3.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

3.3.1 Intellectual Context

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

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

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

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

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

### 3.3.2 Fieldwork

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

**The merits of the work are:**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### 3.3.3 Analysis of Data

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.4.4 Conclusion

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

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

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

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

3.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

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

3.5 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY 

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

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

3.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

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

3.6.1 Intellectual Context

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

3.6.2 Fieldwork

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

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

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

### 3.6.3 Analysis of Data

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Some other characteristic features associated with Jaunsari marriage

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

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

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

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

### 3.6.4 Conclusion

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

It may be added that although there is no ‘preferential marriage’ typified here, the Khasas do prefer to marry with the *soga*, whose family condition is better known to them than those of the non-related caste men (Majumdar, 1963:113). Spouse relationship is the most complicated and most important of all the interpersonal relationships in the Khasa family, in view of its polygynandrous composition. The interrelationship between the spouses should be in the spirit of cooperation and mutual help. However, whatever economic or other importance it may have for the foundation of this family system, a family, as soon as it is established, functions more as an affectionate unit than an economic corporation. There is in the Khasa family much affection and mutual care between the husbands and the wives, as well as between either the co-husbands or the co-wives themselves. Interpersonal jealousy is remarkably absent. In fact, a wife here has a much greater responsibility than that of a monogamous wife, as she has to cater to the needs and satisfaction of all husbands to the same degree, despite her possible liking for or dislike of someone or the other among them. The conjugal relations between husbands and wives are usually cordial, though either side is always on guard against the other, lest his or her partner may go to clandestine
paramours (Majumdar, 1963:124).

The fraternal co-husbands, on the other hand, share their common wives without quarrel or even bitterness (Majumdar, 1963:125). Strict taboo on marriage among agnates exists, as conveyed by the term baba and kaka used for their paternal uncles in the aal and dai chara, respectively (Majumdar, 1963:126). There is an absence of specific names for the ‘amitate’ and other kin groups and the classificatory use of kinship terms for these kin. It seems that the Khasas are content with a dichotomization of their kin into the dai, who are barred by a taboo from marriage with the Ego, and the soga, with whom Ego’s family has an affinal tie (Majumdar, 1963:128). They remarry widows, practice levirate, sororate and polyandry, recognise divorce as legal, and as against the Hindus of the plains intermarriage between the various Khasa groups is not tabooed and children born of such marriages do not suffer any social stigma (Majumdar, 1963:249).

3.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

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

3.8 SUMMARY

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

References


Kinship, Family and Marriage


**Suggested Reading**


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

**Sample Questions**

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

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