UNIT 2 FAMILY

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Learning Objectives

In this unit, based on two ethnographic accounts the students will be able to understand the:

- the complexity on which the family is based;
- peculiar form of family;
- functioning of the family; and
- comparative perspective vis-à-vis one’s own family.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

2.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

2.3.1 Intellectual Context

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

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

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

2.3.2 Fieldwork

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

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

2.3.3 Analysis of Data

Madan has employed the following methods for data collection:

- a) Sociological census;
- b) Interviews;
- c) Genealogy, family history and biography and
- d) Participant observation.

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

Basic Premises

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

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

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

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

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

Pandits of Utrassu – Umanagri: The Community and the Village

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

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

**The Kashmiri Pandits**

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

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

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

1. Domestic groups called gare (household) or chulah (hearth group) also identified as household which comprise the former.
2. A wider group comprising Chulahs called kotamb (family, usually extended family).
3. Kol (patrilineage which link the constituent domestic groups- gara/chulah- by the rule of agnatic descent)

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

**The Homestead and Household**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Recruitment to the household**

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

**Parent-child relationship**

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

**The economic aspects of the household**

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

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

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

**Partition of the household**

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

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

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

The Family and the Patrilineage

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**The Family and Wide Kinship Structure**

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

### 2.3.4 Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

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

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

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

2.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

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

2.6.1 Intellectual Context

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

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

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

2.6.3 Analysis of Data

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

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

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

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

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

The People: Castes

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

Field Centres

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

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

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

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

Population Composition

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

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

Social Stratification And Caste Hierarchy

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

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

Professional Classes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Caste Hierarchy**

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

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

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

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

**Structural Features of Typical Family**

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

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

Another structural feature of the joint family in the Jaunsar-Bawar region is the presence of additional members.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Functioning of the Typical Family**

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

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

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

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

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

**Family Size**

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

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

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

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

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

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

Variations in Family Form

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

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

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


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

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

Types of Family in Baila Village

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.8 SUMMARY

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

References


Sample Questions

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

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