

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 matriloca, 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,

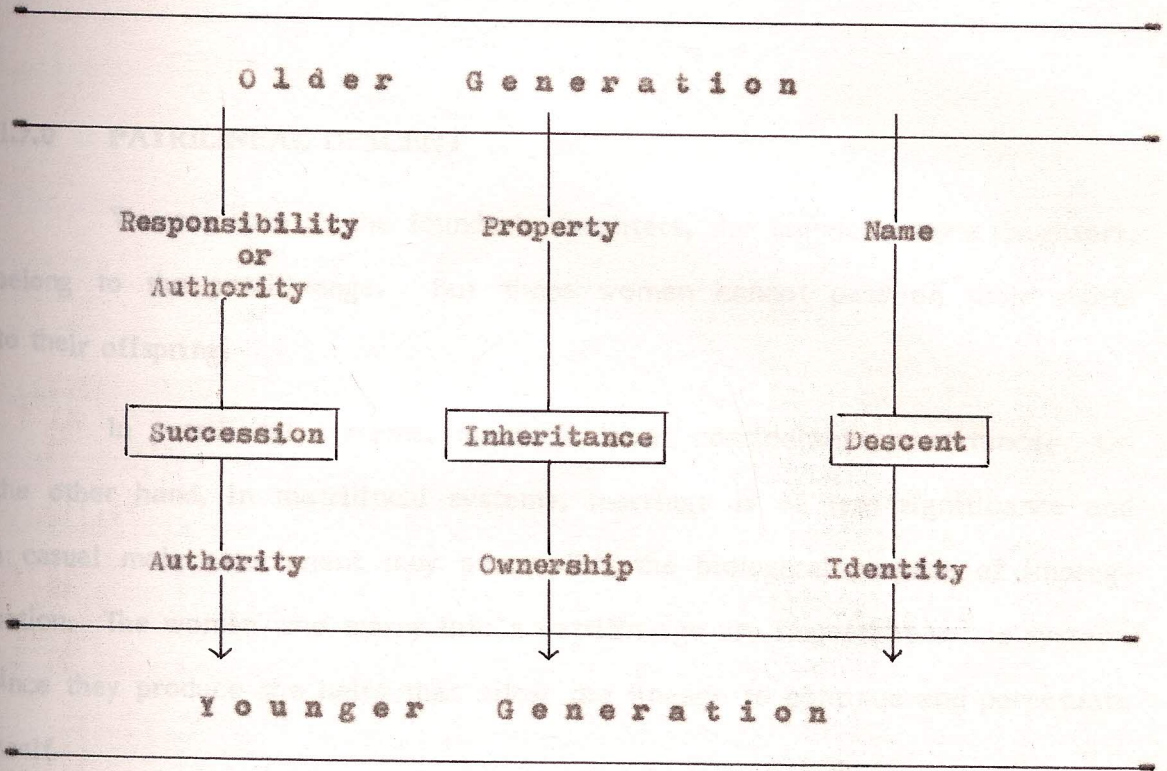
**Matrilocality** : is a household that is headed by the wife's mother.

**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.

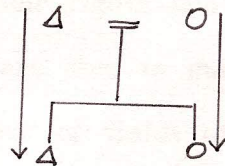
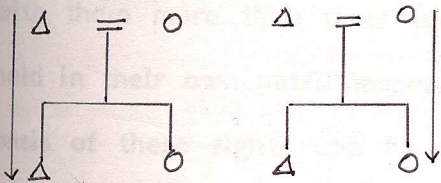
1. In patrilocal or virilocal residence, authority and descent both at home and in society are centred on the male, in patrilocality on the groom's father, and in virilocality, on the husband over the wife.

2. In matrilocal or uxori-local 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.



Unilateral Descent

Bilateral Descent



Patrilineal      Matrilineal

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 Nayars 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.

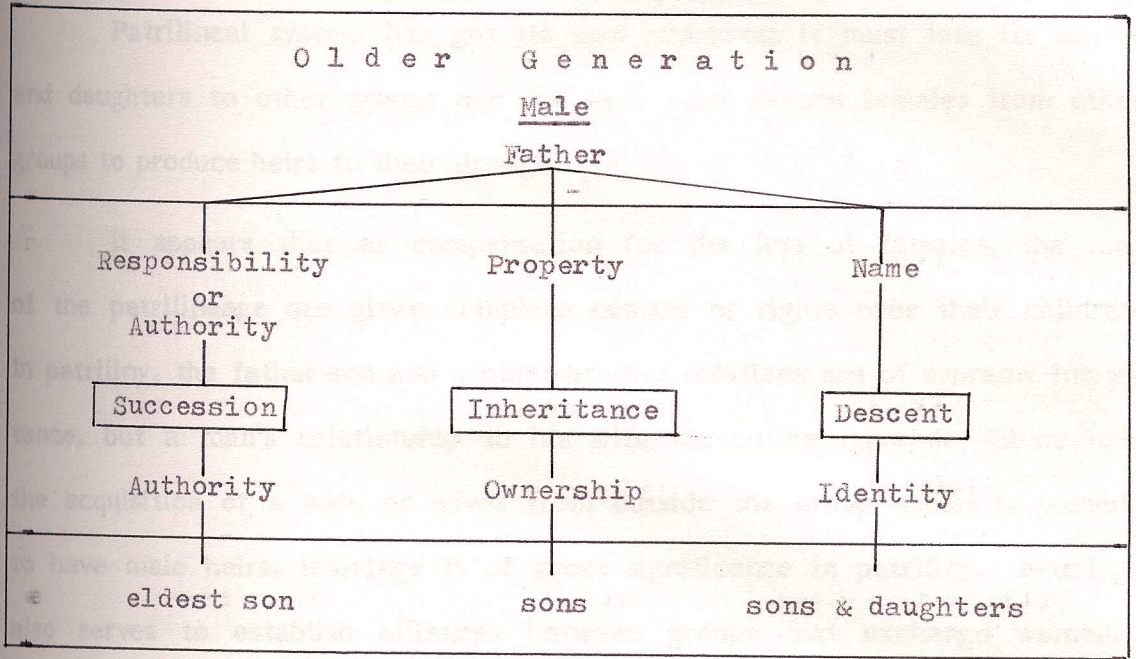
3. In yet another form, the brother-sister-sister's son relationships are central. Avunculocal residence or some other mechanism provides the sister's brother with control over his nephews.

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

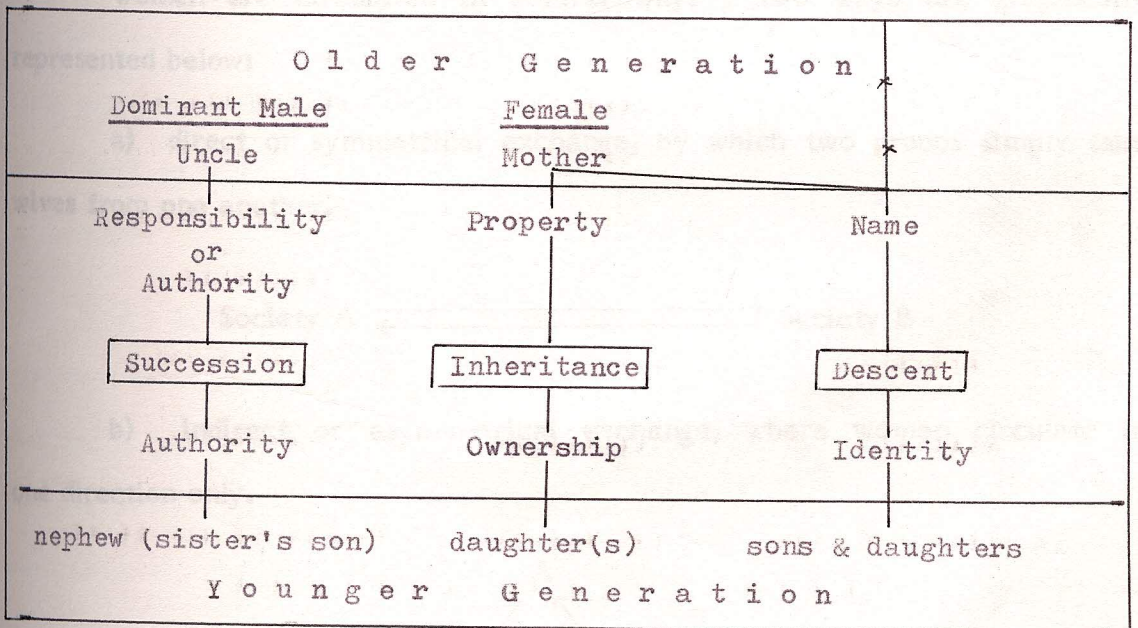


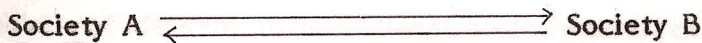
Fig. 2

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.

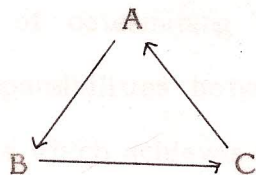
It appears that as compensation for the loss of females, the men of the patrilineage are given complete control or rights over their children. In patriliney, the father-son and brother-brother relations are of supreme importance, but a man's relationship to his wife cannot be ignored. Since only the 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 Genetricial 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 genetricial 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.

Genetrical 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 genetrical 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 matriliney. 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 matriliney 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

#### Village Rabhas

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Semi-isolated and closed                              | 1. Open and exposed to and interacting with patrilineal groups since 1947, especially with Bangladeshi Hindus and the Rajbansis. |
| 2. Moving slowly towards patriliney                      | 2. Moving very rapidly towards total patriliney.   |
| 3. Prevalent uxori-local residence                       | 3. Generally viri-local residence  |
| 4. <u>Property</u> :                                     | 4. <u>Property</u> :   |
| - <u>movable</u> : according to the matrilineal pattern. | Both movable and immovable according to the patrilineal pattern.   |
| - <u>immovable</u> : from father to daughter's husband.  |  |
| 5. Place higher premium on baby girls.                   | 5. Place higher premium on baby boys.  |
| 6. Generally tradition bound                             | 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.

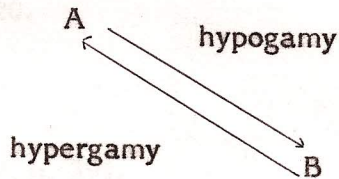
Those who rebel psychologically against their own group, have feelings of alienation. Those who are emotionally unprepared are more likely to marry outside their group and are more likely to exhibit lower pattern of marital stability.

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.

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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.

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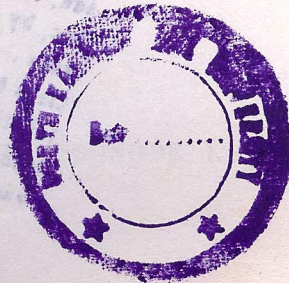
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# THE IMPACT OF CROSS-CULTURAL MARRIAGES ON THE KHASI FAMILY

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

**Roland Kharkrang**



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1990

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 Khari 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.

  
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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### 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 legitimizing 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