

## Endogamy : Cultural and Ecological Determinants

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The terms "exogamy" and "endogamy" were introduced by Mc Lennan<sup>1</sup>. These two terms, in fact, indicate two important social institutions. Many anthropologists and social scientists have been working on these two social institutions and have suggested various causes regarding origins of these institutions.

Till today no serious attempt has been made to put together the probable reasons for origins of these social institutions, though they are very much scattered in anthropological literature.

Regarding origins of exogamy and incest, Slater<sup>2</sup>, Ember<sup>3</sup>, Aberle et al<sup>4</sup>. and others suggested some hypotheses. In 1969 Livingstone<sup>5</sup> reviewed all those existing hypotheses and put forward a revised version about origins of incest and exogamy.

In the present paper we shall not deal with exogamy, rather we shall exclusively deal with the probable determinants of endogamy.

Endogamy is a social practice to regulate marriage within one's group<sup>6</sup>. Here the group is a socially defined category. It may be a tribe or a subtribe, a caste or a subcaste, a 'deme', etc. According to Murdock<sup>7</sup> a 'deme' is an endogamous local group in the absence of unilateral descent and is regarded as a Kin group, in the absence of unilateral descent and is regarded as a Kingroup, rather than as a community. Westermarck<sup>8</sup> has described various types of endogamous groups, found in human populations, in his book entitled "The History of Human Marriage". But the purpose of the present paper is to find out the specific reasons, cultural and/or ecological, which lead to the formation of an endogamous unit, more precisely a 'deme'.

'Fission' and 'fusion' are the two particular processes, which are responsible for splitting of an endogamous group and amalgamation of some endogamous units respectively. It can be well assumed that there must have to be some specific cultural and/or ecological determinant (s) behind every splitting off in an endogamous unit as well as every amalgamation of two or more endogamous

groups into a bigger endogamous unit. In this paper we shall try to see what are the possible determinants of the two processes mentioned above.

### A. Property right

Murdock<sup>7</sup> says that a universal association exists between matrilocality and local endogamy in sedentary communities. Both Linton<sup>8</sup> and Murdock<sup>9</sup> have argued that a woman can utilize her domestic technical skills, without any trouble or handicap, in her husband's family. And for doing that she does not require any special familiarity with the locale. The matrilocality and local endogamous marriage implies that if a man goes to a new community, he comes across an entirely new environment, where he will seriously be handicapped to make use of his knowledge and skills in hunting, fishing, etc.

On the other hand Das Gupta<sup>10</sup> is of opinion that in regulating local endogamy among the War Khasi, (which is a matrilocality group of Meghalaya) the environmental knowledge is not the dominant factor. The reason, that he puts forward, is that the two distant villages in the War country do not really differ much ecologically from each other. He, further, suggests that the rule of inheritance among the War Khasi is the prime factor to regulate this phenomenon of marriage alliance. Among the War Khasi residence is matrilocality and children of both sexes inherit family property. If a man, due to marriage alliance, moves out of his village, he will find extremely difficult to exert his right on the family property, and the man loses his right on land or some objects like limestone, etc., if he has to leave the village after his marriage.

So, it shows that where residence is matrilocality, maintenance of right on landed property is the most important reason for practising local endogamy in a society.

### B. Barrier of distance

Nakane<sup>11</sup> observes that village endogamy is the intrinsic pattern among the Khasi. She argues that owing to the prevalence of duolocality among some sections of the Khasi (if a husband's house is in another . . . . village) 'Visiting marriage must have been a great inconvenience'. Her argument appears to be convincing.

### C. Leadership and succession

Kloos<sup>12</sup> thinks that the most crucial factors in regulating local endogamy are leadership and succession to the position of influence. In order to justify his proposition he has cited examples of the Garo, Mimika and some other populations, among whom, in spite of the fact that social practice is matrilineal residence, some of the male members with a view to keeping authority and leadership marry within their own village. But how such marriages within the village can give rise to local endogamy, is not really clearly explained by Kloos.<sup>12</sup>

### D. Migration

From demographic, genetic and cultural points of view migration is a very important factor. Regarding migrant populations there are two possibilities : one, they (migrant) can be completely absorbed in the local populations in the new environment and second, they (migrant) may keep the separate identity intact and it can happen due to various reasons like linguistic difference, cultural difference etc. Karve<sup>13, 14, 15</sup> and Karve and Malhotra<sup>16</sup> have described many situations, in relation to formation of castes and sub-castes in Indian situation, particularly in Maharashtra state. It is found that some sub-castes were formed due to splitting off from the larger groups, and also sometimes it happened that after migrating to a new place a group didn't fuse into any other group but assumed a position for itself in the caste structure. However, all these conjecture were possibly made on the basis of some cultural data as well as some physical measurements due to lack of written records.

Similarly, it is also assumed that both the Toda and the Kota of Nilgiri Hills (Tamil Nadu) must have migrated from Northern India. The dendrogram, constructed on the basis of some genetic markers, suggest that initially the Toda and the Kota belonged to the same population, and subsequently one became separated from the other (Ghosh et al)<sup>17</sup>. It is true of course, that the exact reasons behind such migration, separation and formation of separate endogamous units are not known, nor can one conjecture the reasons for their migration and separation due to lack of information and sufficient evidence. However, there cannot be any denial that migration, though in most cases, social, cultural or political reasons behind such migrations are not known, is one of the most important factors, which leads to the emergence of a new endogamous unit.

## E. Religion

No body can deny that religion is one of the most powerful factors in determining the endogamous boundary of a population. Everyone knows that religion is, by and large, the most important consideration in selecting mates. To prove this proposition, we feel, one need not have to cite any example. But the point that we like to make here is that when a section of a particular population is converted to some other religion, the converted section tends to form a separate deme by giving up marital relations with the rest of the parental population. Now let us examine a very specific case of 'endogamy by religion'.

In the southern part of Manipur Valley the Purum (Chote) are distributed in only nine villages, and comprised of 1464 souls only<sup>18</sup> Lumlanghupi happens to be one of those nine villages and is situated in the north-western extremity of this valley. Excepting the Purum (Chote) of this village, the inhabitants of the other eight villages accepted Christianity. Consequently, Lumlanghupi became isolated from the other eight villages and virtually there was no marital relation between Lumlanghupi and other Purum (Chote) villages till late 1940s. But on the basis of the traditional cultural norms, language and marriage rules it seems that the entire Purum (Chote) population, belonging to those nine villages, should be considered as a single Population Unit. When one takes into consideration the marriage links between Lumlanghupi and other eight Purum (Chote) villages, it seems that the entire purum (Chote) population is certainly divided into two separate demes. So, it shows that religion is a very powerful cultural determinant, which leads to the practice of endogamy.

## F. Social hatred

Though there is no denial that religion is a strong determinant for endogamy, yet in some cases it is found that religious sentiment is coupled with social hatred or apathy is responsible for formation of a new breeding isolate i.e., an endogamous unit. If one really cares to look through social history of India, one will certainly find how apathy or intolerance of the high caste Hindus towards not only the low castes but also the people of other religions created tensions among various communities and helped forming rigid endogamous groups. In this connection an example may clarify the above contention. Mirpur is a small village in Midnapore district, West Bengal. This village is solely inhabited by the Christians, numbering only 320 individuals<sup>19</sup>. This village is surro-

unded on all sides mostly by Hindu villages as well as by some Muslim villages. According to some published reports and oral traditions Rani Janaki of Mahisadal Raj brought twelve Portuguese gunmen sometime in the middle or late 18th century in order to protect her estate. In course of time those Portuguese gunmen abducted some local women and eventually married them (at least in biological sense) and finally established this christian village 20 21 22,23 24.

The Raj family gifted some land to those gunmen and they settled there. Initially these Portuguese gunmen while trying to set up a village for themselves met with a lot of opposition from both the Hindus and Muslims of that area. It is easily understood that the reasons behind such opposition were certainly religious sentiment and social hatred towards those Portuguese gunmen, who abducted women from the local Hindu and Muslim communities.

So, social hatred, coupled with religious sentiment, may be one of the important determinants of endogamy.

### G. Ecological adaptation

Adaptation is a continuous biological process and all living organism have constantly been trying to adapt themselves to the environment in which they live. But it is interesting to find that ecological adaptation in some cases brings about splitting off in a population, and one splinter group, taking advantage of a particular ecological condition and safeguarding its interest, forms a new endogamous unit by breaking off all relation with the parental group. Such a situation can be better understood if we study the case of the Semsá. The Semsá is a splinter group of the Dimasa tribe of North Cachar Hills district in Assam<sup>25</sup>. The Semsá is completely restricted in one village, name *Shemkhor* and still having all traditional cultural traits, including the language of the Dimasa tribe. There are several stories about the migrational history of the Semsá tribe to *Shemkhor* village and their settlement there. But there is a complete consensus that the Semsá originally belonged to the Dimasa tribe. In *Shemkhor* village there were five (at present only three) saline pits. In olden days the ancestors of the present day Semsá migrated to this village and gradually got used to cooking with saline water. Once in remote past a few families left *Shemkhor* village and tried to settle at Guilung village. But eventually they had to come back to *Shemkhor* village after realising that they just could not survive in any other

place where there was no saline pit 55. It shows that some sort of adaptation to a particular environmental condition compelled the ancestors of the present day Semsā to be restricted to one village and they did not like to share that ecological advantage, which they had in *Shemkhor* villages, with the other sections of the population i.e., the non-shemkhor Dimasa people. Eventually they had to give up all social relations with the parental group i.e., 'the Dimasa' and have virtually become an isolated endogamous group for last 200 years, though they are surrounded by the Dimasa and the other neighbouring populations like the Naga and others. Sometime in the past a stray instance of marriage between a Semsā boy and a Dimasa girl occurred. But the Semsā boy was forced to leave *Shemkhor* village. The case above illustrates how the drive to safeguard the ecological advantages gives rise to the origin of a new deme.

## H. Social rivalry

Social rivalry at times between various segments/villages of a population may lead to splitting off within the population, and subsequently it may lead to the formation of separate demes within the population, when each of them starts practising endogamy. Behind such rivalry there may be some reasons like social, political, economic, demographic, etc. Let us discuss here the case of the Kota.

The Kota, distributed only in seven villages, is a small culturally as well as biologically isolated tribe in the Nilgiri Hills. Though there are still some marital relations among the seven Kota villages, there is a strong tendency for village endogamy due to increasing inter-village rivalries (Ghosh, 1976). Such inter-village rivalry takes place due to various types of differences of opinion between the members of Kota villages. Such differences of opinion occur around marriage disputes, money lending, land dispute, bride-price, etc. The tendency for village endogamy is much more perceptible in case of numerically more dominant villages than in small ones. It is due to the fact that the members of numerically bigger villages can procure mates within their respective villages, whereas the numbers of numerically smaller villages do not always get suitable mates in their respective villages. But there is a very clear and strong tendency in Kota villages to get a mate within one's own village (for example, of all marriages the percentage of village endogamy is 69.75 in *Trichibadi*, 60.42 in

*Sholur*, 52.52 in *Kollimalai*, 53.63 in *Kunda* etc. (Ghosh, 1976). It has been found that generally the members of bigger villages always try to dominate and impose their views and wishes on the members of smaller villages, which lead to inter-village rivalry and strengthen village endogamy.

How such rivalry between villages, leads to the emergence of separate endogamous units within a population, can be better understood, if one examines the case of Yanomamo Indians of Venezuela and Brazil. "The Yonomamo like tribesmen every where are organised into small communities, in this ca villages. But unlike most remaining tribes, the Yanommo are still a sovereign people and retain their aboriginal warfare pattern. This is particularly important, for most tribal institutions are structured in such a way that they make sense only in a political milieu that includes if not actual warfare, the threat thereof" (Chagnon, 1975).<sup>27</sup> Inter-village rivalries are constant phenomena among the Yanomamo Indians. The tension in inter-village rivalries varies in intensity and magnitude from centre to periphery. Small villages, situated at periphery generally live in more or less isolation; and the members of such small villages try to adapt themselves to the threats from their neighbours by constantly moving away from them. This process leads to the geographical separation between the members of two such conflicting villages. Such separation eventually leads to micro-differentiation among the people of various Yanomamo villages. Such micro-differentiations are found at various socio-cultural levels, e.g, a lot of distinct dialects, etc. among the Yanomamo Indians. There are some cultural determinants which constantly set on the processes of fission and fusion among the Yonomamo Indians, which in turn, lead to micro-differentiations, both cultural and biological, among the Yanomamo villages. But the question is that what are the precise cultural determinants that bring about such fission and fusion among the Yanomamo Indian villages. It is known that the residents of one village generally do not trust and are rather afraid of the residents of such other neighbouring villages. Again one may ask "why such distrust and fear"? There are several socio-cultural reasons for such distrust and fear among the Yanomamo Indians.

The members of one village are always apprehensive that any death, occurring in that village, is supernaturally caused by the members of the other villages since one group is involved in chronic warfare with the other groups. Besides, it is a very common phenomenon among the Yanomamo Indian villages that the

members of one group all on a sudden treacherously attack the members of the other group, who are believed to be friends, with a view to killing the men and abducting the women of the former group. Moreover, the social system and the political organisation among the Yanomamo Indians is just not capable of organizing more than 150-200 individuals in one village and consequently a constant process of village fission is there among them.

From the above discussion it is clear that a new endogamous unit i. e. deme, comes into existence through operation of either of the two processes i.e., fission and fusion, owing to various socio-cultural determinants, which initiate either of those two processes. But which socio-cultural factor/factors will initiate which process is entirely dependent on specific social situation and/or specific society. So, it may be safely concluded that none of the socio-cultural determinants is really universal, but to a great extent it is society and/or situation specific.

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