mother, which requirement is taken care

of neither by the  $K\Delta=nKO$  nor by the  $K\Delta=KO$  type of marriages with patrilineal principles.

Granted the ideological thrust and time difference between them, A.S. Khongphai's definition is very different from that of C. Lyngdoh who, in 1938, had equated the identity of a Khasi with his religion; he wrote: "A Khasi is a Khasi because of his religion ... more than anything else. This is a great fact."<sup>5</sup> Yet both were men of jurisprudence.

The above definitions leave certain naive questions unattended :

1. Are the definitions above definitions or descriptions of Khasis?
2. Is Khongphai defining/describing a Khasi person or the Khasi matriliney?
3. How comprehensive and adequate are the above definitions?
4. How viable are they in the light of the current developments?

What are their social implications? /

This subject is beyond the scope and competence of this study. It is a potential area for further enquiry.

#### **5.16.0 REACTIONS TO CROSS-CUTLURAL MARRIAGES**

The reactions of people to cross-cultural marriages are of the type that are called 'mixed feelings'. It does not mean that all those whose reactions were called for necessarily had anything to do with such marriages in that they might have had to deal with such situations in their homes

such as they themselves, or any of their sons or daughters, or brothers or sisters, being cross-culturally married. Some of the interviewees were youngmen and women, married or unmarried; others were elderly people.

6.66% were not particularly committed to being either for or against cross-cultural marriages.

26.67% looked on cross-cultural marriages as something that one cannot help coming across these days, and to which one must learn to get reconciled, and which one must learn to accept.

66.67% were positively in favour with a qualified stand. These were not in favour of the  $KO=nK\Delta$  type of cross-cultural marriages, because of the following reasons :

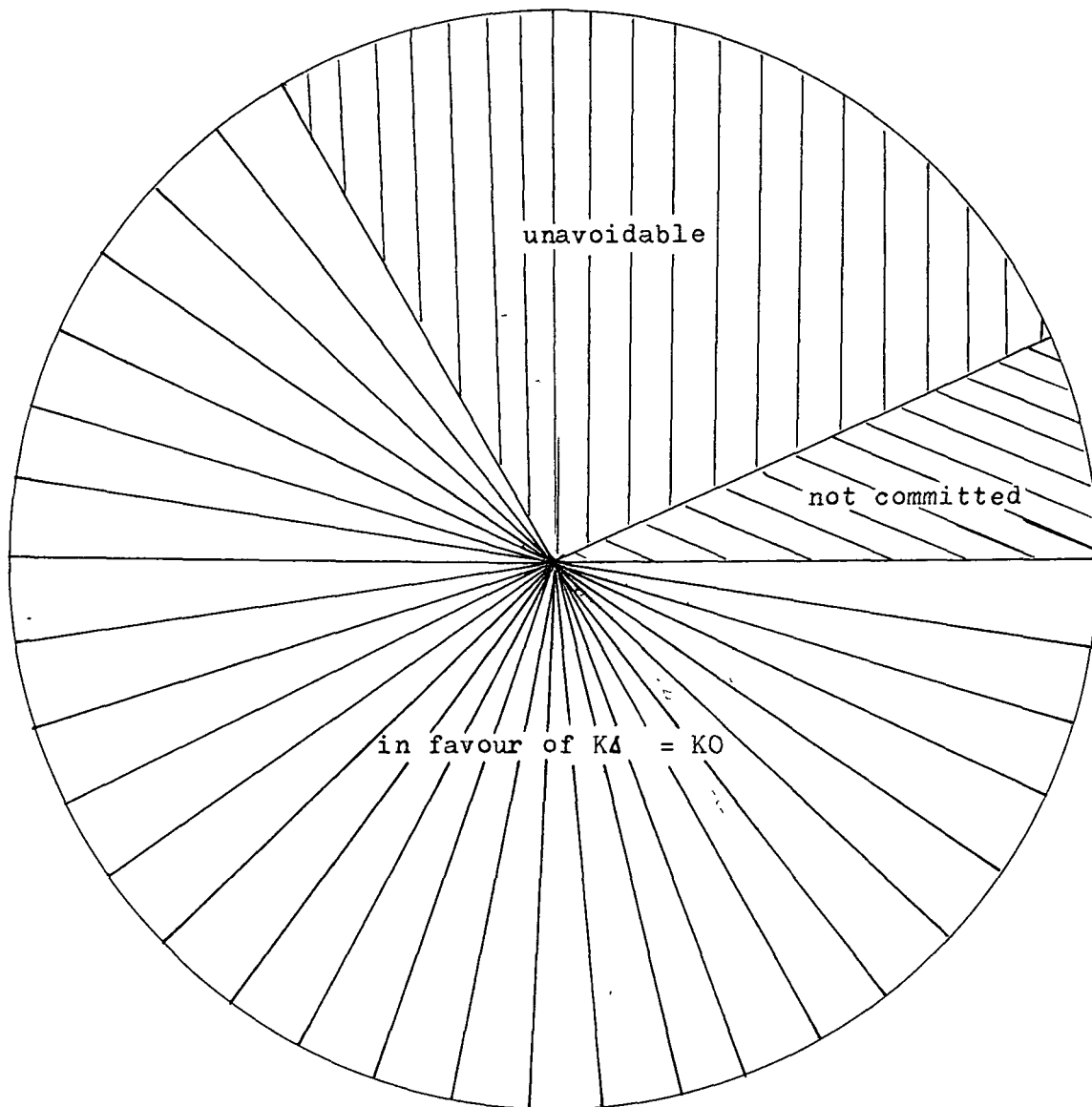
a) differences in cultural and lingual backgrounds make communication and concurrence difficult;

b) in such mariages, it is men from other cultures who come into the family, and most come to interfere and for personal advantages;

c) it perpetuates the weaknesses of the matrilineal system, or even makes it weaker. (See pie-diagram no.6).

The same people, however, were positively in favour of the  $K\Delta=nKO$  type of marriage, for the following reasons :

a) in this type of cross-cultural marriages, it is the woman who comes into the family, and she is not likely to meddle in the family affairs,



Pie diagram no. 6

Pie diagram showing the distribution of the general reaction to the  $K\Delta = nKO$  and  $K\Delta = KO$  (pat.) types of marriages.

nor can she take advantage of the family;

b) most of the interviewees want boys to come up. "Ultimately, the future of the nation is in the hands of boys/men". "Man is the natural head of the family, not the woman";

c) we shall be in line with the other communities with and around us. Many of the difficulties arise out of cultural differences, and there will be less opportunities for other communities to take advantage of us.

Asked if they were ready for the changes that this type (K =nKO) of marriage calls for, they said that not all are ready for those changes, but that they believe people can and will change with the spirit of the time and the need of the hour.

#### Notes and References

1. Kurbah, P.W., 'Balei Das Swer?', Dongmusa, VI(27), July 5, 1990, p.4.
2. In October 1978, in the annual convention of the Catholic Youth League from Shillong, a young lady did say that our society is sang-ridden (or sang-infested), obsessed with ka sang, to the detriment of the more fundamental and more important values. I agreed with her, and many did.
3. Khongphai, A.S., 1979, p.1.
4. Ibid., p.2.
5. Lyngdoh, C., loc. cit., p.9.

**Chapter VI**

**GENERALIZATIONS AND STRAINS**

### **6.1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter which dealt with the analysis of data has opened up new vistas. The statements made by the interviewees contained several hidden agenda. There are also hidden facts which are only referred to or implied, or certain forces, tendencies latent in these facts. An attempt is made in this chapter to pinpoint and to enunciate them as Generalizations and Strains.

### **6.2.0 GENERALIZATIONS**

1. As the lady in couple no.S-La:7 said, "It is very much easier to let go (of responsibilities) than to accept them." Such responsibilities come and go with certain advantages attached to them. For example, couple no.S-Ma:3 is a case that has already been commented upon in another part of this paper. The man was a Government servant stationed in the state of Uttar Pradesh where he met and married a girl Uttar Pradesh. The man died a few years ago and is survived by his wife, three sons and two daughters who live presently at Nainital. They have their father's title, Lyngdoh. Their closest relatives are in Shillong and want to come to Shillong to stay with their relatives who are not keen on having them as members of their clan for considerations of their responsibilities towards them.

Why is it that the mother of the man in couple no.S-Ma:2 objected so vehemently to his giving his children his own title so that he had to



withdraw his title and give his father's name as the children's title? There are many others like her. There is hardly any mother who seriously and effectively protests against losing members through their daughters' abdicating their right to their own title in favour of their husbands'.

It is precisely because it is easier to let go than to accept. After all, letting go is a loss for the clan, but accepting becomes a personal responsibility. There is a "fear psychosis", as the lady in couple no.S-La:7 said, on the part of the general public in respect of the Khasi families switching over to the patrilineal practice.

2. Descent is an identifying mechanism which creates a sense of mutual belonging in those who are identified. Biologically, the children belong equally to both father and mother. When one parent says to the other, "they are your children", as in couple no.S-La:7, he or she does not refer to the biological fact, but to the social fact, that children belong to one or the other descent group. In fact, the lady above added, "they have your title".

It is usual for the Khasi man to think of the children as belonging to the wife and her clan because of the matrilineal norms of reckoning descent. It needs tremendous courage and clarity of mind for a Khasi woman to say to her husband, "they are your children", and that too not for a change, but to mean it.

3. A Khasi belongs to his clan not only during his lifetime, but

also after his death so that his kur, clan members, under certain circumstances, stake claims on his property. In couple no.S-Ma:6, the man is married to a Nepali woman. He is the younger of two brothers, and received a share of the property of his parents. Much of what he has today is the result of his own industry. He has already apportioned all his property to all his children equitably, and yet he labours under some lingering apprehension that after his death his kur will claim his property. What he fears is that his kur may apply the matrilineal principles, and not accept his children as belonging to the clan, and, therefore, having no right to the property. In short, they may prefer the property to potential members of the clan.

4. From the cases that came under study it became abundantly clear that there is a close relation between :

a) Residence and family pattern : If a marriage is homogamous, the rules of the family do not pose a problem, and the type of family, in all likelihood, will be in favour of the prescriptions of the cultural practice of the partners. But when a marriage is heterogamous, that is, when the two parties come from two differing cultural contexts, one will supersede the other. However, supersedence is not haphazard, but conditioned by certain unenuniated rules or forces. Residence is one powerful force. In general, the pattern seems to be as follows :

In the table below,

Column 1 = The Khasi partner, male (KΔ) or female (KO), coming from a matrilineal (m) context;

Column 2 = The non-Khasi partner, male (nKΔ) or female (nKO), coming from either patrilineal (p) or matrilineal (m) culture;

Column 3 = Permanent residence of family, in setting that is either patrilineal (p) or matrilineal (m). Names of places are put for the sake of example.

Column 4 = The family type that is likely to emerge.

	1	2	3	4
i)	KO(m) = nKΔ(p)	...	Shillong (m)	... matrilineal
ii)	KO(m) = nKΔ(m)	...	Guwahati (p)	... patrilineal
iii)	KO(m) = nKΔ(m)	...	Shillong (m)	... matrilineal
iv)	KO(m) = nKΔ(m)	...	Tura (m)	... pa-/matrilineal
v)	KΔ(m) = nKO(p)	...	Shillong (m)	... patrilineal/new
vi)	KΔ(m) = nKO(p)	...	Guwahati (p)	... patrilineal
vii)	KΔ(m) = nKO(m)	...	Shillong (m)	... pa-/matrilineal
viii)	KΔ(m) = nKO(m)	...	Tura (m)	... matrilineal
ix)	KΔ(m) = nKO(m)	...	Shillong (m)	... matrilineal
x)	KΔ(m) = KO(m)	...	Guwahati (p)	... patrilineal

i) KO(m) = nKΔ(p) - Shillong (m) - matrilineal, and -

ii) KO(m) = nKΔ(m) - Guwahati (p) - patrilineal.

E.g., couples no.A-G:1 in Guwahati, no.B-C:1 in Calcutta and no.N-K:1 in Kohima.

iii) KO(m) = nKΔ(m) - Shillong (m) - matrilineal, Shillong abounds in examples of these.

- iv)  $KO(m) = nK^A(m)$  - Shillong (m) - pa-/matrilineal.  
E.g. couple no.G-T:10 in Tura follows the matrilineal way, while couple no.G-T:14 in Tura is patrilineal.
- v)  $K^A(m) = nKO(p)$  - Shillong (m) - patrilineal/new.  
E.g., couples no.S-La:1 in Shillong and no.P-J:1 in Jowai are patrilineal. But couples no.S-Ma:2, no.S-La:3 adopted new titles; in other things, they are very much matrilineal.

The investigator is inclined to disagree with what was pointed out in the pre-submission seminar that the man in this type of family may be under compulsion by necessity to go patrilineal, because, in such a situation, the man knows fully well that the children can never belong to the clan of the wife. The investigator disagrees with this opinion for the following reasons :

1. The man is under no absolute compulsion to go patrilineal. There are several instances even today that such a family can go for a new title, like couple no.S-La:3 or couple no.S-Ma:2 did.

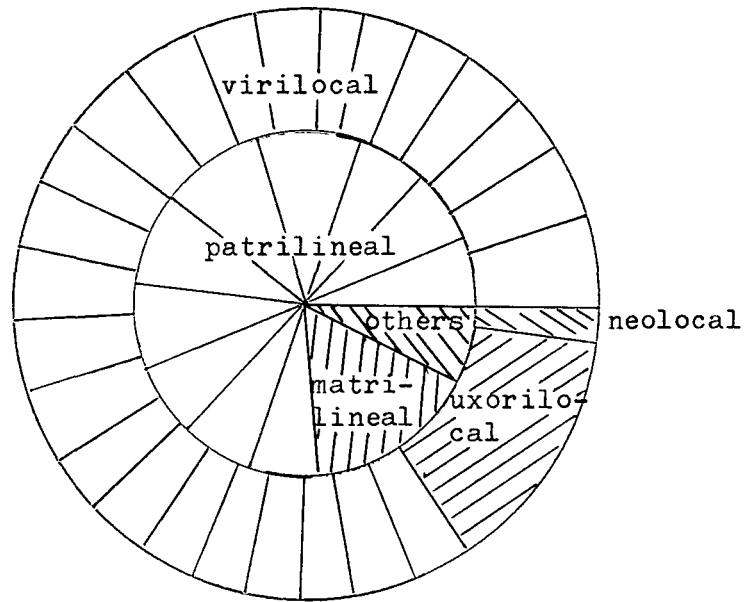
2. Statistical evidence shows that there is no compulsion, but there is intention. 100% of the  $K^A=KO$  type and 77.27% of the  $K^A=nKO$  type of family are intentionally patrilineal; in other words, the men entered into these matrimonial alliances for specific reasons. Intention implies foresight and fore-warning. Hence, the men did not need to adopt extreme measures to accommodate themselves to the inevitable.

It may be pointed out that patriliney is not made up of descent alone, but of all the constituent elements : descent, inheritance and succession.

- vi)  $K\Delta(m) = nKO(p)$  - Guwahati (p) - patrilineal.  
E.g., couple no.N-D:3 in Dimapur.
- vii)  $K\Delta(M) = nKO(m)$  - Shillong (m) - pa-/matrilineal.  
E.g., couple no.S-P:13 in Shillong is matrilineal, while couple no.G-T:15 in Tura is patrilineal.
- viii)  $K\Delta(m) = nKO(m)$  - Tura (m) - matrilineal.  
E.g., couple G-T:11 in Tura is matrilineal.
- ix)  $K\Delta(m) = KO(m)$  - Shillong (m) - matrilineal, but there are some who are deliberately patrilineal.  
E.g., couple no.S-La:7, couple no.S-B:19, are deliberately patrilineal. The cultural setting is matrilineal, but the residence and everything else is patrilineal.
- x)  $K\Delta(m) = KO(m)$  - Guwahati (p) - patrilineal.  
E.g., there is a family in England; both the man and his wife are Khasis from Shillong. While in Shillong the family was matrilineal. When they went over to England and settled there, the family switched over to patrilineal.

There seems to be an intimate connection between residence and the family type (see pie-diagram no.7). A very clear example of this truth is the case of couple no.S-Mk:18 where the man is a Khasi and his wife is a Nepali. From 1971 to 1987 the family was both matrilineal and matrilocal. In 1987, the house of the parents of the girl was razed to the ground by a fire. Family no.S-Mk:18 then changed to virilocal residence, and became immediately patrilineal thenceforward.

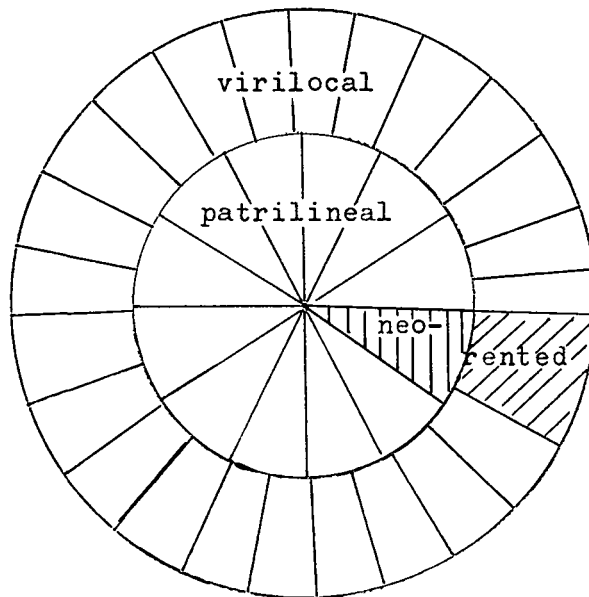
Thus it is not clear, at least, for the time being, how Fr. Sngi expects women who are married to non-Khasis and are living with their husbands



Pie diagram no. 7a

Two concentric circles showing relation between residence and family type.

KΔ = nKO : Outer circle shows distribution of residence.  
Inner circle shows distribution of family type.



Pie diagram no. 7b

Two concentric circles showing relation between residence and family type.

KΔ = KÖ (pat.) : Outer circle shows distribution of residence.  
Inner circle shows distribution of family type.

in England, Germany, USA, etc. to pass on their matrilineal titles to one of their sons. It seems to be a grand wishful thinking.

b) Residence is inherently connected with descent, inheritance, authority, and status. Ownership is a tremendous source of power and authority. One who owns commands; in other words, he who owns calls for the tune.

5. The family type has a great deal to do with adoption. People from patrilineal cultures generally adopt girls, and those from matrilineal cultures adopt boys. The boys and the girls we are talking about should have no relationship whatsoever with the adopting parents who in turn, should have no obligation of any sort to adopt these boys or girls. Their adoption is entirely a matter of philanthropy or human beneficence. The reason why this is so is because patrilineal families have an obligation to provide for boys only. At the most, what they are required to do for girls is to bring them up and marry them off. In matrilineal cultures it is the other way around: girls are provided for, and boys are brought up and married off.

There was a family in Shillong in which the woman was married to a Khasi and they had at least a boy and a girl. The man either died or left the wife; the fact is that the woman met and married a German with whom she is now living in Germany. The daughter went with her; the son is left behind to tell a tale of woe and to languish in abundant

misery.

At Marbisu, 15 km. west of Shillong, there was a family of brothers and sisters. The eldest brother who was living at Umsning once found a baby-boy abandoned by its non-Khasi parents. The man picked up the baby and brought it home to one of his sisters at Marbisu who took care of it and brought it up along with her son. The boys grew up like two blood-brothers. They are today both married. It was, no doubt, a praiseworthy act of mercy and kindness. But right now we are interested in the idea behind : "It will do us no harm; it is a boy."<sup>2</sup> No interpretation whatsoever can be imputed to the act of mercy of the adopting parents, Bah Siris Kharpan and his wife Kong Enrica Nongrum Kapew. The only fact that is certain is that the abandoned and adopted infant was a baby-boy.

6. There is a close relation between the family pattern and the type of cross-cultural marriages that take place. Usually it is the men from other cultures who are attracted to marry into matrilineal families, for two apparently obvious reasons : (a) the psychological and material back-up that matrilineal women have; (b) the material advantages and security that men from other cultures expect to get by marrying women from matrilineal cultures.

A close observation seems to lead the observer to the following corollary : matriliney brings men from outside in cross-cultural marriages, patriliney seems to bring in women.



7. There is no denying the fact that the nuclear family is emerging out of its shell. Both young men and young women are leaving the protective wings of their parents to forge their own destiny and be their own masters.

### 6.3.0 STRAINS

It is generally believed that matriliney was the original system prevailing the world over in the beginning. The discovery, for example of Fabian Lyngdoh,<sup>3</sup> Dr. Homiwel Lyngdoh,<sup>4</sup> H.O. Mawrie,<sup>5</sup> B. Nikhla,<sup>6</sup> that matriliney is entirely in consonance with nature is really nothing new. The basic process of generation was not entirely unknown even to the primitive man. It has always been known that the process of generation, that the creation of man, requires from the mother a far greater and personal investment than it has ever been possible to require from man.

(a) Conception : In the conception of a child, the mother carries it in the sanctuary of her own body and nourishes the child with her own body for nine long months. During all that time she bears all the inconveniences which men never know.

(b) Birth : At the birth of the child the woman goes through the ordeal of birthpangs. In that act of bringing life out into the world, her own may go out of it. In spite of the practice of couvade in some cultures, no man has ever died of childbirth.

(c) Infancy and childhood : The long period of total dependence of the infant is primarily on the mother who suckles it close to her own heart. The mother is the first person the infant recognizes. The interaction between the mother and her infant is very deep, very personal and very vital to the emotional growth and well-being of the infant.

Humankind at large is far more sympathetic towards the mother than towards the father, just as it is towards woman than towards man, the saying goes: "It is a wise child that knows its own father; but it is a happy child that knows its mother" (Desmond Morris, The Naked Ape).

The impact of the influence of the mother on the growth and socialisation of the child is inculcable. The father's contribution is only secondary.

(d) A Woman's Stake : The fourth consideration is the fact that man produces practically at any time millions of living sperms, while the woman produces only one viable egg in a cycle of about a month and that too only between the age span of about 15 to 50. All she can do is capitalize on that one-egg-a-month. She has to be choosy about the man with whom she would share her life and about his contribution, the man who should be biologically fit and economically dependable.

The facts above are, in principle, true of generation of all creatures at all levels, and that is how many have come to the conclusion that matriliney is much closer to nature than patriliney, and, therefore, that matriliney

must have been the original and universal way of life.

Granted the proposition of matriliney as the original and universal way of life, one has to admit the reality that today there are more patrilineal cultures than matrilineal. Some time in the past, somewhere in their development, changes took place, which changes made patriliney preferable to matriliney. "It is received wisdom that matrilineal systems are more liable to change than patrilineal ones..."<sup>7</sup>. One of the arguments put forward is the change in the mode of production, from subsistence to exchange. Another reason is the weaknesses that are inherent in the system itself. Ladislav Holy says that matriliney is "a system (that is) ridden with structural contradictions which it perpetually tries to resolve and overcome, such as the contradictions between the individual family and the matrilineal descent group, or that between marriage and sibling cohesion, the contradiction in the allocation of authority resulting in the 'matrilineal puzzle', which rests on the division of a man's loyalties between his children and the members of the descent group, or, more generally, that between productive individualism and distributive communalism. The contradictions, ..., is ultimately seen as the cause of its demise in the modern world."<sup>8</sup>

Chie Nakane speaks of another deficiency of matriliney : The "complexity of the matrilineal system is a decided handicap when it comes to resisting radical economic changes ... This may be one of the reasons for the rapid disintegration or instability of social organization of matrilineal peoples in the world."<sup>9</sup>

In the subsequent section a few inherent strains on the Khasi matriline, are enumerated which strains contribute substantially to the weakness and possible disintegration of the Khasi family system.

1. The centri-petal tendency of man which is noticed also by outside observers. Chie Nakane wrote in 1967, "Though it does not always end in divorce, considerable number of husbands have a strong tendency to spend most of their time at their sister's house", so that some wives moaned, "I don't know why he does not come to my place."<sup>10</sup> Further, should a Khasi man even succeed in spending his life with his wife's kinsmen, as soon as the wife dies, he will usually return to his ling, that is, to his sister's house, where he is received warmly and where he often acts as the de facto authority, ... Thus the strong matrilineal structural principle tends to orient a man towards his own descent group, the ling."<sup>11</sup>

This phenomenon leads Nakane to conclude, "This kind of ambiguity in the marriage relation seems to have an important correlation with the Khasi social structure"<sup>12</sup> so that the man who seemed to be both here and there may, in reality, be neither here nor there.

It must be understood that this ambiguity, this ambivalence, is true not only of the man, but also of the woman<sup>13</sup>. A wife who is overly attached to her kins, causes avoidable tension in here relationship with her husband, and endanger the stability of the marriage.

2. Another ambiguity is the exercise of authority in the family.

Mrs. P.R. Lyngdoh pointed to this ambiguity when she wrote that the "household responsibilities are entrusted to menfolk, which are being shared between the maternal uncle and the father. In matters relating to the clan and family such as the arrangement of marriages, management of ancestral property and the performance of religious duties, it is the maternal uncle who makes the decision in consultation with the other members of the family."<sup>14</sup>

The double role and responsibility of the man as uncle of his nephews and nieces in his sister's family, and as father of his children in his wife's family is further heightened by the fact that he is supposed to exercise authority over both families. This results in two situations : (a) the man becomes a split personality; (b) the personality clashes between two commanding males, like two cocks in a roost, between the father and the uncle. So, again, the both-and situation may succumb to a neither-nor reality. Traditionally, the man might have been more willing to abdicate in favour of the uncle; the present state of development, with the emergence of the nuclear family, the status of the father in the family seems to be looming large in the advancing future. The Colossus falls.

The double role of the man creates also the double role of the woman, as sister to her brother who is the uncle of her children, and as wife to her husband who is the father of her children. The difference between the double role of the man and the double role of the woman, is, it seems, that the double status of the man is societal, and that of the woman is

domestic. This is because the man's loyalties are divided between two families, two clans; the woman's loyalties are torn between two men in her family: her brother and her husband. Thus the "matrilineal puzzle" which rests on the division of one's loyalties,<sup>15</sup> is true both of the man and of the woman in the matrilineal setting.

When a woman's loyalties tend to tilt towards her brother, her mother, her kins, the in-laws have ample opportunities for meddling in and interfering with the affairs of the family, and then the husband and father is pushed to the shadow. The study revealed six couples where men married outside the tribe primarily to avoid any possible interferences from the in-laws.

3. In all probability, the Khasi society is caught up in the throes of a transition. The Khasi society is basically no less "liable to change", nor less susceptible to change than any other matrilineal society. This is a time when many a young man prefers the adventure of the unknown and the uncertainty of an uncharted future. The desire to be the master of his own house, may wean him away the matrilineal pattern of family into the patrilineal type. The resultant anomaly is worth noting: the man's nephews and nieces and his children belong to the clan because they share the same title, the nephews and nieces from their mother, that is, the man's sister, according to the matrilineal principles and the children, from the man who is their father, according to the patrilineal principles. How does one reconcile the two apparently incompatible affiliations?

4. It may be said that matriliney has been initiated into change. The total change is so massive and radical that the system cannot possibly muster the required amount of strength to change evenly; it can only change in instalments. While it is ready to change in some sectors, it meets with persistent and stiff resistance in others. The cultural lags make the passage slow and painful. They are the growing pains of a culture. For example, couple no. P-J:1 felt that rural people are far less ready for a change than are the more enlightened towns-people. Secondly, people seem to be more ready to change residence and succession; the question of descent and inheritance are still raw nerves. Cultural sub-systems do not all change at the same rate.

5. Matriliney is a system where men marry into clans other than their own without surrendering their identity. Even in the family of procreation with his wife and children, he retains his title, his identity and his affiliation to his own clan. Whereas in patriliney, it is the woman who is married off into the clans of their husbands. When a woman moves into the family of her husband, she sheds her original identity, and adopts that of her husband; she forfeits her membership of her clan of origin and becomes a member of her husband's clan and family. In matriliney, it is the men who move out, and in patriliney, women move out of the clan. For example, the woman, a Nepali, in couple no.S-Mk:5 said, "I am now Lyngdoh", and the Boro wife in couple no.S-Ma:2 considers herself

a Duia, her husband's title.

It thus follows that in patriliney, clans scatter their women who, once they are out, are no longer their members. Instead, in matriliney, clans scatter their men who, even though they are out, still belong to them. This is a paradox of matriliney : men live among people who are not their own. It is one of the causes of the centri-petal tendencies of men, and of the instability of marriages.

6. One of the greatest contradictions on matriliney is the inherent conflict between ownership and authority. The most natural thing for a man to do is to exercise absolute and exclusive authority over the things he owns. Matriliney creates a dichotomy between ownership and authority, whereas patriliney unites them in one person. Rightly did the man in couple no.S-Ma:4 bewail the fact that he has no real authority over his own children. This blatant dichotomy exists specifically in three areas.

(a) Land : The ownership of land belongs to females who do not, or are not supposed to, exercise authority over it in respect of sale, transfer, alienation, division or administration of it. Ownership, therefore, means only occupation and use of land.<sup>16</sup> In reality, land belongs to the clan or to the family, and is administered by the uncle(s). This is very confusing, to say the least. In the first place there are the following logical questions : (i) Why can't the woman exercise authority over the land she owns? (ii) What authority does a man have over the land he does not own? (iii) Is the ownership pseudo-ownership, or the authority pseudo-



authority?

The apparent unnatural dichotomy has been a typical source of tension and of conflicting ideologies. There have been instances both of women disposing of their land, and men claiming both authority and ownership.

(b) Chieftainship or Political Authority : This is another dichotomy in matriliney. Chieftainship is hereditary, not from father to son, but in the clan. Ownership of chieftainship belongs to the clan, and resides in ka Syiemsad or the Queen-mother or Queen-grandmother. The actual political authority is exercised by the son or the grandson; whereas the ownership right passes on from mother to daughter, the right of exercise of authority passes on from uncle to nephew. The sanction, the approval and the mandate in the appointment of the king comes from ka Syiemsad, but the king or chieftain (u Syiem) is the one who actually exercises political power. Chieftainship is hereditary along her line; the political authority resides in her family, but the right to exercise it (kingship) belongs to her brother, or son, or grandson.

(c) Religion : The third dichotomy in matriliney is found in religion. The ownership of religion also belongs to females, but the priesthood and the priestly functions belong exclusively to males; only men can be priests and perform the religious rites. Again, ownership passes down from mother to daughter, but the priesthood and the priestly office, from uncle to nephew.

Such dichotomies appear to be unnatural, illogical and incongruous. Yet, every cultural practice has a rationale behind it. In the first place one notices that matriliney makes that subtle distinction, which is not at all clear in patriliney, even if it is made, merely because of the fact that both are in one person. What, then, is the rationale of this distinction and dichotomy?

Human wisdom and prudence have never trusted womankind with authority. Hipshon Roy Kharshing puts it very pleasantly: women have never been "burdened ... with politics, and in the traditional political institutions she has hardly any function or place."<sup>17</sup> Mrs. P.R. Lyngdoh says the same thing in different words, "...yet women have no rights in the political and administrative spheres..."<sup>18</sup> Why this is so is not clear, but Hipshon Roy gain seems to answer it by saying that the woman "has more vital functions to perform in her careers, ... her all important vocation as a Mother". He strengthens his argument by quoting from Anges E. Mayer, "... just being a woman is her central task and her greatest honour."

1) It was C. Lyngdoh in 1938 who made the two following clarifications : (i) "... the khatduh is the custodian... She succeeds not to the property but to the office as custodian or keeper of it."<sup>19</sup> (ii) "Being in charge of the properties, she has to look after the religion of the family. To be more correct she holds the properties because she holds the religion of the family. To be more correct she holds the properties because she

holds the religion of the family. But, having the least experience, she usually takes the advice of the elderly male members who are the uncles (kni)."<sup>20</sup>

I beg to differ from Mr. C. Lyngdoh on three counts :

i) It is not only 'usually' that the khatduh has to take the advice of the uncle, but at all times and in all matters of any consequence concerning the family property.

ii) The injunction of the uncle is not only 'advice', which ka khatduh can accept or reject at will, but an order, a command to which she has to bow.

iii) It would seem contrary to reason to entrust matters of such weighty consequence as religion and property to anyone who has "the least experience". It would be more logical that such matters be entrusted to the most experienced person, the eldest daughter. The true reason is because the khatduh is only the "custodian", and not the sole owners, who must place herself and her custodianship under the supervision and direction of the uncle, because she is "quite inexperienced and unfit to do actual management." In fact, "in documents of sale or mortgage," - (the) "name of ka khatduh may not even appear in the documents but the transaction is understood to be on behalf of the nominal female owners."<sup>21</sup>

C. Lyngdoh pointed to the intrinsic relationship between religion

and property, nay, more than that, property because of religion. That again is because "a Khasi is a Khasi because of his religion (Niam) more than anything else... It is religion... which regulates all his thoughts and activities. Forget his religion and you will never understand a Khasi."<sup>22</sup> Under the auspices of religion, hence, we should add to property the concept and practice of chieftainship or political authority of the Khasis. The khatduh is thus and, therefore, the custodian of the family religion, we should, therefore, add to property the concept and practice of chieftainship or syiemship (syiem = king, chieftain).

2) The second possible reason for this distinction and dichotomy in matriliney is the satisfaction of both male and female on the one hand, and the mutual check and restraint that are exercised upon each other, on the other. Such a division becomes a mechanism for interdependence and cooperation, as well as acts as a method of restraining each other from abuses, so that neither good nor evil can be done by either party without the consent and cooperation of the other.

3) Unlike patriliney which scatters its women, matriliney scatters its men, and keeps the women. At marriage, the men leave their original family and go to live uxorilocally, or even matrilocally. It would not be prudent to entrust him with ownership of :

- a) land, for possible misuses that are very likely to arise;
- b) religion, because, in practice, it is a clan religion; each clan

having its own, with its uncles as the priest(s);

c) political authority, because, again, succession is from uncle to nephew, and not from father to son.

For the reasons above, matriliney distinguished and separates ownership from authority.

#### **6.4.0 IMPACT ON THE KHASI FAMILY**

At the conclusion of this study, it may be in order to go back to the original statement of the enquiry, namely, the impact that the cross-cultural marriages have on the Khasi family. It goes without saying, of course, that such social innovations do leave reverberating tell-tales around. The impact of cross-cultural marriages on the Khasi family is summarised as follows :

(a) The cross-cultural marriages revealed the various sides and elements of the Khasi matrilineal family, all of which are exposed to the influence of the changes of family patterns and practices as a result of the increasing number of cross-cultural marriages. One of the things that these marriage have done is to show the flexibility and resistance of the different components. For example, as it has been said earlier, residence and succession are more flexible than descent and inheritance; in other words, the constituent elements of the Khasi matriliney are not equally flexible.

b) The  $K\Delta=nKO$  type of cross-cultural marriages have been responsible to an extent for the emergence of the nuclear family, where the man lives with his wife and their children as one family unit. This may happen either by design or by necessity. New families are getting farther and farther away from the traditional family. The nuclear family brings along with it a positive effect on the "matrilineal puzzle": to heal the divided loyalties of man and the woman. The man becomes more and more the husband of the wife, and the father of the children in his family, and less and less the uncle of his nephews and nieces; the woman becomes less and less the sister of her brother, and more and more a wife to her husband. Thus the family is forging its own identity as a unit quite independent of the clan and the kins.

c) Cross-cultural marriages have resulted in a new kind of consciousness in society as well as in individuals. The  $KO=nK\Delta$  type of marriages have always been known, and there is no dearth of them; they are either matrilineal or patrilineal depending very much on the type of permanent residence of the couple. The  $K\Delta=nKO$  type is not new, and in most of the cases they turned out to be non-patrilineal, either matrilineal or neolineal. What is new is that we are getting more and more patrilineal families out of  $K\Delta=nKO$  or even  $K\Delta=KO$  marriages, something we could not think of till recently. So what is happening is that the society is awakening to a new consciousness of a dynamism that had been lying hidden. Individuals too are awakening to their potentials. Young men find

themselves doing what they were thought to be incapable of doing. The Khasi male is asserting himself more and more articulately in the most urgent search for his identity and individuality.

d) The K $\Delta$ =nKO type of marriages have resulted in a kind of reorganization of the Khasi family. The innovations point in the direction of overcoming the contradictions and conflicts inherent in the matrilineal system. This is particularly true of curing the dichotomy between ownership and authority in respect of property. A man in his own place is the master of his house and his property.

A prophet in many ways, Rev. Fr. Sngi Lyngdoh, cries in the wilderness; taking stock of the situation, and reading the signs of the time, he announces the imminent arrival of the patrilineal age for Khasis, when everything will be made new. Fr. Sngi says through his mouthpiece, Ka Sur Shipara, that the time is not far away when sons will remain in the house, and daughters will go with their husbands.<sup>23</sup>

The Khasis society may, indeed be at the threshold of a new era. In a world of breath-taking changes, it is a wise people who can "keep the best of the old, and take advantage of the new."<sup>24</sup>

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# QUESTIONNAIRE

Couple No. \_\_\_\_\_

Village/Place \_\_\_\_\_  
Date of visit \_\_\_\_\_

Man

Woman

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1. Full name
2. Age
3. Religion :
  - a) original
  - b) present
4. Occupation -
  - a) before marriage
  - b) after marriage
5. Education
6. Actual order of birth
7. Mother tongue
8. Language spoken now
9. Full name of mother
10. Her place of origin
11. Her nationality/tribe
12. Full name of father
13. His place of origin
14. Year of present marriage
- 15.
16. No. of children :
  - a) from previous marriage:
  - b) from present marriage
17. Remarks/Notes

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1st, 2nd, 3rd marriage

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1st, 2nd, 3rd marriage

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## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Residence.
2. Family pattern, identity of children : matrilineal or patrilineal.
3. Reaction of clan members :
  - a) of the wife
  - b) of the husband
4. Was the marriage intentional or spontaneous? If intentional, why?
5. Property decision :
  - a) Did the man have any share in his parental property ?
  - b) To whom will their property go? Boys/Girls/Both
  - c) How will the sharing of property be?
    - i) More to youngest daughter
    - ii) More to eldest son
    - iii) Equally
    - iv) More to boys/girls
  - d) Did the woman bring anything? If yes, what will happen to what she brought?
  - e) Succession to role and authority
66. Status of -
  - the wife
  - the husband
  - the sons
  - the daughters
7. Status of -
  - a) U kni (uncle) : How much importance was he given in the decision of the marriage, the present state of things?

Will he be consulted in family matters of any consequence?
  - b) the father in the family.

Who will be given more importance, the uncle or the father, in matters that concern the family and its members?



8. Kinship terms : matrilineal or patrilineal?
9. In case of religious disparity, was religion a factor to reckon with?
10. What about the possibility of ka sang on children? How are parents taking care of that?
11. Will parents encourage their children to follow their example in matters of marriage?