

CHAPTER IV

LINEAGE STRUCTURE

I

The Mers have fourteen exogamous lineages. I use the word lineage to denote all the male and female members descending from a founding ancestor. In another sense a Mer lineage is also called a maximal lineage in relation to its segments. But now I talk of a lineage as a whole, and so use the word lineage in the previous sense. The high-land is inhabited by the four larger lineages viz., Keshwara, Rajshakha, Odedara and Sisodia. The low-land is inhabited by the other ten lineages, as well as by some segments of the high-land lineages. The low-land lineages are Parmar, Waghela, Chudasama, Chauhan, Bhatti, Vala, Jadeja, Solanki, Chavada and Vadher.

The Mers of high-land were referred to as a single

clan upto 1885 A.D. When John W. Watson was the political agent of Kathiawar (at present known as Saurashtra).* The word clan seems to have been used wrongly in this context, the high-land Mers did not represent a unilineal descent ^{real} group, _{or} putative. High-landers consist of the four lineages descending from unconnected ancestors. Similarly, the ten lineages of the low-land are separate entities descending from different ancestors.

Here it is necessary to make some preliminary observations on the status of the high-land Mers and the low-land Mers, especially, in the old regime of the Jethva rulers. The Jethva kings are recognized as the leaders of the high-land Mers and the latter have remained very faithful to the Jethva rulers. It is said that in olden days the Mers worked as ministers and advisers to the Jethva rulers. The high-land Mers were able to maintain their independence on the strength of their might, but, for the sake of mutual understanding they accepted the political authority of the Jethvas who employed them as a standing army in the times of emergency. The high-land Mers were then made the independent land-holders paying only hearth-tax to the Jethvas. They are therefore referred to as bhomiā, i.e., land-holders.

The low-land Mers have, however, a low political status. They have no tradition of soldiery like that of the

* See page 29.

high-landers. They were ordinary peasants paying revenue to the Jethvas. They are ironically known by high-land Mers as khad Mer, i.e., the Mers of ordinary qualities. The Mers of the low-land are here, for the sake of convenience, referred to as the non-bhomiās as contrasted with the bhomiās of the high-land.

The state of Porbandar passed a law in 1884 A.D., placing a restriction on the sale of the bhomiā land to the non-bhomiās of the low-land or to the people of any other caste. This restriction on the sale of bhomiā land has strengthened the ties of the high-landers to their land. On the other hand, there were no such restrictions on the sale and purchase of the non-bhomiā land. Thus while the high-land Mers could easily settle down in low-land, the movement of the low-landers to the high-land was rendered more difficult. This is more easily understood when we see that the Mers are predominately agriculturists.

This political superiority of the high-land Mers over the low-land Mers has been counterbalanced, by the affinal ties that exist between the people of these two divisions. It is also because of these affinal relations that some of the low-land men have now become owners of land belonging to sonless fathers-in-law in the high-land.

Plate VI

(a) The fair of
Madhavpur:

The place where Lord Krishna is supposed to have kidnapped Rukmini. The occasion is celebrated every year in March-April. The fair is attended by a large number of Mers. March, 1953.

(b) A group dance:

The favourite group-dance called dāndiā rās is here performed on the day of Holi. The Mer women are watching from a distance. Bakharla, February, 1953.

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However, the sharpness of distinction in the status of the Mers of the two divisions has not lessened even to-day. The high-land Mers consider themselves to be braver than the low-land Mers. This is seen in the great fair of Madhavpur where the Mers of both the divisions assemble. Though Madhavpur is in the low-land, the high-land Mers walk about in small groups, laughing at the low-landers and occasionally even insulting them. But if a low-land Mer happens to take similar liberty with a high-land Mer, it will result in a brawl. A group of high-land youths will promptly assemble and threaten or even beat the man concerned. The low-land Mers also gather together to retaliate, but they don't seem to be able to stand up to the high-landers. Such quarrels occasionally flare up, but they are momentary. However, they spread panic among the people gathered at the fair.

II

The relation between the two divisions of the Mers is one of opposition which may occasionally lead to a brawl. But inspite of the opposition the two groups have occasionally combined against outsiders. I have already mentioned the existence of certain affinal ties existing between these two groups of Mers.

Affinal bonds regulated by bilateral or symmetrical cross-cousin marriage forge links between a man and the members of his affinal lineage. Such bonds frequently bind together a high-land lineage with a low-land lineage. This is further strengthened by the fact that such bonds are repeated from generation to generation. The effective unit is the joint family and at marriage two joint families are brought together; this solidarity counterbalances lineage solidarity.

The kinship ties narrow down the circle of relationship to such an extent that the people do not bother much to know as to who belong to their own lineage. When a man wants to marry his son or daughter he may sometimes consult his agnates who direct him to the villages inhabited by those who belong to their affinal lineages. Though the people are free to choose spouses from distant villages, they are found to have limited their circle of affines in neighbouring villages only. A study of the majority of the Mer villages will reveal that very few of the inhabitants of a village have chosen distant villages for selecting spouses. In this way almost all the Mer villages act as a nucleus having narrow circle of affinal relationship sought in neighbouring villages. And these circles of affinal villages as well as kin villages overlap one another in such a way that they unite all the Mer villages by the network of affinal and kinship ties.

The moral and religious ideals also play an important part in consolidating the Mers of the two divisions. The

following couplet known as duhā throughout Saurashtra embodies some moral ideals cherished by the Mers.

janani jan to bhakta jan
kān dātā, kān soor;
nahito rējē vānzani,
rakhē gumāve noor.

This describes an ideal mother (i.e., janani). The poet tells a mother to prefer barrenness to giving birth to a son who is neither religious minded (i.e., bhakta), nor charitable (i.e., dātā) nor brave (i.e., soor). Mers show greatest respect for a virtuous man. The lives of a number of brave, charitable and religious minded or pious persons have been immortalized in their folk-tales and folk-songs. A lineage acquires reputation and social prestige for having such virtuous man among them. Moreover, irrespective of lineage differences, every Mer speaks proudly of such a virtuous man or a woman and looks upon him or her as his caste brother or sister as the case may be. Thus such honour and appreciation offered to a virtuous person of any one's lineage bring about a kind of moral solidarity among the Mers. Besides this, the various religious sects which have great vogue among the Mers have paved the way to cultural unification of the Mer people. That is, the membership of religious sects cut across high-land and low-land divisions.

Now I refer to another cultural factor of Mer society, that is the Mer-art. Mers share a common culture and this

makes for unity. The spread of wall-decoration and ornamental clay-work in bas-relief illustrates how this unity is brought about. Marriage is virilocal and this means that the women born in a lineage are distributed in a number of other lineages. Marriage between the high-land and low-land lineages is frequent and the women of the high-land lineages are famous for their skill in these arts. Through them, the art spreads to low-land lineages.

III

Before I proceed to analyse the internal constitution of a Mer lineage I should like to make certain preliminary observations regarding all the lineages in general. I have given, for reference, a detailed note on each of the fourteen Mer lineages in appendix II.

The Mer lineages are not organized in an order of high and low for the purpose of giving or taking a bride. Any man can give or take a bride from any lineage other than his own. However, the Mers of Keshwara lineage are recognized by other Mers as the earliest of them and therefore superior to those of other lineages. This is supported by a proverb which says, "ādyā mēr kēshwārā jēni suraj poorē shākh", i.e., the sun stands testimony to the fact that Keshwaras are the original Mers. A male member of Keshwara lineage is also called galdhēro, meaning an elder, and therefore, one who has to be shown respect.

The Mer lineages have separate hereditary bards or heralds. These bards are known as vahivanchā, meaning the readers of genealogy. The preceding proverb is taken from the book of a bard of Keshwara lineage. The bards of other thirteen lineages admit the truthfulness of this proverb. And, they unanimously say that other Mer lineages are the results of the intermingling of Rajput groups with the Keshwara Mers, or with other Rajputs who mixed with the Keshwaras. The appellations of these thirteen (excluding Keshwara) Mer lineages are certainly Rajput in origin.

Some hereditary bards of the Mers are found to record the genealogy of some Rajput group in Central Saurashtra. Such a bard has acquired a right to record the genealogy of a particular Rajput group and also that of a Mer lineage bearing the same appellation. This speaks for a fission that took place in a Rajput lineage or in one of its segments; and one of these intermingled with the Mers. This, I can say, is the general character of these thirteen (excluding Keshwara) Mer lineages.

I have taken some notes from the book, chopadā of a bard of Keshwara lineage. According to my notes the depth of this lineage is fifty generations. If we give twenty years' average duration to each generation, the earliest founder of the Keshwara lineage must have lived more than one thousand years ago. I should like to confirm this approximate period of time, more than one thousand years, as the range of Keshwara

lineage. But the bards do not stop at this stage. They, with a view to flatter the Mers, trace their genealogies back to Rama, Krishna, and to sun, moon and fire, as the case may be.

This makes it clear that the Mer genealogies as recorded by the bards are not completely accurate. Prof. Meyer Fortes writes, "Genealogies can be understood if they are seen to be conceptualization of the existing lineage structure viewed as continuing through time and therefore projected backwards as pseudo-history. A genealogy is in fact, what Malinowski called a legal charter and not a historical record."¹ The examination of a Mer genealogy supports these views.

IV

The constitution of the Mer lineages is based on agnatic descent. The fourteen lineages I have referred to earlier may be called independent maximal lineages. A maximal lineage is the most extensive group of people of both the sexes all of whom are related to one another by common patrilineal descent traced from one known (or accepted) founding ancestor.¹ The exact agnatic relationship of every other member, is known or can be ascertained by genealogical connection. All the agnatic descendents of the founding ancestor, both male and female, belong to a maximal lineage. But in practice the male members are supreme in the conduct of the lineage affairs.

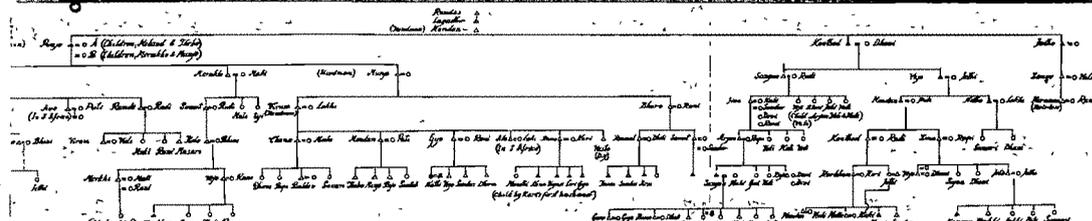
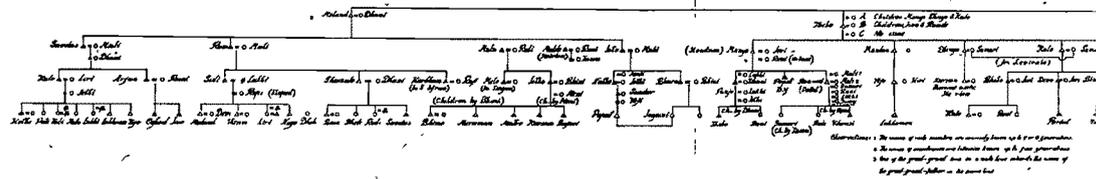
This is due in part to the fact that women members are bound to marry out of the lineage by the rule of lineage exogamy. As marriage is virilocal, a woman is separated from her natal lineage and cannot easily take part in its affairs. What is even more important, her children also do not belong to her patrilineal lineage, i.e., they do not contribute to its physical and social perpetuation. And the dominance of male line is found in the law of inheritance of property which passes to any distant agnate. In the case of social and religious institutions, like marriage and mortuary rites and the appeasement of deities the responsibility of fulfilling these duties lies with the agnatic relatives. I will amplify this point in one of the succeeding sections dealing with the area of interaction in a lineage.

V

A Mer maximal lineage is divided into various major segments all of the same form as the whole lineage but of regularly diminishing order of segmentation. Each segment is identified by reference to its founding ancestor or more generally it is known by the name of the village in which the members of a segment live. The major segments are composed of all the agnatic descendants of the sons of the founder of the maximal lineage. This is the highest order of segmentation to be found in a maximal lineage. At the subsequent

CHART - B

A GENEALOGY OF THE PATEL LINEAGE OF VILLAGE KHISTRI



- Observations: (1) The names of male ancestors are commonly known upto 7 or 8 generations.
- (2) The names of ^{are} ~~ancestresses~~ ^{ancestresses} likewise known upto five generations.
- (3) One of the great-grand-sons in a male line inherits the name of the great-grand-father in the same line.

level, each major segment is itself divisible into minor segments. The heads of the minor segments may be the sons of the ancestor who started the major segment or sometimes his second or third descendant. The members of the minor segments of a major segment of a particular lineage live generally in one village. In such cases a big village is divided into as many wards (faliān) as there are the minor segments.

A Mer village has one common building called chorā where the elders of the village meet on different occasions. I have explained earlier that the assembly of the elders of a village is known as panchāyata; and the meetings of panchāyata are held in a chorā. In olden days a village assembly consisted of the heads of each minor segment of a village; and the head-ship of a minor segment passed on generally to the eldest son of the previous head-man. When a segment becomes bigger in strength, the members may decide to build a building or chorā of their own. Some Mer villages have more than one chorā (the village Odadar has twenty four chorā) or the meeting places where the people of the respective segments meet at the time of marriage or mortuary rites. Besides, the common chorā is used when some bigger problems like that of paying revenue, raising common funds for the upkeep of the village etc. have to be tackled. A common chorā in a village symbolises the solidarity of the minor segments of a village which itself is a major segment of a maximal lineage. In some cases the members of a minor segment have migrated from

the ancestral village and have founded a small village. Such small villages have obviously only one common chorā but it is likely that after some years when the minor segment breaks some more chorā may come into existence. This is however a tentative supposition, because the increase in the number of chorā depends upon the space available for the expansion of a village.

The wards or faliān in a Mer village may be further divided into rows of houses known as āri. Each row of houses may represent an extended family and each house in a row represents a minimal lineage. A minimal lineage is equivalent to a small scale joint family or just an elementary family; it is in fact the smallest segment of a particular maximal lineage.

A Mer lineage is known by a colloquial Gujarati word viz. 'shākh'. The segments of a lineage are known as 'pānkhi'; a major segment is called 'moti pānkhi' while the minor segment is called 'nāni pānkhi'. And a joint or elementary family is called 'katam'.

VI

The members of each Mer lineage worship their own lineage deity who may be male or female. The shrines of these lineage deities are situated in various villages. It has been found that now-a-days the members of a lineage do not

meet at the principal shrine of the lineage deity. The distribution of the Mer villages, having the shrines of the deities, is responsible for the lack of a mass gathering of a particular lineage. Before explaining this I must again draw attention to the fact that each Mer village is a stronghold of a segment of a lineage. But it is significant to note that each village does not have the shrine of the lineage deity. Besides, the villages representing the segments of a particular lineage are not clustered in one area but they are dispersed at random.

The inhabitants of a village which has the principal shrine of their lineage deity have not to go outside to worship. Similarly, the people of other villages which have subordinate shrines do not always bother to go to the principal one. And the people of the villages which have neither principal nor subordinate shrine of their lineage deity, may go to worship lineage deity in any other village at their convenience. Thus, the members of one lineage do not come together for a ritual purpose. This factor is also responsible for the slackening of a lineage solidarity.

VII

Every Mer belongs to a hierarchy of lineage segments lying between the maximal and minimal limits of his own lineage.¹ Different orders of segmentation become relevant for his conduct in different degrees, and in accordance with variations in the

social situation. As for a farmer, for instance, his productive activities are mainly determined by his membership of his minimal lineage. If, on the other hand, he wants to marry, membership of his maximal lineage (which is exogamous) is one of the factors limiting his choice of a bride.

A lineage segment emerges in action only as a relatively autonomous unit. Its activity is regulated by its relationship with the other segments of its lineage and with the whole. Conversely, a lineage or lineage segments always function as a combination of segments and not as a collection of individuals.

At present a maximal lineage appears fixed in form and dimension and all its segments except the minimal segments are fixed in relation to one another. The degree of relative autonomy of the segments of a particular order is likely to alter with each generation. While the father is alive, sons have no jural, ritual, or economic autonomy, either individually or as a group. However, the source of effective minimal lineage is a joint family which splits up as soon as possible after the death of the father. Thus a joint family of two generations divides itself into minimal lineages when the father dies or when he himself allows them to establish elementary families, or, more proper minimal lineages. The effective minimal lineage is marked by the fact that it commonly forms the basis of a domestic family which inherits a part of the ancestral land and which usually constitutes a single unit of food-production.

VIII

The fourteen Mer lineages have unequal genealogical depth. The Keshwara lineage is, perhaps, the deepest with fifty generations.* Moreover, the developments of the various segments of a particular lineage do not tally exactly with those of its own as well as with those of other lineages. It is likely that a minor segment may be further sub-divided into still smaller segments, but each functioning like the parent segment. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain a boundary line of the area of interaction in a lineage or its segments. The range of interpersonal behaviour varies a great deal from one lineage to another, and from one segment to another of the same lineage. I was told by some informants that if a particular segment is large and is split up into a number of minimal lineages, then its cohesion decreases, and its co-operation in ritual and economic rights and obligations is not as great as it ought to be. Suppose a minor segment consists of, say, twenty joint families functioning at a time, and each joint family becomes very big, it is likely that the interpersonal behaviour (between members of a joint family or minimal lineage) in economic, ritual and jural pursuits becomes weaker. While on the other hand, if a minor segment consists of ten joint

* This information was collected on 20th November, 1954, from the genealogical book (chopadā) of the bard, Raja Lakha living in the village named Khapat.

families it may be found that the members of a segment show considerable co-operation and cohesion.

The members of an elementary family or joint family upto three generations are interdependent in ritual, jural and economic activities. Individuals forming a four-generation group i.e., descendants of a great-grandfather, should also take active part at the time of betrothal or marriage of one of the group. Similarly, those who are members of a five- or six-generation group participate in religious activities such as the pāt ceremony of Ramdeo Pir, or in the propitiation ceremony (jawāranu) of the various deities. And, those who are farther removed, are required to attend at death.

A man acquires the right to inherit land and other property of an individual however distant he is related. The institution of the lineage heralds (bārot) play a very significant role in this matter. When more than one claimant come forward as the heirs, the matter is reported to the court; and the court magistrate calls the herald of the lineage. The herald reads before the court the genealogical book and points out the rightful heir. The court admits the validity of the information given by the herald and gives judgement accordingly.

Serious quarrels flare up between brothers or among the members of a lineage if someone seduces the wife of another. Sometimes blood-feuds occur due to the violation of this law. If a man wants to marry the wife of a lineage member living

in his own village, he is not allowed to do so directly. In such a case the woman first of all obtains a divorce from her husband and then remarries a member of another lineage in a different village, and obtains a divorce from her second husband as well. She then marries the man she actually wanted to. If this procedure is not followed it may result into a quarrel or a blood-feud between the two men of the same lineage. This may be considered as one of the factors that weakens the solidarity of a lineage or a segment of a lineage. I have discussed some instances in the next two chapters which deal with kinship organization and interpersonal relationship and which throw light also on interlineage relationships as governed by kinship ties.

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REFERENCES

Section III

- 1 Meyer Fortes, The Structure of Unilineal Descent Groups, American Anthropologist, (University of Chicago, Chicago, 1953), Vol. 55, No. 1, pp. 27, 28.

Section IV

- 1 Meyer Fortes, The Web of Kinship Among The Tallensi, (Oxford University Press, London, New York, Toronto, 1949), p. 2.

Section VII

- 1 Meyer Fortes, op. cit., pp. 7, 8.

CHART E A MAN AS EGO

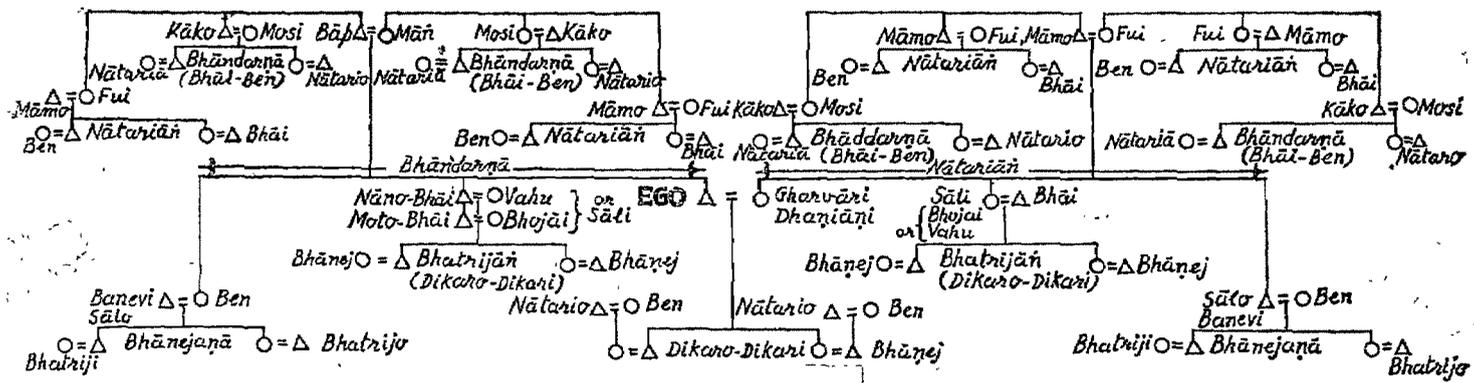


CHART F A WOMAN AS EGO

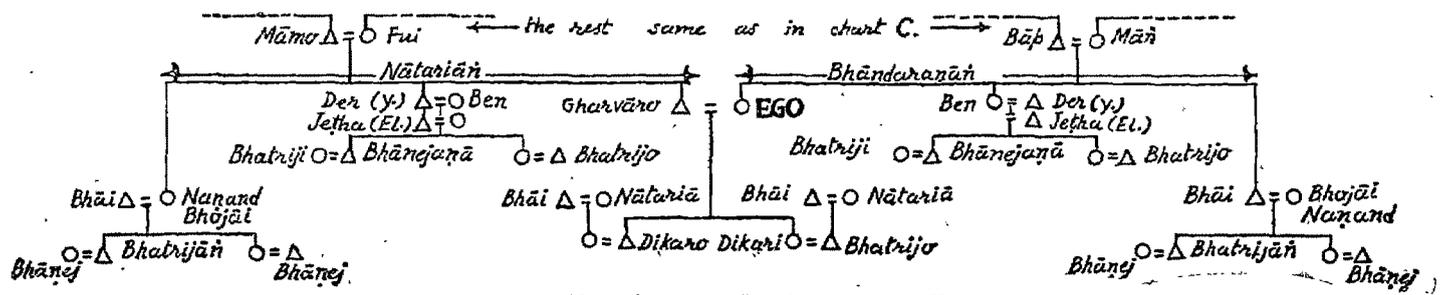
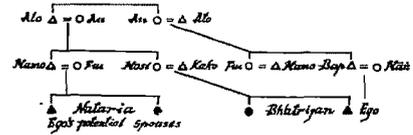
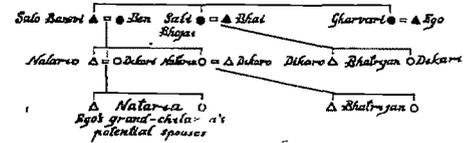


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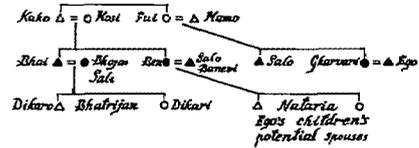
EGO'S FATHER'S MOTHER'S KIN



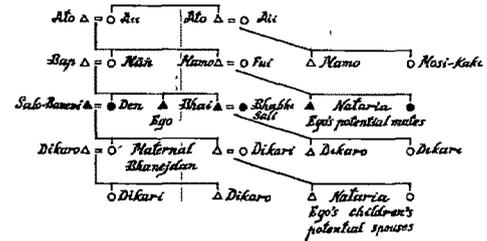
EGO'S WIFE'S KIN



EGO'S WIFE'S MOTHER'S KIN



EGO'S MOTHER'S SISTER'S KIN



EGO'S FATHER'S SISTER'S KIN



EGO'S MOTHER'S BROTHER'S KIN

