

STRUCTURE AND DIVISION IN KULUNGE RAI SOCIETY*

Charles Mc Dougal

Kathmandu

The Rais, together with their neighbours the Limbus, form a substantial part of the population of the eastern hills of Nepal known as the Kirati, speakers of a number of related Tibeto-Burman languages. The Kirati are the earliest known inhabitants of the region, traditionally named Kirat. In relation to the Kathmandu Valley, the eastern hills region is divided into Near Kirat, Middle Kirat and Far Kirat. Middle Kirat, also known as Khambuan, has long been recognized as the land of the Rais, the descendants of Khambu, while Far Kirat, or Limbuan, is the home of the Limbus. Many Rais, however, have migrated eastward into Far Kirat and beyond into India. (According to the 1961 Population Census there are 216,817 Rai speakers in the eastern hills region of Nepal.)

The degree of local and linguistic differentiation exhibited by the Rais is unique among the tribal, Tibeto-Burman speaking populations of Nepal. Other groups, including the closely related Limbu, usually have a common language intelligible to all of its members, although there may be differences in dialect. The Rais, however, are divided into numerous, discrete local groups, or tribes, speaking mutually unintelligible languages. Moreover, although the various tribes are broadly similar in social structure, share certain distinctively Rai features of culture, and constitute a self-conscious ethnic community, they at the same time exhibit quite marked social and cultural variation. There are at least 15 such tribes, each localized, or at least concentrated in a particular area—one or more valleys, or portions thereof—such as the Kulunge, Khalinge, Thulunge, Bantawa and Chamlinge, only to mention a few of the larger and better known groups. This high degree of local variation would appear to be the result of a gradual process of differentiation over time.

When I did field research among one of these tribes, the Kulunge Rais in the Hongu Valley of Solu-Khumbu District, it soon became clear that much the same kind of differentiation, on a smaller scale, existed within the tribe itself. The Kulunge Rais were divided into sub-tribes, and the latter further divided into smaller units, occupying separate areas. Between these various local units there was very little regular

* The data presented in this paper were collected in 1964-65 while doing field research in Eastern Nepal. The present tense as used throughout the paper, refers to the period when I was in the field. My research among the Rais was made possible by a postdoctoral fellowship from the National Science Foundation, Washington, D. C., and by a grant from the London-Cornell Project for South and South East Asian Studies, financed jointly by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Nuffield Foundation.

co-operation and, I gradually discovered, very little intermarriage. Empirically there was a very strong tendency toward local endogamy. The Rais do travel and do have contact with their fellows in other localities. Nevertheless, these contacts are usually transitory and are not reinforced by regular, recurrent bonds of co-operation. Fellow Rais of other localities are frequently regarded with suspicion.

Internal Divisions

The Rais are divided into tribes, the latter are divided into sub-tribes, which in turn are divided into branches, each of which is composed of a number of clans. This is a structure of agnatic descent; recognized common ancestors form the points of articulation whereby clans are grouped into branches, branches into sub-tribes, and sub-tribes into tribes. Furthermore, the Rais of Middle Kirat are divided into a segmentary series of territorial units, structurally paralleling the series of descent groups, territorial units at each level being linked to corresponding units of descent.

When the Rais were conquered by the Gurkha Kingdom of Nepal as the latter extended its power eastward in the latter part of the eighteenth century, their rights to ancestral lands they then occupied were recognized by the conquering power. Their headmen were given the honorific title *rai*, or "chief" which since has come to be applied to all the members of the ethnic group. Thereafter, the Rais held their lands in Middle Kirat under a system of tenure known as *kipat*: their lands were recognized as a communal holding, to which the members of the group had unalienable rights. Each household paid the same amount in taxes, more in the nature of tribute, regardless of the amount of land cultivated. The greater Rai *Kipat* was divided into smaller *kipats* for each of the tribes; it is probable that these tribal land divisions existed well before the establishment of *kipat* tenure as such. The *kipat* of a tribe was further divided among its component sub-tribes, and so forth. It was the clans-or local clan groups-which actually exercised corporate rights to land and resources, controlling access to them, and regulating their use. In spite of the abolition of *kipat* tenure two decades earlier, the system described still existed in the Hongu Valley when I did field-work there. It is essentially a system of land allocation among the Rais themselves, and in the upper valley, at any rate, there were few members of other ethnic groups.

It cannot be claimed that the genealogical framework, which links hierarchically arranged territorial units and descent groups, is a truly accurate representation of relationships, or that genealogies have never been manipulated for purposes of political expediency. Nevertheless, the parallel structuring of territorial units and descent groups, in general if not in particular instances, reflects a process whereby partition of the common estate occurs in conjunction with descent group fission.

Clan fission is precipitated by an intra-clan marriage. Clans are exogamous with the qualification that exogamy is related to the genealogical distance between the clan's

component sub-clans. After seven generations of common descent, but not before, a marriage between persons belonging to separate sub-clans within the clan is permissible indeed, it is expected; a single such marriage results in division of the clan into two separate clans—the former subclans of the principals to the marriage—which are then free to intermarry. When the clan divides, its common estate is also divided. This process will be described in greater detail later, but note here that, viewed in formal terms, the system facilitates the fission of clans with periodic regularity, by an almost mechanical process, whereby the division is always between two segments of equal order. Note further the contrast between this situation and one of a localized descent group observing a rule of absolute exogamy. In the latter case brides must of necessity be recruited from outside the locality. Here, given the rule of limited exogamy, fission of the localized descent group makes possible the recruitment of brides within the locality.

In practice of course, clan fission, involving as it does reallocation of rights to land and resources, is a phenomenon from which political considerations cannot be divorced.

The traditions of every Rai tribe assert that they are immigrants from outside the regions they presently occupy. Without wishing to pursue the complex question of their migrations, suffice it to say that movements were probably gradual, that it is likely that displacements were caused by the pressure of other groups, and that the Rais were no doubt divided already into a number of tribes when they arrived in Middle Kirat, a long time ago, after which a great deal of local differentiation also took place.

The Kulunge Rais of the Hongu Valley are divided into 4 sub-tribes: the Kulunge proper, the Pelmunge, the Namlunge, and the Sotange. The first 3 occupy the upper part of the valley, called Kulung, and may be grouped together as opposed to the Sotange, living in the lower valley, known as Sotang. (The valley as a whole is called Sotang-Kulung, or alternatively "Greater" Kulung). In this study we are concerned primarily with Kulung, which is much more homogeneously Rai, and only incidentally with Sotang, where there are fair numbers of Chetris and Brahmins settled among the Rai. Kulung is divided into Kulung proper, Pelmung and Namlung, the territories of the 3 sub-tribes. Of the latter, the sub-tribe of the Kulunge proper is the largest, being found at 8 villages: Chemsing, Chheskam, Bung, Sadi, Sano Sadi, Tomou, Lacham and Gudel; the Pelmunge are at Pelmung and Chocholung Villages; and the Namlunge are found at Namlung Village. These groups, as well as the Sotange at Sotang and Sitang, all speak the Kulunge language, although a small amount of local variation exists even within the valley.

Environment and Settlement Patterns

Many generations ago the Kulunge immigrated to the Hongu Valley from the Rawa Valley to the southwest, which they had occupied previously. Persons throughout the valley agree that the first settlement was at Chhemsing, founded by the first immig-

rant, Chhemsî; his brother Tamsî founded the neighbouring village of Chheskam shortly afterwards; subsequently the other villages occupied by the Kulunge sub-tribe were established by the descendants of these two brothers. The villages of the Pelmung and Namlunge sub-tribes were founded by cousins of Tamsî and Chhemsî. The assertion that the upper valley was settled first supports the conjecture that the Rais in general, and the Kulunge Rais in particular, are not traditionally cultivators of rice but of dry, high-land crops. The chief crops today are maize and millet, supplemented by barley, wheat, buckwheat and potatoes, and there also is a good deal of dependence on stock raising in the upper valley. Rice cultivation is negligible except in the lower valley around Sotang, where it may have been introduced by the Chetri and Brahmin settlers, who significantly have not settled north of Sotang, with the exception of a few households near Sadi.

The present population of Kulung (including Kulung proper, Pelmung and Namlung) is approximately 7,200; that of the entire valley probably close to 12,000. With the exception noted, the only non-Rais in Kulung are some Sherpas living in small settlements at higher elevation, and a few households of Kamis (Blacksmiths) in most of the Rai villages. In the area of Chhemsing and Chheskam Villages, the ratio is 93 percent Rais, 5 percent Sherpas, and 2 percent Kamis.

The topography of the Hongu Valley is extremely rugged, as is much of Middle Kirat, especially in the north. There is virtually no valley bottom land. Villages are not situated in the valley bottom or on the tops of the main ridges flanking the valley, but on the slopes of the spurs between tributary streams dropping, sometimes quite literally, into the Hongu, which in the upper valley forms a deep gorge. Except at two points where permanent wooden bridges have been constructed, it is necessary to cross the Hongu by temporary bamboo suspension bridges, washed away every year at the onset of the monsoon.

The villages of Kulung are divided into a number of localities. Thus, Chhemsing, Chheskam and Sano Sadi form one locality; Pelmung, Bung and Sadi a second; Tomou, Lacham and Gudel a third; and Chocholung and Namlung a fourth. Villages of the same locality form a recognized community, and are linked by bonds of regular co-operation and common interest, lacking between villages of different localities, although in a few cases individual villages have divided loyalties. The locality (indeed the village, in the case of the larger ones) tends to form an endogamous unit.

Villages are quite large, the biggest of them having populations of over a thousand. The houses of which they are composed are scattered over the hill-slope. Terraced fields not only occupy the area between houses, but extend to outlying areas. There are huge tracts of uncultivated land, especially in the higher areas, above the settlements, but much of it is unarable or of indifferent quality. Moreover, the elevation sets limits beyond which certain crops may not be grown. (The villages range from 6,000 to 8,000 feet in elevation.)

Although population pressure on available resources is not as acute as in many parts of the eastern hills, considerable numbers of Kulunge Rais have moved eastwards in search of new lands, and there also has been a limited amount of emigration to the Darjeeling region of India.

Land Ownership and Use

The land owned by clans is uncultivated land, which is not to deny its importance, as much of it is valuable for grazing and the gathering of a variety of forest produce. Land which has been improved for cultivation is individually owned. All members of the clan residing in the locality have the right to reclaim its lands for cultivation upon payment of a fee to the headman of the local clan group. Thereafter it becomes his personal property for which he pays taxes to the government through his headman. Prior to the abolition of *kipat* he was not permitted to sell it to a non-Rai. Nowadays this is possible, but in Kulung, at any rate, the Rais are reluctant to sell land to outsiders, and the amount of land which has been alienated from the Rai community is still negligible. (In Sotang, however, the situation is different, a large proportion of the land having passed into the hands of persons of other ethnic groups.)

A member of another clan might be given permission to reclaim clan land for cultivation, but this required a meeting of clansmen, and permission could be refused. The Sherpas in the valley had been permitted by particular clans to cultivate on their lands. They paid the required fee to the Rai headman concerned, and in addition formerly had to pay him an annual tribute in the form of liquor and foodstuffs. Under *kipat* tenure the Sherpas were not allowed to own land outright, ultimate rights to it being retained by the Rais. For the most part the Sherpas exploit different resources than the Rais, while the few Blacksmiths settled in the Rai villages exchange their services for the use of land or an annual payment of grain. Consequently, the legal abolition of *kipat* tenure has not essentially altered the relationship between the various ethnic groups with regard to the control of land and critical resources, at least not above Sotang. The system of clan-owned communal lands is still very much in operation (Implementation of the lands Act, 1964, no doubt has brought about significant changes since the time I did fieldwork.)

Economic Organization

Early partition of the household estate is the empirical norm; the maintenance of a joint family is not even particularly idealized. Shortly after a man brings his bride to live with him, he builds his own house and separates from the parental household, receiving his share of inheritance at that time. The rule is that brothers share equally. After partition there is little obligation for brothers to co-operate economically. They share equally the brideprice subsequently received when a sister marries, and

must contribute equally toward her dowry. The successive establishment of independence by brothers as each in turn marries is considered the normal course of events.

The household, with an average size of 4 persons, and seldom having more than 7 members, is the primary unit of economic production. The bulk of the agricultural work is done by women, except during the peak months of activity during the rains when maize is weeded and millet transplanted, at which time the entire available labour force is mobilized. Men do the heavy work of constructing and maintaining terraces and rock retaining walls, and do the ploughing. Only the larger fields are ploughed, the remainder being hoed. When outside assistance is required, a man can claim the services of his married sisters and daughters; alternatively day labourers may be hired for a standardized wage in kind.

Although subsidiary to agriculture, animal husbandry is of great importance. Moreover, the demands of ecology necessitate the organization of a substantial portion of the population in terms of a herding economy. Pigs are raised by everyone in pens adjacent to the houses, but cattle require extensive pasture lands. Immediately after the harvest in the fall, cattle are quartered on the harvested fields in and around the village, for two months or so, in order to obtain manure for the next year's production. For the bulk of the year, however, they are dispersed over a very wide area, moving from one pasture to another, depending on the season. Efficient use of fodder resources depends on dispersal and frequent movement. Most households own some stock, and it is necessary for them either to keep part of their personnel with the animals at all times, occasionally rotating the herdsmen, or to enter into cooperative arrangements with another household—most in fact herd independently, although camping close by others at the same pasture.

The various pastures, or *kharkas* are owned by particular clans. To use a pasture a group of cattle-owners combine to lease it for a period of several years. The local group controlling the land sets the amount of rent required for the period desired. The cattle-owners each contribute the same amount toward the rent, which they pay to the headman of the local clan group, who distributes it in equal shares to all householders of the group. The stockowners make an annual adjustment among themselves, according to the number of animals which each takes to the pasture. Each cattle-owner combines with others, not necessarily or even usually the same group of persons on each occasion, to rent several pastures, where his animals are grazed at different times of the year. Only members of the landowning clan have the technical right to rent its pastures, but affines and others may be included. With some exceptions, men residing in another locality are not included, even if they are members of the clan. Each locality has its own pasture lands and tends to be independent of the others. It is the members of the clan who are co-residents of the same locality who enjoy common rights to their clan's holdings there. Basically the same resources are available to each locality

although they vary in quantity and quality. Important to note is the fact that there are no individually owned pastures.

Small-scale trading is of some importance as a supplementary source of income. Livestock and butter, for example, are sold at the bazaar towns to the south, the proceeds being used to purchase cloth, salt, tobacco and other items, which then are sold locally for a profit, either in the village or at the small markets held weekly in some localities. There is also considerable trading with the Sherpas, the Rais to some extent acting as middlemen between the Sherpas to the north and the bazaar towns to the south. With the exception of the weekly market held at Sotang, the largest in the valley, there is little trade with fellow Rais outside the locality. The Rais are not self-sufficient, but the important point to make is that different local units are drawn into parallel relations of dependence on the external economy, rather than into relations of interdependence with one another.

Descent and Locality

The Kulunge Sub-tribe is divided into two branches: (1) the Chhemsí Branch, containing 7 clans claiming descent from Chhemsí, and (2) the Tamsí Branch, composed of 9 clans claiming descent from Tamsí, Chhemsí's brother. Clan members co-resident in a particular locality form a corporate group—"the local clan group." It controls the use of communal land and resources, It has a leader, the *talukdar*, or *rai*; the members of his group are referred to as his *raiti*, or "subjects." (A large clan group may have two or more leaders, or headmen, for its segments at different villages within the locality.)

The clan as a whole has not only a popular name, but also a magical name, or *daphning*, used only in ritual contexts. Although some clans have members in different localities where they form separate local clan groups, it is true that clans tend to be concentrated in particular localities, and many have only a few scattered members in others. When small numbers of clansmen emigrate to a neighbouring locality they may be allowed to remain affiliated with the clan group in their parent locality for some time, temporarily enjoying the rights and privileges attaching to membership in that group. To cite an example, Morokhu Clan, one of the largest of the Chhemsí Branch clans, is concentrated in Chhemsing-Chheskam-Sano Sadi locality (mainly at Chhemsing): a few members who have recently emigrated to Pelmung in the neighbouring locality continue to be extended rights of membership in the parent local clan group, but others, who emigrated to Chocholung-Namlung locality in the more distant past form a separate local clan group—in any case, since the locality to which they emigrated is not a neighbouring one, their rights of membership in the parent group were terminated immediately. Large local clan groups such as Morokhu and Pidimu at Chhemsing Chheskam-Sano-Sadi locality, may have a membership of 50-75 households, small ones only a dozen or so; most contain 25-30 households.

The feature which the Rais themselves claim to be diagnostic of the local clan group is that it constitutes a unit for the payment of a marriage prestation known as *duri*. When a man marries he must pay a fee of 16 paise to every householder of his wife's natal local clan group. The group of co-clansmen who receive *duri* when one another's sisters and daughters marry is coincident with the group of co-clansmen who exercise communal rights to land—i. e. the local clan group. With the temporary exception of recent emigrants to a neighbouring locality, who continue to receive *duri* when girls of the parent group marry, and who continue to exercise rights to the communal lands of the parent group, membership is limited to coclansmen of the same locality.

Clan Fission

Stated genealogically, it is forbidden for a man and woman tracing common agnatic descent to marry until their common ancestor is seven generations removed. Stated in clan terms, this means that the clan is strictly exogamous for seven generations beginning with the generation of the sons of the founder, but that from the eighth generation onward it is permissible for a marriage to occur between the lineages descended from the founder's sons—i. e. between the component sub-clans of the clan. Sexual relations or marriage between members of the same clan are classed as *hadphora* or "breaking the bones." When they occur between agnates separated by less than seven generations of common descent it is considered a heinous crime, requiring expulsion of the principals from the region.

Although marriage between a man and a woman whose common agnatic ancestor is more than seven generations removed is permissible, the intra-clan marriage which precipitates clan fission is still classed as *hadphora*, even though it is a phenomenon both accepted and expected, and one upon which the whole system of clan dynamics hinges. Although it is thought to entail a certain amount of danger to the principals, it is not a reprehensible union. Subsequent marriages between persons of the two units which acquire separate clan status as the direct result of this single intra-clan, *hadphora* union are no longer classed as *hadphora*. Units having separate clan status are free to intermarry according to the normal rules.

After 3 or 4 generations of common descent, lineages descended from the sons of the founders of the clan acquire separate names, at which point they may be said to have become sub-clans. (Although it is theoretically possible for there to be as many sub-clans as there are sons of the clan's founders, binary division is the empirical rule.) As soon as the clan reaches a depth of eight generations, fission along the line of cleavage between its component sub-clans by means of a *hadphora* marriage is potentially possible at any time. When it actually occurs depends on a number of factors, the most important of which is the size of the clan. Other things being equal, the larger its membership (within a given locality), the more readily will fission take

place. For example, Walakham, a medium-size clan, is still intact in spite of having reached a great depth, whereas Pidimu, with lesser depth but far more members, is in the process of division.

When the initial rite of marriage for the intra-clan marriage is performed, the sub-clans of the bride and groom are given separate magical names. (A marriage requires two rites, which may be separated by several years; it is on the occasion of the final rite that *duri* is paid.) When the final rite of the intra-clan union takes place, the husband pays *duri* to the householders of his wife's sub-clan, but not to those of his own sub-clan. In so doing—by recognizing his former co-clansmen of the other sub-clan as affines—the *duri* group is divided and becomes two separate groups for the distribution of that prestation whenever future marriages occur. Shortly after the final marriage rite a ceremony is performed to formalize the division between the two new clans; usually in conjunction with it the former common estate is partitioned.

A case illustrating a number of aspects of the process of fission is that of Pidimu Clan. Three marriages have been contracted between its sub-clans Hocheràu and Pokhoti, and the initial rites of marriage performed in each case. The sub-clans possess separate *daphning*, or magical names. Nevertheless, for various reasons—death, desertion and divorce—all of these unions were terminated after a short period, and in no case was the crucial final rite of marriage performed. As a consequence Hocheràu and Pokhoti have not become separate units for the distribution of *duri*, and Pidimu remains a single clan. Quite recently the initial rite for a fourth union, between a Pokhoti boy and a Hocheràu girl, was performed. When, and if, the final rite of marriage for that union takes place, Pokhoti and Hocheràu will become separate clans.

Fission of the clan resulting from an intra-clan, *hadphora* marriage in any given locality, and the contingent division of the *duri* group there, results in separate clan status for the sub-clans in question at whatever localities they happen to found, and other local *duri* groups of the clan, if any, are divided accordingly.

It is necessary to distinguish the physical separation of co-clansmen living in different localities, discussed earlier, from the phenomenon of clan fission through intra-clan marriage. In the former case, co-clansmen residing in different localities may become separate *duri* groups, but the division is defined by the criterion of locality and not by a genealogical criterion. In the latter case, the division of the *duri* group is along the line of cleavage between genealogically defined segments, irrespective of the criterion of locality. Assume that co-clansmen physically separated by residence in different localities constitute separate *duri* groups. An intra-clan marriage in one locality dividing the *duri* group there automatically divides the *duri* group in the other locality also, provided the same two sub-clans co-exist there. A final point is that the separation according to locality does not affect the rule of clan exogamy, whereas an intra-clan marriage between persons of different sub-clans necessarily does so, since the former sub-clans become separate clans which are free to intermarry.

Marriage Exchange

Marriage exchange between clan units (local clan segments) is symmetrical: each unit gives to and takes brides from the other. The members of a given clan classify all females of their clan married to men of other clans as *samlume*, while all females of other clans married to men of their clan are classed as *bomme*. Stated differently, a married woman is classified as *samlume* by her natal clasmen and as *bomme* by her husband's clansmen.

When a woman's final rite of marriage takes place, the men of her local clan group (those who receive *duri* for her marriage) tabulate all of their *samlume*. A prestation of four paisa, known as *mauks paisa*, must be made to the households of all *samlume* (out-married clanswomen), regardless of locality of residence. After the death of the *samlume* and her husband, the prestation continues to be given to her son, and after his death to her son's son; the obligation to give *mauks paisa* lapses only after the third generation. The amount required for all these prestations to *samlume* (or their descendants) are demanded from the husband of the woman whose final rite of marriage is being performed, whereupon the members of her natal local clan group make the distribution to the recipients. The *mauks paisa* which a married woman (or her descendants) receive from her natal group every time a subsequent marriage of a woman of that group occurs is conceived as an expression of "brotherly" love for "sister."

Those who receive *mauks paisa* also have obligations to the group from which they receive it. Whenever a man of that group dies, four out-married women of the group (*samlume*) or their sons or son's must each contribute four paisa to pay for two flags called *sibalo* in commemoration of the deceased, this presentation being known as *sibalo paisa*. All *samlume* of the group, as well as their descendants who receive *mauks paisa* after they die, are called upon to give *sibalo paisa* for these flags of commemoration, on a rotation basis, as successive deaths occur. *Sibalo paisa*, given by a married woman (or her descendants) to her natal group when a male member dies, is thought of as an expression of "sisterly" love for "brother".

The prohibited degrees of marriage are related to these prestations. A man should not marry any woman of his mother's natal clan—i. e. the group from which he receives *mauks paisa* following his mother's death. Similarly a man should not marry the daughter of any *samlume* since his group gives *mauks paisa* to her natal household. In the third generation (that of the final *mauks paisa* recipient, the son's son of the *samlume*), persons belonging to the two lines directly connected by the original marriage may not marry: a man (*mauks paisa* recipient) may not marry his father's mother's brother's son's daughter (belonging to the *mauks paisa* giving group). Likewise, a man (of the *mauks paisa* giving group) may not marry his father's father's sister's son's daughter (the sister of a *mauks paisa* recipient). All unions of the above type are classified as *dudh-*

phora—"to break the milk." Only in the fourth generation (when *mauks paisa* is no longer given) may persons belonging to lines linked by a former union intermarry.

In practice, however, the rules tend to be relaxed in the case of larger clans with great genealogical depth. Thus, marriage with a woman of mother's natal clan will be condoned if she does not belong to mother's natal sub-clan. Similarly, a man may be allowed to marry the daughter of a *samlume* (clanswomen) if the latter's natal sub-clan is different from his own. Of Chhemsing males who are, or who have been married, only 6 percent married a female of their mother's natal clan, and in no cases a woman of their mother's natal sub-clan. Seven percent married the daughter of a clanswoman, in two instances the daughter of a woman of their sub-clan. The latter unions were considered flagrant violations of the rules: the marriage ceremonies were boycotted by the village. In spite of such cases, it is clear that the rules generally are observed.

The locality, indeed the village, tends to be an endogamous unit. Over 90 percent of all marriages occur within the locality, and over 80 percent within the village. Note that villages tend to be quite large. Chhemsing (from which the above sample was drawn) has a population of nearly 700 persons: certain other villages, such as Chheskam are even larger, while most contain at least 500 persons. Nevertheless, at any given time, intermarriage among the local descent group within the village and to a lesser extent within the locality, approaches the saturation point: there is nearly as much intermarriage as possible consistent with the observation of the prohibited degrees. Given the comprehensive rules governing the latter which do exist (and which are observed), it would be impossible to maintain a high rate of local endogamy over time were it not for the process of clan fission by means of intra-clan, *hadphora* marriage, which periodically creates new opportunities for obtaining spouses locally, within the framework of the existing rules. Not only are relations of intermarriage established between units formerly recognizing a common bond of exogamy but the restrictions governing intermarriage with other groups which the two units previously observed jointly, now apply separately, with the result that certain unions which before would have been classified as *dudhphora* are now permissible.

Marriage and Authority

Marriage is better described as a process than as an event; there is an interval of several years between the initial and final rites of the union. Unmarried boys and girls mix freely and have ample opportunity to become acquainted with potential mates in their locality, both during work and leisure time. Moreover, they have a good deal of say in the selection of their spouse. When a family is ready to arrange a son's marriage he is asked which girl he favours. That girl's mother's brother, sent by the family as an intermediary, discusses the match with her parents, and in their presence questions the girl herself, whose wishes in the matter are almost always respected.

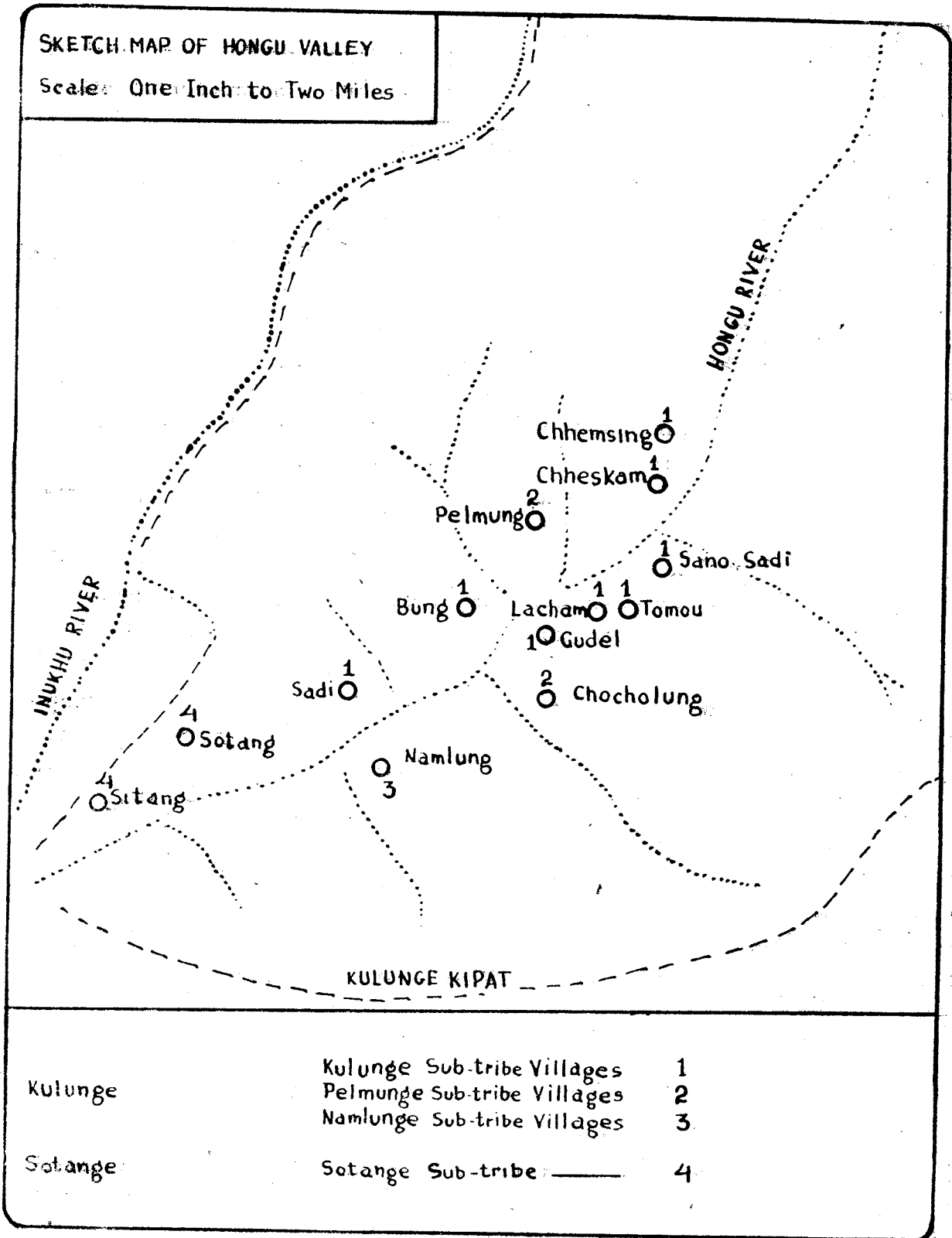
The initial rite of marriage establishes a man's exclusive sexual rights to his bride, and certain rights to his children by her, although the latter do not acquire fully legitimate status until the final rite is performed. The bride's natal family retains jural and ritual authority over her. The period following the initial rite is considered a trial period. The bride and groom continue to reside separately at their respective natal homes, usually for a couple of years or so. It is up to the groom to prove his worth, and to persuade his bride to come and live with him. Her family will not send her against her will, and her husband cannot force them to do so.

When the bride does go to live with her husband—who establishes his own separate household shortly thereafter—the latter necessarily acquires a good deal of *de facto* authority over her. Nevertheless, jural authority and responsibility continue to be vested in her natal family even at this stage. Should she die leaving debts (an unlikely but illustrative contingency), for example, they and not her husband, are responsible for them. Her natal family still has the right to demand her services. Divorce is fairly easy at any time before the final rite of marriage is performed: about 20 percent of all unions are terminated by divorce during this interim period. Both parties have recognized grounds for divorce, and the subsequent settlement depends on which is judged to have been most at fault. Should another man abduct his wife—and wife-stealing is by no means uncommon—the husband receives compensation, half paid by the abductor and half by the woman's natal family, with divorce as an automatic consequence.

A man must obtain the permission of his wife's natal family in order to have the rite of marriage performed, since their participation is essential. They normally do not consent until children have been born, and it is not unusual for the ceremony to be delayed past the birth of two or more children. Of married couples who have not yet completed the final rite of their union, 36 percent are still residing separately at their respective natal homes, 26 percent are living together but have not yet produced any children, and 38 percent already have one or more offspring.

The final marriage rite transfers jural and some ritual authority over a woman to her husband, and it establishes the legitimacy of all children of the union. Some ritual authority, however, continues to be vested in the married woman's natal clan group, in which she retains membership. The husband must pay brideprice, consisting of a number of large copper vessels to his wife's natal family; he must also pay *duri* to each of the other households of her natal clan group, as well supply that group with the money which it requires to make *mauks paisa* and other obligatory prestations on this occasion.

Subsequent to the performance of this rite the jural bonds of marriage cannot be broken—i.e., divorce is no longer possible. Should the woman establish a conjugal union with another man, either by deserting her husband while he is still alive or by living with someone else after his death, that union can never be legally recognized,



nor can the offspring ever be fully legitimized, for as the Rais say: "Brideprice cannot be accepted twice for the same woman."

Shortly after the final marriage ceremony, the woman's brothers are required to give her and her husband a dowry, consisting of household utensils, cooking vessels, tools, cloth, grain, livestock, and possibly some cash. The dowry is given not only for the benefit of the married woman, but especially for that of her children. It forms part of the inheritance of her son, who combines it with the estate which he receives from his father; out of this he in turn gives a dowry to his own sister when she marries. It is noteworthy that the inheritance of personal gods is also bilineal: some are inherited from the father (who earlier had already inherited them partly from his father and partly from his mother) and some from the mother, those from the latter source being considered the most powerful and potentially dangerous. When a man establishes his own household he must periodically make offering not only to all these gods which he has personally inherited, but also to those which his wife has inherited. His children inherit both his personal gods and those of his wife.

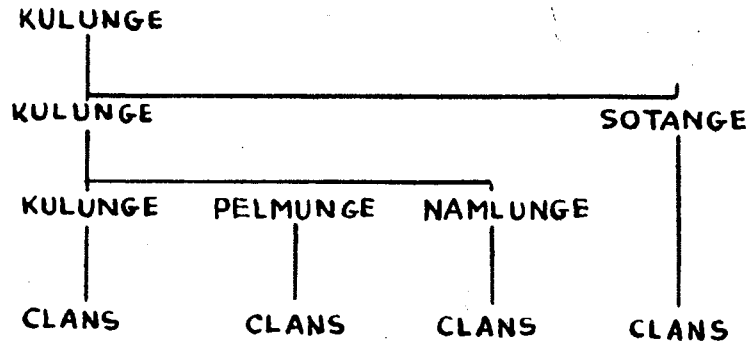
If a marriage is terminated either by death or divorce before the final rite or the union has been performed, any offspring are considered illegitimate. In order that their status be legitimized it is necessary for a rite to be performed on their behalf by their mother's brother, who alone has the authority to do so. It is also important to note that when a girl marries, her mother's brother plays an indispensable part in the proceedings.

To summarize this section, a woman has strong, enduring ties to her natal group. Rights over her are relinquished gradually, reluctantly as it were, and even after her final marriage rite this bond is not severed—her natal group retains certain claims to her, and to her children. The important tie in this relationship is the sibling bond between brother and sister. It is her brothers who receive the brideprice which is paid, and it is out of their inheritance that her dowry is given. Her brothers have the authority to legitimize her marriage, as well as the status of her children. Before the final rite of her marriage the interests of these men focus on their sister; after it has been completed, their interests focus on her children, who gain legitimate status as the result of that rite.

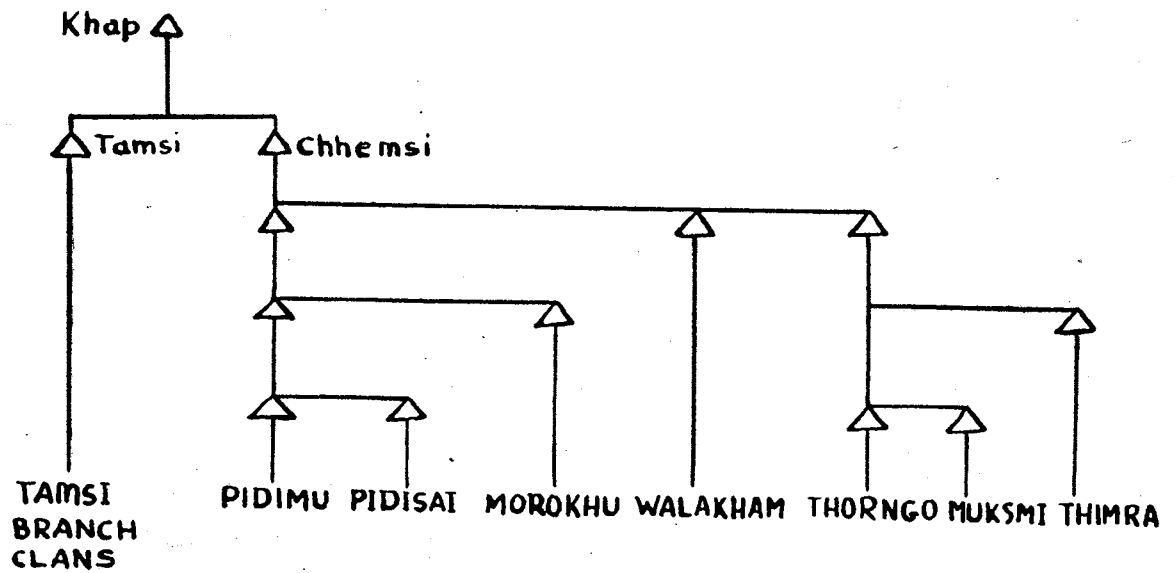
Community Leadership

I speak here of traditional leadership. The situation has altered since 1962 when His Majesty's Government of Nepal introduced a system of elected local Panchayat assemblies throughout the country. Since this took place only a short time before I did fieldwork, I have not attempted to describe the changes in local leadership which were brought about.

TRIBAL SUB-DIVISIONS



KULUNGE SECTION

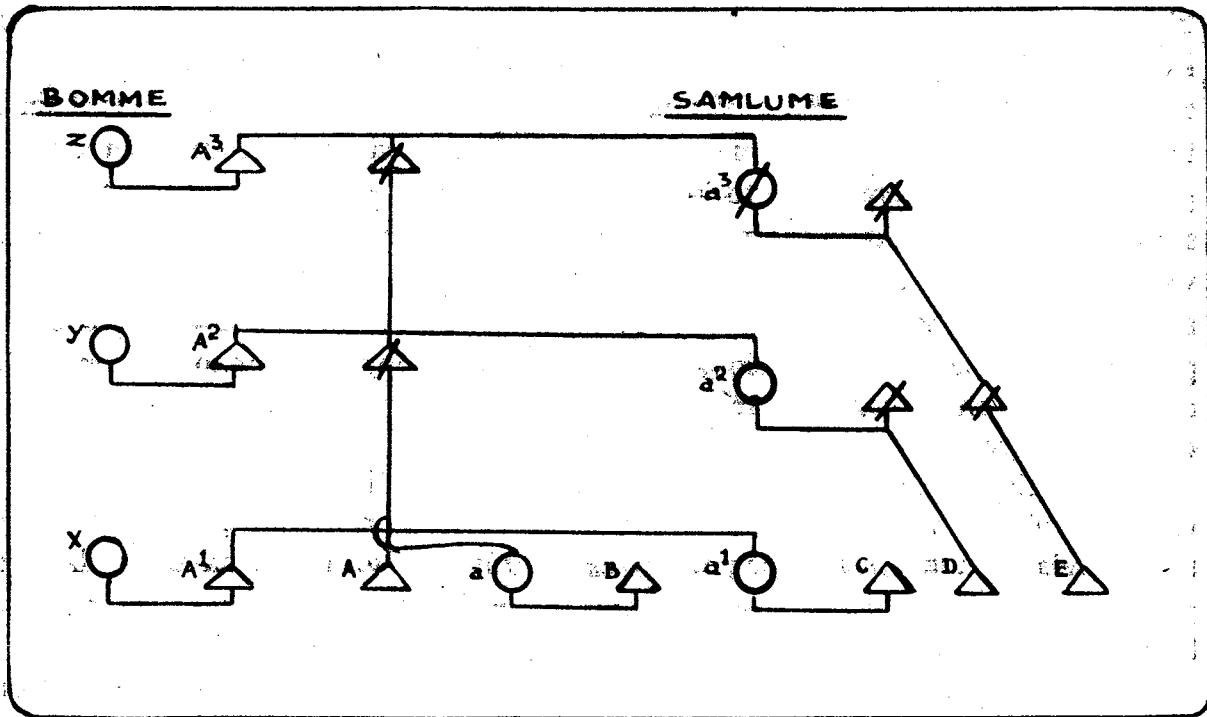


Formerly local authority was vested by the Administration in the *talukdars* (or *rais*) who served as intermediaries between it and the villagers, and who were responsible for the collection and delivery of taxes. The role of *talukdar* was grafted on to an already existing one, that of clan group headman. At the two large villages of Chhemsing and Chheskam there were 18 *talukdars*, representing 13 clan groups; the largest group had 2 *talukdars* at Chhemsing and 1 at Chheskam, 2 other large groups had 1 *talukdar* for the segment at Chhemsing and 1 for that at Chheskam, while the remainder only had 1 *talukdar*, either at Chhemsing or at Chheskam. The *raiti*, or "subjects" of the *talukdar* were the members of his clan group (or segment), as well as any non-*kipati*—i. e. Sherpas or Blacksmiths under his jurisdiction. The role of the *talukdar* was normally hereditary, passing from father to son, but new posts could be created.

There was no local super-ordinate authority, no village headman over all the various *talukdars*, who were largely autonomous. The *talukdars* had the legal authority to settle disputes among his *raiti*; in the event of quarrels between persons of different groups, the respective *talukdars* of the two parties involved were supposed to decide the issue. In practice, however, disputes were settled by *ad hoc* assemblies which included other influential villagers in addition to the *talukdars* concerned—men of wealth, with knowledge of customary procedure, or powers of persuasion. The participation of these persons with no formally vested authority supplemented the role of the *talukdar*, and acted as a check on his power. The limited power which the *talukdars* did manage to exercise was rarely translated into substantial economic gain. They received gifts in return for favours, and were the beneficiaries of certain customary fees and prestations. Each of their *raiti* was required to render them two days of unpaid labour per annum. Nevertheless, the *talukdars* did not constitute a wealthy class, and in fact many remained men of quite moderate means. The *talukdar* had obligations toward his *raiti*, and on certain occasions was required to feast them. His power and influence depended to a large extent on his generosity.

Since the *talukdars* could not recruit *raiti* from outside their own group (except non-*kipati*, such as Sherpas and Blacksmiths cultivating on the group's land) and local areas of jurisdiction, there was no competition to build up followings of *raiti* at each other's expense. The distribution of power among the various *talukdars* in a given locality depended on differential capacity for leadership and ability to influence the behavior of persons generally, not only on the relative size of their groups of *raiti*. (One of the most respected *talukdars* in the locality where I worked was that of the smallest clan group). Moreover, since natural increase in the size of the group over time was liable to be interrupted by clan fission, there were limits to the number of *raiti* which could be maintained by the *talukdar* under his jurisdiction. When fission occurred, the *talukdar* retained only those *raiti* of whichever of the two units he hap-

MARRIAGE PRESTATIONS



Initial Rite
(Sagun)

B marries a.

B pays LASTUR (8 copper pots) to A.

Final Rite
(Janti)

B pays DURU (16. paisa) to A¹, A², and A³.

A, A¹, A², and A³ distribute MAUKS PAISA (4 paisa), paid by B, to C, D, and E.

A, A¹, A², and A³ distribute BOMME PAISA (8 paisa) paid by B, to x, y, and z.

Dowry

A subsequently gives DAIJU (dowry) to a and B.

pened to belong; a new *talukdar* was created for the other unit. The latter was in effect "elected" by the members of that unit, although the old *talukdar* often played a privileged part in the selection process.

A traditional aspect of the *talukdar's* role was that he had the authority to decide whether a proposed marriage was to be allowed or to be forbidden, on the grounds that it constituted a violation of customary practice. Knowledge of the genealogy of his clan was consequently one of his responsibilities. Although this was not common knowledge, most persons, even if they did not know the genealogical details, were aware, at least approximately, of the number of generations which had elapsed since the founding of their clan, such knowledge being passed down from generation to generation. Some were liable to know parts of the genealogy fairly accurately, since possession of knowledge of this kind was one source of influence. There were thus limits to the extent to which the *talukdar*, even in consort with others, could manipulate the genealogy for his own ends or those of his friends. Moreover in practice, the genealogical considerations bearing on any questionable union were discussed by an *ad hoc* assembly of influential villagers, including the *talukdars* of other clan groups.

When clan fission occurred, the communal land holding of the clan was not divided equally between the two units acquiring separate clan status, but according to their relative numerical strength. An agreement had to be reached by the two parties, and that having the ablest and most determined spokesman often got the better share.

The effective political unit tended to be the locality. Ideally a dispute between parties resident in different localities could be settled in much the same way as one within the locality, the respective *talukdars* of the disputants co-operating together in order to effect a settlement. In practice, unless the issues were exceptionally clear-cut, it was much more difficult to resolve disputes arising between members of different localities than ones between parties residing in the same locality. The leaders of each locality tended to support their man, regardless of the issues. Such a situation was not ameliorated by the feelings of mutual suspicion which often characterized the relationship between localities generally.

Ritual Co-operation

Although Rais throughout the valley share a common body of ritual practice, the largest regularly constituted ritual congregation is the village. Common descent does not act as a focus for ritual co-operation involving the participation of members of different villages: even within the village the local clan segment does not form a ritual unit. Although members of more than one village frequently co-operate during the performance of a marriage ceremony or funerary rite, participation is situational and Ego-oriented.

There are two types of ritual practitioners, the *nokchha*, a part-time priest, and the *dhami*, a shaman who is a diviner and spirit-medium. The role of the former is ideally hereditary, but in practice tends to be filled by the most competent candidate, possessing the greatest fund of ritual knowledge; the role is not monopolized by particular descent groups. Recruitment of shamans is through personal inspiration. The two types of practitioners are concerned with mutually exclusive bodies of ritual and deal with different supernatural forces, although the basic objectives of their activities to some extent overlap. Household rites are performed periodically for the purpose of curing sickness, warding off calamity, and promoting family prosperity. The householder summons a shaman to perform rites for the household gods, including all of the personal gods which he and his wife have inherited. Once a year he employs a priest to perform a rite for *nagi*, the water serpent, an important supernatural being influencing the health and well-being of the household unit.

The object of one series of village rites, performed by priests, is to promote the growth of crops by placating the supernatural agencies which control the forces of nature. There are other ceremonies, some officiated by priests and some by shamans, to ward off sickness and calamity, and to promote the general well-being of the community. For some rites attendance is mandatory: every household in the village must be represented, absentees being fined. Although members of other villages are not prohibited from attending ceremonies they rarely do so. Each village has its own shrines, its own religious practitioners, and performs rites independently of others.

At certain times of the year there are large gatherings, or *melas*, at various places in the region, usually on hill tops, where shamans make offerings to local deities and dance. Persons from many different villages and localities attend these events to sing, drink, dance and enjoy themselves. Far from being occasions when the solidarity of the wider group is given expression, it is at these times that feelings of aggression, and hostility between different localities are liable to be overtly expressed. As a result certain *melas* have had to be discontinued. At some of those still held, persons attending from different localities may seek to avoid contact by camping on different sides of the hill, with the consequence that social intercourse is minimal. At these *melas* even the shamans of different localities do not perform together as a body, but individually or in small groups from the same village or locality.

Among the Kulunge Rais – and among Rais generally – we find a high degree of local separatism and divergence of interests. The environmental situation is such that the rugged topography tends to divide people. The same resources are found in different areas, obviating relations of interdependence. Nevertheless, this situation applies to a good part of the hills region of Nepal; the environment in itself cannot explain the rather unique divisiveness and atomization which characterize Rai society.

Taken in association, the following features of Kulunge Rai society which we

have examined would appear to be significant: The unit exercising corporate rights to land is a localized, agnatic descent group. Economic co-operation between different localities is for the most part lacking. Married women retain strong, unbreakable ties to their natal group; relations with maternal kin are very important, being reinforced by ritual bonds and considerations of property. The locality, in fact the village, tends to form an endogamous unit—marriages are rarely contracted with distant parties. The structure of constituted authority is highly de-centralized; the maximal effective unit for the settlement of disputes tends to be the locality. The largest regularly constituted ritual congregation is the village; bonds of ritual co-operation between different localities are lacking.

The critical feature of the society, which has a bearing on all of the above factors, is the process of descent fission by means of intra-group marriage, which occurs with periodic regularity, given natural increase in group size. If the population rises, the size of corporate descent groups, upon which process of fission places a ceiling, remains relatively constant, while their number multiplies. Over time the communal holding of the group is subject to greater and greater fragmentation. Authority structure becomes more and more de-centralized as roles for new headmen are created. Multiplication of descent groups within the locality makes endogamy increasingly feasible, given the other rules of the system.

The paradox of Kulunge-Rai society is that marriage divides rather than unites the segments which compose it. *Hadphora* marriage, dividing as it does clans and periodically creating new opportunities for obtaining brides within the local unit, allows the latter to remain largely endogamous, obviating enduring ties of intermarriage between the larger segments of the society. *Hadphora* union amounts to a repudiation of the principle of reciprocity underlying marriage exchange, which after all depends on the repudiation of the women of one's own group in favour of men of other groups. Intra-group marriage can only be at the expense of inter-group alliance.

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