

CHAPTER V

MATRILINEAL KIN

Muthuvan kinship and rules of inheritance follow the matrilineal system. They say that they were originally patrilineal, but adopted matriliney after settling in the Travancore hills because the Poonayattu Rajahs did the same. As for the western Muthuvans, they adopted matriliney following their new masters, the Kodikulom Karthas. Whatever be the origin of Muthuvan matriliney, it is strongly embedded in their social structure. Muthuvan social behaviour is characterised by a variety of matrilineal kinship obligations. Rights and duties towards each other among matrilineal kinsmen underlies social behaviour^{on}/all crucial occasions. This is specially exemplified in the major critical situations in the individual's life such as birth, initiation, marriage and death; the chief collective occupations of agriculture and hunting; and in the rules of inheritance.

To marry and found a family is part of the normal course in the life of the individual Muthuvan. An unmarried man over the age of twenty-two or twenty-three, and a childless couple are both rare phenomena. It is considered a bad thing, or rather, a curse of God, to be without children. If a couple is so unfortunate as

not to have children of their own, it is customary to adopt a child of the husband's direct or classificatory brother. In either case, the kinship relation between the child's pater and genitor is parallel to the kinship relations between his foster-mother and own mother. It is fairly obvious that in a network of cross-cousin marriages, relations of this nature take place because when two brothers marry their maternal cross-cousins, their wives are sisters, direct or classificatory. Under normal circumstances the kinship relations among a group of men related to each other as brothers or paternal parallel cousins are equal or nearly equal to the kinship relations among their wives. Therefore, when a man adopts his brother's or parallel cousin's child, the child bears the same, or nearly same, kinship relation to its pater as well as foster mother.

A childless couple seeks the blessing of deities, or resort to magic and witchcraft, to get children. There is a belief that the flesh and soup of the black monkey (Nilgiri Lagur or Kasi johnii) is good to make a man potent, or restore lost potency. If a woman is barren she is given a concoction of various spices to overcome the malady.

The birth of twins portend good fortune, and of deformed babies or monsters bad luck. It is said that babies with deformities are left in the open to die, and

then buried, but Muthuvans deny this. Mr. Krishna Iyer states that the fact that there are no physically handicapped Muthuvans seems to confirm the presumption that Muthuvans dispose of deformed babies by simply leaving them to die.¹ No reliable instance of such cruelty has been reported, and it is doubtful if the allegation is well-founded.

For her first delivery a woman goes to her parental village, if she is not already living there. It is expected of the girl's mother to look after her during the first confinement. In the seventh month of a girl's first pregnancy, her mother takes her home and looks after her until one month after delivery, or longer, unless the husband takes the mother and baby to his house earlier. Sexual intercourse with the wife after the sixth month of pregnancy is considered injurious to the child. It is only during the first confinement that the girl's parents are obliged to care for her, but subsequent confinements may also take place at the girl's parental home. A girl prefers to go to her mother's house to be delivered because the mother looks after her with genuine understanding and concern, whereas the women of her husband's kudi are not so deeply concerned for her welfare. When the husband calls to take his wife and child to his own house, he is expected to give presents of clothing

1. See L.A. Krishna Iyer, op. cit., p. 17

to the wife and child.

During confinement a woman is in a state of pollution. As soon as labour pain starts she is removed to the muttukudichi (seclusion shed), and is attended by the women of the kudi until she is able to take care of herself. A woman's pollution period lasts for thirty days after delivery during which time she lives in the muttukudichi out of sight of men. For three days after child-birth, the mother is bathed in warm water, and after that she is helped to walk to the nearest river to bathe. The very sight of a woman in pollution defiles a man. So, if the woman and her companions see any man around, on their way to the river or back, they shout a warning so that the man may keep clear of the path, and out of sight. A woman's discharges in confinement and menses affects only men, and not her own sex.

As soon as the child is born, the umbilical cord is cut with a sharp piece of reed or bamboo. The cord, and the placenta and other discharges, as well as the cloth, rags, mats etc. stained with any form of maternity discharge, are buried deep in a pit near the seclusion shed. The mother is given generous helpings of a pungent, hot concoction of garlic, turmeric, red chillies, cummin seed, tamarind and salt. This is considered to have an energising effect. No special diet, other than this, is

given to the mother for a day or two. Afterwards, she is given the usual food.

The child's first feed is called chena. This is just a drop of honey, milk or rice soup, and is given by the child's mother's brother's wife or father's sister. The feeding of chena by the matrilineal kinswomen of the child has an important symbolic value. It marks the beginning of a close bond of kinship between the child and his matrilineal kin group. It may be asked how the father's sister belongs to the matrilineal kin group of the child. In a network of cross-cousin marriages, all sisters of the father, uterine and classificatory, are the wives of the mother's brothers, uterine and classificatory. The chena is also a symbolic expression of the fact that the child is the prospective heir and successor to his mother's brother.

The child is named after its maternal ancestors because he is part of the matrilineage. Mr. Krishna Iyer says that a male child is given the name of the maternal uncle, and a female child that of the maternal grandmother.¹ This practice, though customary, does not seem to be compulsor for the child could be named after any person of the same sex in the matrilineage. The name of an ancestor who died

1. L.A. Krishna Iyer, op. cit. p. 17.

young is not given for fear that the new recipient of that name may also die young. Muthuvan names are much like the Tamil Hindu names, e.g., Lakshmanan, Mariappan, Sundaram, Nagappan, Subramanian, Muthuswamy, Gnanamuthu etc., for males, and Lakshmi, Nagamma, Subbamma etc. for females. However, there are also several names that are peculiar to the tribe, e.g., Soundan, Arasanan, Karinkunju, Nariyan, Thevanan, Vellachetti, Komali etc. for males, and Kuruvamma, Soundamma, Sirangam, Karuppayi, Thayamma, Vellathayi, Pechi, Kuppi, Chembi, Ramayi etc. for females. According to Thurston, Muthuvan boy twins are invariably called Lutchman (corrupt form of Lakshmanan) and Raman, and girl twins Lutchmi (corrupt form of Lakshmi) and Ramayi. (I have not been able to find that this is necessarily so; there are instances where twins are named differently.)

Before the child is five years old the ceremony of kathu kuthal (piercing the ear-lobes) is performed. This is a custom prevalent among all Hindus, but whereas in orthodox Hinduism the ear-piercing ceremony is a religious ritual, among the Muthuvans the ceremony is devoid of religious significance. It is socially important, however, as a further cementing of the bond between the child and his matrilineal kin group, or as an expression of the rights

1. Edgar Thurston, op. cit., p. 86

and duties as between the two. The ear-piercing is performed by the child's matrilineal kinsmen, preferably the mother's brother, who also presents a pair of brass or silver ear rings to the child. Ear-piercing marks the individual's passing from infancy to childhood.

The Muthuvan child has little chance of going to school and getting a formal education. The Managements of tea plantations in the High Range and Cardamom Hills maintain primary schools for the benefit of children of their employees. Tribal children from nearby settlements are welcome to join the schools if they wish to, but only very few tribal children ever go to school. In the few instances where Muthuvan children attend an estate school, they start going to school at the age of nine or ten, and finish by the time they are twelve or thirteen. In four hamlets in the Cardamom Hills with a total population of about 280 among whom a literacy survey was conducted, it was found that only six boys aged between six and sixteen had ever been to a school. Out of the six, only two continued to attend school at the time, and the remaining four had attended school for varying periods of time from six months to three years. Among those aged above sixteen, four were literate - the criterion of literacy being ability to read and write a language, in this case Tamil. Among those aged thirty and above, there were two literates, and

among those aged fifty and above, none. Among the western Muthuvans of Idiyara and Neriamangalam forest ranges, the state of literacy is worse with entire hamlets devoid of a single literate person.

The chief occupation of the Muthuvan boys is the grazing of cattle. They milk the buffaloes in the morning and lead them to the hill-side pastures to graze all day. The joint cattle-grazing by a set of boys leads to strong friendship ties among them and at least a few of these friendships last for life. From the age of seven or eight onwards until adulthood, the boys spend nearly all their time in the company of their age and sex group. In the daytime they tend the cattle, play on the hill-side, chase birds, collect berries; at night they share the bachelor hall. Among the western Muthuvans who do not rear cattle, the boys join in fishing or in working in the fields. In any case, from early childhood the Muthuvan boy is part of a friendship net-work. No wonder then that the keynote of Muthuvan social life is group cohesion and mutual help. The pursuit of blatant self-interest and the tendency to stand off from others arouse condemnation. Muthuvan sentiment towards the group finds its roots in the friendship ties of boyhood and early youth. Since the kudi consists of a net-work of kinsmen, any group of boys in a kudi consists of cousins of various degrees of kinship.

Therefore, Muthuvan kinship bonds are doubly strengthened by the personal friendships added to the traditional kinship obligations.

The pattern of life is much the same for girls as for boys. Girls go to the forest in groups to gather firewood, collect roots and berries, or draw water. What is more, these age-sets by sex are not mutually exclusive. Groups of boys and girls engaged in their different occupations often come across each other and revel in good-humoured teasing and raillery. Amorous attachments short of sexual union are common at this time, and some of these lead to elopements and marriage. Songs exchanged between boys and girls, a few of which are given in a later section,¹ point to the development of early friendship between the sexes.

When a boy is about eighteen, and a girl about fifteen, they are formally initiated into adulthood. Muthuvan initiation rite is not a single event in time, but a process taking a year or two to complete. There is, nevertheless, a final act of initiation which marks a distinct milestone in the life of the individual. The commencement of the initiation process accords recognition to the fact that the boy or girl has reached biological adulthood.

The chief participants in initiation, apart from the initiatee himself, are the matrilineal cross-cousins of the

¹ See PP. ~~infra~~ 242-243 infra

boy, and their female counterparts in the case of a girl. Only boys and girls of the same age-set as the initiates take part in the function. The first act in the initiation process is that the initiate's hair is allowed to grow long. The matrilineal cross-cousins of the boy ask his parents not to cut his hair any more as they wish to perform his initiation. Until this notice is given, the boy's hair is either cut very short or shaved periodically; so with a girl too; but from now on the hair is allowed to grow long. After a year or two when the hair has grown long enough to be tied in a knot, the initiators tie an urumal (turban) round the boy's head. The urumal must be of new, white cloth, six to eight yards in length. This is purchased by the initiators themselves. The initiation proper for a boy consists of the tying of the urumal, and hence the initiation rite is called urumal kettu (tying of the turban). A girl's initiation is marked by the tying of her hair and the presentation of a bamboo comb called pukari. The girl's matrilineal female cross-cousins tie her hair after oiling it generously, and thrust the pukari into the knot. A girl's initiation, known as mudi kettu (tying of the hair), is a comparatively quiet affair, whereas a boy's initiation is characterised by great hilarity. This is because the boy himself resists the tying of urumal; it embarrasses him to be marked off suddenly

FIG. 28

A GROUP OF ADOLESCENT AND PRE-ADOLESCENT BOYS(WESTERN MUTHUVANS)
(Of the Five Older Boys in the Back Row Three who have Turbans
on were Recently Initiated and the other Two were sharing
Initiation as is evidenced by their Long Hair. The Boys are
Standing in Front of an Improvised Bachelor Hall)



as an adult man with a turban on his head. Very often a boy's initiators have to use force to tie the turban on his head.

The initiated boy is led to the kudi in a small procession when the women folk sprinkle turmeric water on him. This is presumably a symbolic expression of their recognition of the fact that the boy has attained adult status; it may also be interpreted as an act of purification. Turmeric water figures as an agent of ritual purification on several occasions. It would seem that by sprinkling turmeric water on the initiated boy the womenfolk make him start the new phase in his life as an adult male of ritual purity. This is only a conjecture; Muthuvans themselves say that the women do it for fun. In the evening, the boy visits all houses in the kudi and accepts some food from each. He is now a full member of the adult society of the kudi. On the following day, his parents give a feast to all the boys of the kudi.

The process of initiation is the same for the girl too, except for the difference in the material symbols of initiation. It is important to note that the relations who perform the initiation rites for a boy or girl are his or her potential affinal kin of contemporary generation. A boy's initiators are his potential brothers-in-law (wife's brothers); a girl's initiators are her potential ~~brothers-in-law~~ ^{brothers-in-law}.

sisters-in-law(husband's sisters). A boy's brother-in-law, actual or potential, is his machan, and a girl's sister-in-law, actual or potential, is her nathoon.

Muthuvans attach considerable significance to the ritual of initiation. The final act of initiation is nearly of the same order of importance as marriage. This is indicated by the fact that initiation and marriage are both spoken of as kalyanam, except that when referring to the former certain qualifying terms are also used. The initiation rite for a boy is called urumal kettu kalyanam by the eastern Muthuvans, and tala kettu kalyanam by the western Muthuvans (urumal kettu means tying of the turban, and tala kettu means tying of the head). The corresponding rite for a girl is called by both sections mudi kettu kalyanam (mudi kettu means tying of the hair). The word kalyanam literally means a feast or festal occasion. Used by itself, it means marriage because feast and marriage invariably go together.

Among the Kadar of Cochin also the initiation rite is a kalyanam, but the act of initiation consists of the chipping of the incisor teeth with a chisel until they assume a triangular shape. Hence the initiation feast is called pallikothu kalyanam (tooth-cutting feast)¹. The Kadar tooth-cutting feast takes place at the time of marriage or immediately before it in the case of boys, and

1. Cf. U.R.Ehrenfels, Kadar of Cochin(Madras: The University of Madras, 1952), p. 147.

at the time of the first menstruation in the case of girls. Among the Muthuvans the initiation rite need not necessarily coincide with either of these, but in actual fact it does in a number of cases.

The first menstruation of a Muthuvan girl is an occasion for ritual observances, quite apart from the mudi kettu (tying of hair) ceremony. When a girl menstruates for the first time she is said to have become pushpavati (a girl who has flowered). She is sent to the seclusion shed for five days. On the fifth day the adult women of the kudi conduct her to the nearest brook where she is ceremonially bathed with her clothes on. She stands knee-deep in water and the women standing around her pour numerous pots of water on her head. After this ritual bath she walks home with a pot of turmeric water on her head. The other women line the route each holding a pot of water. As the girl passes along, the women empty their own pots into the pot on the girl's head, so that she drips water all the way. On reaching home, her parents present her a new pudavai (a woman's dress). The women who participate in the first menstruation ritual of a girl must themselves be ritually pure; a woman in either of the two states of defilement, namely, menses or confinement, may not take part in the ritual. The worst of all natural states of defilement of a woman is the

first menstruation. Particular care is taken to keep her out of sight of men at this time. A girl's menstrual pollution lasts for five or more days whereas subsequent pollutions last for three or four days only.

Menstrual and maternity pollutions are observed by other hill tribes also in Travancore. A woman in her state of pollution is strictly forbidden to go near the cultivation site or tend cattle, because it is believed that the menstrual discharge is harmful to crops and cattle. The custom of regaining normal ritual status by the sprinkling of turmeric water, is prevalent among certain other hill tribes, notably the Kadar of Cochin. According to Ehrenfels,

When the actual menstrual bleeding ceases, i.e., usually on the third or fourth day, a good bath will be taken, if possible in a river, after which the thus purified girl would mix manjal (turmeric) with water, carry it back to the village in a pot and sprinkle the mixture on the huts and inmates in the immediate neighbourhood of the girl's own home. This ceremony marks the termination of the monthly pollution.

Turmeric, as an agent of ritual purification, appears in Muthuvan rites of initiation, menstruation and death. It is also used in religious rites. The sweet-smelling wild turmeric called Kasturi manjal (Curcuma aromatica) is considered to have greater efficacy, as a ritual purifier, than the cultivated variety sold in shops.

Much has been written on Muthuvan marriage customs, in so far as anything at all has been written on the tribe. The excitement over Muthuvan marriage is possibly due to the fact that there is an element of what might be called "marriage by capture" in it. The popular belief is that Muthuvan marriage is preceded by a brief period of "probationary" or "trial" marriage in which the bridegroom forcibly carries away the bride ~~when~~ she goes into the forest to collect firewood or draw water, and lives with her for a few days in an abandoned tree-house or in a cave. If, during this period, the boy and girl find that they are temperamentally and physically compatible, and wish to get married, they announce their intention to the elders on return to the village whereupon the marriage is celebrated. If, on the other hand, they found themselves unsuited to each other, the marriage does not take place, and the parties are free to contract marriages with other partners.

In its barest outline, this popular idea about Muthuvan marriage has some truth in it although there is considerable variation in detail as between one region and another. All the same, it would be erroneous to think of Muthuvan marriage as being preceded by a "trial" marriage. The "capture" so called is only a mock capture considering that parental approval has already been given for the

parties to come together with a view to marriage. The purpose of "capture", then, is only to enable the boy and girl to know each other before marriage. The girl is not "captured" by her future husband himself; his cross-cousins do that for him. The girl and the boy are accompanied by their cross-cousins of the respective sexes. They all stay together so that there is no opportunity for the would-be bride and bridegroom to cohabit.

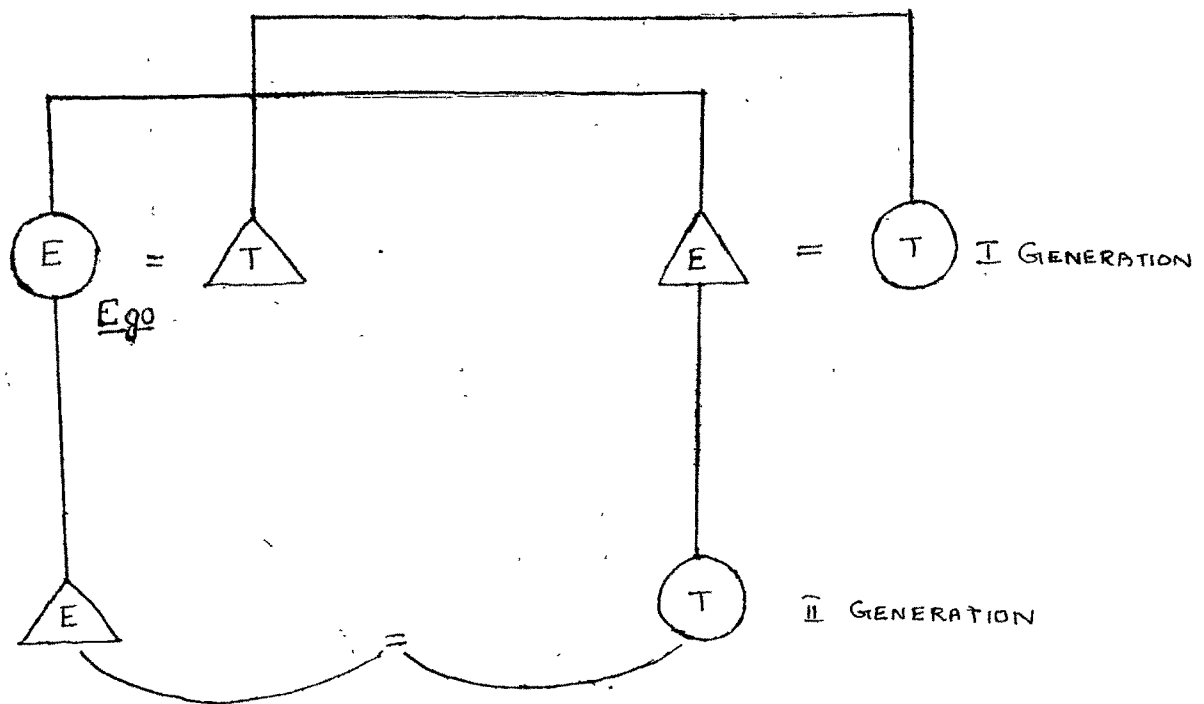
Muthuvans marry their cross-cousins. In a system of cross-cousin marriages, the marrying partners are mother's brother's daughter or son, or father's sister's son or daughter to each other. This will be explicit in the light of Muthuvan clan exogamy and the tracing of descent through the mother. For instance, let us consider two inter-marrying clans E and T.

A woman of E clan marries a man of T clan, and the former's brother marries the latter's sister. The children of these unions are mother's brothers child as well as father's sister's child to each other. This may be shown diagrammatically as below. (See next page)

When E of the II generation marries T of the same generation, they are mother's brother's child, as well as father's sister's child to each other. Several Muthuvan marriages are, in fact, of this type; but it is customary

FIG. 29

KINSHIP CHART OF AFFINAL KIN - CROSS-COUSINS



to say that a boy marries his mother's brother's daughter, and a girl, her father's sister's son. Due to this pattern of kinship between husband^{and} wife, it is meaningless to specify whether the marriage is between maternal cross-cousins or paternal cross-cousins; it can be either depending on whether the kinship is traced through the mother or father. When traced through mother, the husband and wife are maternal cross-cousins, and when traced through father they are paternal cross-cousins.

All marriages are not of the same pattern of kinship as shown above, and they cannot be so either, for the obvious reason that in real life a systematic, mechanical arrangement of births and sexes is not obtained. Hence, the degree of kinship in the mother's-brother's-son/father's-sister's-daughter network is often unequal. For instance, a boy may marry his mother's brother's daughter, and the girl her father's sister's son, but the reverse need not necessarily be true because the boy's father and the girl's mother may not be siblings. The majority of Muthuvan marriages are between children of classificatory sisters and brothers. As a general rule a Muthuvan could marry a cross-cousin of contemporary generation among his second and third orders of kin group, i.e., those related to him by one connecting link, mother's brother or father's sister, and those related by two connecting links, mother's

mother, mother's father, father's father, or father's mother. The following kinship charts show the networks of kin from whom an affinal partner may be chosen. It is assumed that all marriages take place between clans E and T. Since descent is reckoned through the mother, children belong to the same clan as the mother, and the father to the opposite clan. (See p.228 for charts)

The charts ~~above~~ give the possible choices of affinal partner in the second and third orders of kin. In all the charts, we start with a man of clan E as ego. All persons involved in the kin groups are assumed to be of either clan E or clan T. Since clans are exogamous, ego (clan E) could marry only a woman of clan T. His possible choices, namely, women of contemporary generation in clan T in the second and third orders of kinship, are enclosed in larger circles. We thus see that a man may marry any one of the following:-

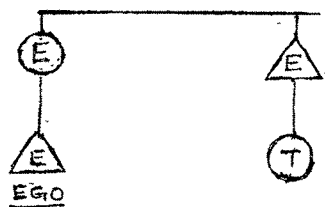
- | | |
|-----------|---|
| II order | (1) Mother's brother's daughter
(2) Father's sister's daughter |
| III Order | (3) Mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter
(4) Mother's mother's sister's son's daughter
(5) " father's brother's son's daughter
(6) " " sister's daughter
(7) Father's " brother's " daughter
(8) " " sister's son's daughter
(9) " mother's brother's son's daughter
(10) " " sister's daughter's daughter. |

FIG.30

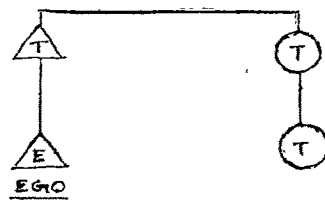
MUTHUVAN AFFINAL KIN

SECOND ORDER OF KIN

A. THROUGH MOTHER

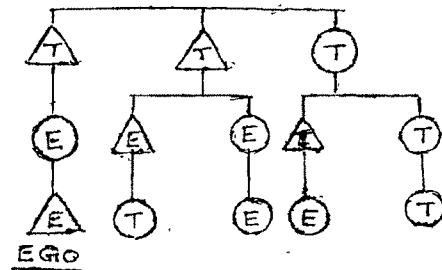
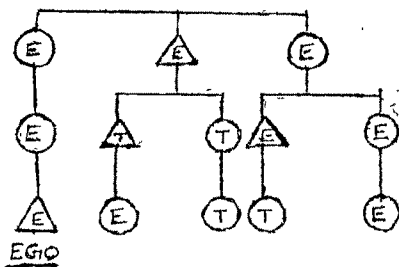


B. THROUGH FATHER

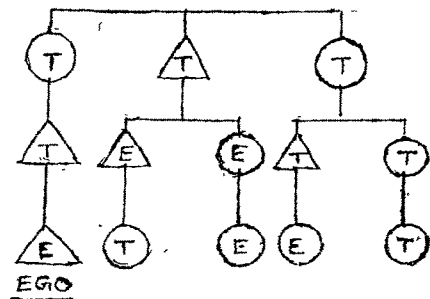
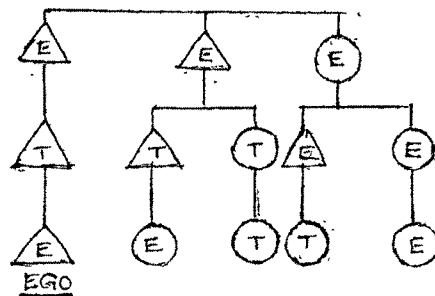


THIRD ORDER OF KIN

A. THROUGH MOTHER



B. THROUGH FATHER



This is the recognised affinal kin group. Nevertheless, marriages do take place outside of this group also. For instance a man may marry a woman of contemporary generation in the fourth order of kinship in the opposite clan, but such marriages are frowned upon, and the couple may be severely chastised or made to pay a fine. Muthuvan kinship reckoning seldom goes beyond the third order, i.e., a depth of three generations. Even so, it is only a village headman or an unusually knowledgeable elder member who could trace the kinship network in three generations; others are generally unable to go beyond the first ascending or first descending generation.

The most important consideration in marriage is the clan. Marriage within one's own clan is tantamount to incest, and persons involved in such marriages are subjected to heavy penalties, amounting even to expulsion from the tribe. Muthuvans are deeply concerned about the rule of clan exogamy, and any infringement of the rule is looked upon with a sense of horror and anger.

S. of Ellikuttom clan in Rajamala had an illicit love affair with the daughter of his mother's sister who lived in a hamlet near Pallivasal, on the occasion of his stay in the latter's house where he had gone to assist the family in some agricultural work. When the clandestine affair had gone on for a little while, it got talked about and the

couple decided to elope and get married secretly. When their absence was noticed they were pursued to Rajamala where they solemnly declared that they had married. The matter was immediately taken up by higher authorities, and a panchayat was called at which the head of Ellikuttom clan presided. When called upon to answer the charges, S. showed himself to be completely impenitent, and he retorted by saying that the presiding head had no right to correct him when he himself was guilty of cohabiting with his wife's younger sister during the former's life-time. This created a temporary deadlock. Subsequent efforts by other persons at finding a satisfactory solution proved futile, and as far as the present writer's knowledge goes, S. and the girl continue to live as husband and wife to this day, in Rajamala. They had to put up with some social ostrac^{ism}tion initially, but most members of Rajamala kudi seem to be reconciled to the incident now. In this particular instance, the man's personality counted much. S. is a man of strong personality and considerable leadership among the youth. He had many friends who secretly abetted his defiance of authority, and helped him to bear the incipient boycott.

A man marries between twenty and twenty-two years of age, generally, and a girl as soon as possible after puberty. Unlike certain other tribes, Muthuvans do not generally give the girls in marriage before puberty. The consent of

the headmen of the villages of the boy and girl as well as of the elders among near relations is sought in arranging a marriage. The formal request for the girl's hand is made by the bridegroom's brothers or cross-cousins. Among Muthuvans of the Anjanad valley, the boy's father requests the girl's father to give her to be his son's wife. There is no formal betrothal. When consent of the parents, near relations and headman has been obtained, the bridegroom's friends and cousins go to the girl's village and await an opportunity to carry her off to the jungle. The bridegroom himself may or may not be present; he is avowedly too shy to participate in the "capture" of the bride, and remains in a tree-house or cave in the forest. When the girl goes out with her friends to collect firewood or draw water, the boys surround them and lead them off to the rendezvous. The entire party spends two or three days in the forest, visiting the village occasionally to collect grain or other things they need. After this brief period of permitted courting, the boys and girls return to their homes.

In nearly every case, the courting in the forest leads to the immediate marriage of the pair, but in rare instances it may so happen that they take a dislike to each other, or one dislike the other in which case the marriage may not take place. The parties are then free to marry somebody else. In view of the possibility, albeit remote,

that courting does not necessarily lead to marriage, Muthuvans are all the more particular that the courting couple should not cohabit during the period of courting. The presence of other boys and girls is not accidental or exceptional, but a customary practice which is a means to thwart the possible sexual inclination of the couple. If consummation took place during courting the girl might possibly become pregnant, and if later the boy changed his mind about marrying her, there would be serious scandal and disastrous consequences for the girl. Muthuvans are therefore anxious to avoid the chances of pre-marital intercourse between the prospective husband and wife.

A couple who desire to marry are required to make a formal announcement of their intention. This is usually made by proxy so to say, that is, indirectly through brothers or friends. Muthuvans say that even if it is a foregone conclusion that courting will lead to marriage, the couple are required to declare their intention to marry so that if marital troubles develop later on, this could be held as witness against them.

The marriage ceremony is very simple. On an auspicious day fixed by the poojari (among eastern Muthuvans) or the moottukani (among western Muthuvans), the bridegroom and his companions go to the bride's hamlet - if she is of a different hamlet - and remain in the chavadi (guest house).

They are lavishly entertained to sweetmeats, fruits and betel leaves by the bride's parents. At the appropriate time, the bridegroom, accompanied by his friends, goes to the bride's house where she, clad in bridal clothes and surrounded by friends, awaits their arrival. The bride's parents vacate the house for the time being because their presence would be too embarrassing for themselves as well as the young people. The boy presents the girl, a new pudavai (woman's vestment), ear rings, bangles, a bead necklace, and a pukari (comb) of golden bamboo, made with his own hands. This last is ritually the most significant gift, having the same importance as the tali in Hindu marriage, or the ring in Christian marriage. It is said that previously the Muthuvans also used to tie the tali as part of the marriage ritual, and that it was given up because the brides who had the tali tied around their neck died young. After the ritual presentation, the bride and bridegroom share betel leaves, arecanuts, fruits etc. off the same plate. This completes the essential part of the marriage ritual. It is followed by feasting, singing and beating of drum.

Marriage is not consummated on the first night; the bride and bridegroom sleep separately with their respective age-sets, "to show that their friendship for the erstwhile companions is not broken on account of the new partnership;;

but the feigned non-attachment of the newly married couple towards each other cannot last very long. From the second day onwards, the couple live together. They have a short honeymoon lasting three or four days when they repair to an old tree-house or an abandoned hut away from the kudi. The couple usually take up permanent residence thereafter in the wife's kudi, but there is no compulsion regarding this. If the bridegroom is also the prospective heir of the wife's father, he becomes a permanent resident in the wife's kudi.

While the general pattern of Muthuvan marriage is as described above, there are minor variations in detail from one region to another, as witness, for example, Mr. Krishna Iyer's account of marriage among Muthuvans of Deviar Valley where a girl may be married either before or after puberty.

A man's younger brother with parental approval moots the marriage question with the girl's father. If his assent is obtained, the girl is caught on the way and taken to an ermadam (tree-house) about half a mile from the hamlet in the cultivated area. Here she meets her fiancée who presents her with strings of beads, a cloth of ten cubits length, and a comb of golden bamboo. The brother keeps watch over the ladder. The girl is taken to his house by his brother, where she is made to do domestic service. The husband goes home after three days. A separate shed is erected for the couple about hundred yards away from the hut. After two months he takes her to his uncle's hut remains there for one or two months, and returns to his village.

1. L.A. Krishna Iyer, op. cit., p. 11 et seq

Among the western Muthuvans, if the girl is married before she attains puberty, a nuptial ceremony is held immediately after her first puberty pollution is over. The couple spend the nuptial night by themselves in a separate hut. After this they remain with the husband's parents until they build a hut for themselves in the kudi of their choice.

There are frequent occurrences of deviation from the norm in respect of courting and marriage. A boy and girl of the same kudi or of two adjacent kudis may fall in love, but for one reason or another the parents may object to the marriage. In such an event, the lovers elope and live by themselves in the forest with the connivance, and sometimes clandestine assistance of friends. In the meanwhile the missing couple are searched for and brought back. A panchayat is held to try the offending couple. More often than not the couple are let off with chastisement and a fine varying from Rs.1/4/- to Rs.5/- ^{for} the man, and Rs.-/8/- to Rs.2/-8/- for the girl, depending on the seriousness of the situation.

If the affair involves a boy and girl of the same clan, it is tantamount to incest, and is much more serious than if it were between members of different clans but not of the approved affinal kin groups. An 'incestuous' couple

are almost certainly banished from the tribe.¹

In an instance in which the girl's parents refuse to give her in marriage to a particular boy, the latter may attempt to carry the girl away forcibly, with the help of his accomplices, and marry her in secret. It is this form of marriage, and marriage by elopement, that has led some to believe that Muthuvans practise marriage by capture. Mr. Krishna Iyer's description of Muthuvan marriage seems to lend support to the fact that marriage by capture takes place only when the girl's parents refuse to permit the suggested alliance.

When a girl's parents do not favour a match with a man who seeks her hand, she is taken away by force at a favourable opportunity. They live together in a secluded part of the forest for some days. Meanwhile they are being searched for. They are found and brought back to the village. The man is tried by the village panchayat, and is let off with a fine of one rupee. The marriage is then allowed to run its course with the consent of the two parties.

In the Deviar Valley, the girl is waylaid by the man and his comrades, and taken to a remote hamlet. He informs the members of his clan of his

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1. For an instance of incestuous union, see instance cited on p.229 Supra. In this instance there was no successful banishment of the couple, but that was because the chief accuser was himself guilty of an offence which the accused used to his advantage, and because the man concerned was one of unusually strong personality. The normal procedure in the event of ~~the~~ an incestuous union is instant banishment. However, I have no reliable information on instances of the kind at the present time (P.T.T.)

action, and seeks their help and protection. When the girl's party come in quest of her, they are pacified and clamours are averted. The girl's relations then take them back to their hut. During the period of capture, the elements of marriage like the presentation of strings of beads, cloth and bamboo comb are gone through.¹

As a rule, Muthuvans are monogamous, but rare deviation, either in the form of polygyny or polyandry, occur, the former being more common. An outstanding living instance of polygyny is the one already referred to in connection with the incestuous marriage of S. of Rajamala. (See P. 225 *Supra*) But even this is only a case of polygyny on the sly as the person concerned, namely, the head of Ellikuttom clan, has not formally married the second woman but was only believed to be cohabiting with her. There are no other known instances of polygyny at the present moment. Generally, all Muthuvans express the deepest abhorrence of all polygamous unions. Nevertheless, there is one circumstance in which he may marry a second time when he already has a wife, and that is when the first wife is barren. The matter is considered by the panchayat who, if satisfied that the grounds justify the granting of request for second marriage, may allow the man to take a second wife. The preferred choice in such marriage is the younger sister of the first wife. Polyandry is not permitted under any circumstance,

1. L.A. Krishna Iyer, op. cit., p. 13

but instances of such unions have not been unknown.

(I have heard of one instance of a widowed woman in Anjanad many years ago who, after the death of her first husband, married another man in a nearby hamlet, and, shortly afterwards, eloped with a third man to his hamlet and married him. The second husband followed her to her new residence to bring ^{her} back, but was eventually reconciled to sharing her with her latest husband. The scandal spread soon, but before anything could be done about it, the situation was resolved by the death of the woman. The two men were severely chastised and they married again and settled in different hamlets.) Polygamy of either type is rare nowadays. Muthuvans of the younger generation express particular distaste for the practice.

Widows may remarry. Among the western Muthuvans, a man may marry his elder brother's widow if he wishes to, but neither of them are obliged to marry each other. The eastern Muthuvans do not practise levirate, but a man may marry the widow of a classificatory brother, i.e., a maternal or paternal cross-cousin. Sororate marriages are more frequent among both sections of Muthuvans; a man may marry his deceased wife's sister, and this, in fact, is the preferred form of marriage for a widower.

Ordinarily a man does not marry outside the tribe, but there are a few instances of marriage between Muthuvans

and non-Muthuvans. Strictly speaking these are not cases of marrying outside the tribe, because the non-Muthuvan marrying a Muthuvan is already incorporated in the tribe, and reckoned as a Muthuvan for all practical purposes. Only members of the Vellala or Naicken castes are normally admitted to the tribe. Muthuvans believe that they were originally Vellalas. Naickens are considered to be a caste of equal status and hence they may also be admitted. In Muthuvan settlements bordering on Tamilnad, a few instances of incorporation have taken place. A few years ago, a man of the Vellala Caste was admitted to the tribe in Anjanad, and he eventually married a Muthuvan woman.¹

Thurston, while saying that outsiders are practically never received into the caste, mentions a few instances of adoption that actually took place, and he also quotes a Mr. Bensley to show that members of the Vellala caste are permitted entry into Muthuvan community.

Outsiders are practically not received into the caste, but a weaver caste boy and girl who were starving and deserted on the hills, were adopted and, when they grew up, were allowed the full privileges of the caste. Since then a Thotiya Naicker child was similarly adopted and is now a full-blown Muduvar with a Muduvar wife. On similar occasions, adoptions from similar or higher caste might take place, but the adoption of Pariahs or low caste people would be quite

1. For this information I am indebted to Mr. Kurien Ipc of Kothamangalam who has planting interests in the High Range, and has personal knowledge of several individual Muthuvans.

impossible. In a lecture delivered by Mr. O. H. Bensley, it was stated that the Muduvar permit the entry of members of the Vellala caste into their community, but insist upon a considerable period of probation before finally admitting the would-be Muduvar into their ranks.¹

The Administration Report of Travancore Forest

Department in the 1890's from which certain portions are reproduced earlier in pp. ²³ ~~16~~ et seq., ^{Subra} would also seem to testify to the fact that intermarriages of Muthuvans with Tamils of the plains have been going on for quite a long time. In fact, as far as the present writer's knowledge goes, such intermarriages have been more frequent in olden times than now. One explanation that can be suggested for the increasing rarity of intermarriages at the present time is that while the Tamil plains people have advanced considerably in economic and social position, and in education, over the last half-century or so, there has been no comparable rate of advancement among the Muthuvans, nor indeed among other hill tribes. This has made the distinction and separateness between the two groups increasingly obvious, so much so that a natural assimilation between any two individuals of the two sections is difficult.

Muthuvans are very discreet in the matter of sexual life, and have a high sense of sexual morality. Premarital

1. Edgar Thurston, op. cit., p. 89.

and extra-marital relations are severely dealt with. In childhood and adolescence the Muthuvan boy is subjected to a high degree of parental discipline, and after marriage, to tribal discipline. Any overt expression of romantic feeling between the sexes is considered to be in bad taste. No Muthuvan woman may talk to a stranger, or even be seen by strangers. Sexual intercourse between husband and wife is avoided on the eve of all occasions that call for ritual purity of the participants, such as religious rituals, jungle-clearing, sowing, cutting of sheaves, hunting, the performance of death rites etc.

Despite the puritan discipline of adolescence, a certain degree of friendly teasing between boys and girls is tolerated. They have frequent opportunities to come together in the forest when amorous songs are exchanged. The romances of early adolescence often continue in later years which is a possible explanation for the relatively high incidence of elopements among Muthuvans. A free translation of some of the couplets exchanged between boys and girls is given below. All the songs are certainly romantic, and some even erotic, but their chief interest in the present context lies in the fact that they are also expressive of certain aspects of Muthuvan affinal kinship and marriage.

1. A boy and girl meeting in the forest:

Boy: O, daughter of my uncle, daughter of a Maharaj,
My darling girl, show me not your golden breasts

Girl: O, son of my uncle, son of a Maharaj,
My darling boy, show me not your golden bud.

2. While the girl is plastering the floor of her hut with cowdung paste, the boy approaches her:

Boy: Sweet girl, daughter of my uncle,
Come with me and plaster my floor.

Girl: O, you naughty boy, I won't come with you,
When I was playing in the sand by the riverside,
You passed by saying, 'a girl too young'.

Boy: Then you were five, the age of ignorance,
Now you are ten, and fit for me.

3. While the boy tends the cattle in the hillside, the girl creeps behind him and says:

Girl: O, brother of the cattleman,
Cattle-tending little boy,
All the cattle you tend will disappear in
the hills.

Boy: What if my cattle disappear in the hills?
What if they eat poison grass?
I will hold my bow and arrow,
In the river in which you bathe.

Girl: Go on you little boy, go on with your cattle,
You who have tasted neither earth, nor tree,
nor girl.

Boy: The taste of earth is in white ant+mound,
The taste of tree is in sandalwood tree,
The taste of girl is in tender breasts,
And O, my girl, I love you so!

4. The boy sings in the forest as if to himself:

Boy: When the elephant is in heat
He must be chained to a tree,
But where is the tree, and who has the chain?

Girl: My breasts are the trees,
My hands are the chains,
What more do you need to chain the elephant?

5. Boy and girl in the forest:

Boy: O, beautiful punna tree,¹
For whom will you shed your flowers?

Girl: I will shed my flowers for only one,
Yea, my father's sister's son.

6. A girl has just been married and taken away by her husband, leaving her father alone. A man calls out in front of the house:

Man: Where is he who planted the punna tree?
Where is he who watches the punna sheds?

Father: He who planted the punna tree is here;
He who watches the punna seeds is beyond the hills.

7. A boy and girl are in love and want to get married, but their parents do not consent. The girl encourages the boy to elope with her, but the boy is diffident:

Boy: My beautiful red-skinned girl,
If I run away with you,
And marry you in pride,
How can we be sure it will last?

Girl: All that last are from God,
All that perish are also from God,
Act, and with the help of God
We shall prosper under one roof.

Muthuvan marriage and family are fairly happy and stable. The husband is the head of the family. A woman refers to her husband as veetukaran (owner of the house or

1. The punna tree (*Dillenia pentagyna*) figures in several Muthuvan songs as a metaphor or transferred epithet for girl. The breasts of a very young girl are often compared to the seed of the punna tree. The idea is perhaps expressed better in the next song.

master of the house). The wife and children are expected to submit to the authority and discipline of the father. Ordinarily the family consists of the husband, wife and unmarried children only. Divorce is permitted, but its occurrence is very rare. Divorced parties are free to remarry.

* * * * *

Muthuvan death rites have received scant attention from authors, but kinship duties become more explicit at death than at any other crisis in the individual's life. We shall therefore deal with death rites in some detail.

As soon as a man dies the women of the kudi retreat to a secluded spot in the forest and perform a ritual mourning. A piece of wood or a stone is laid on the ground in the north-south direction, and the women circumambulate the object, wailing loudly, beating their breasts and extolling the virtues of the deceased. The object in the centre is a symbol representing the corpse. After the mourning, the women sprinkle turmeric water on the 'corpse' and on each other. Turmeric, as we have already seen, is an article of ritual purification.

Members of the deceased's clan, and of all the adjacent villages are informed of the death. All clansmen are expected to attend the funerary rites. The body is kept

until the day after death so that friends and clansmen, and relations from distant villages, could pay their last respects to the deceased. When a child or young person dies, the body is usually buried the same day.

When a man dies the chief ritual mourner is his sister's son who is also his heir. The wife, children, brothers and sisters are naturally the real mourners but in the ritual sense they are preceded by the sister's son.

Soon after death, the body is bathed and wrapped in clean linen. Adult men who call to pay their respects remove their turban on entering the house, and keep it folded under the right arm, or tied round the waist; it is worn again only after the burial is over. The chief mourner and other near relations observe ritual mourning for thirty days during which time they abstain from bath and embrocation, and discard the turban, ornaments, and other adornments. The widow does not wear any ornament at all henceforth, unless she resumes married status by a second marriage.

On the second day the body is carried to the burial place by hired Pulayas, and interned in a deep grave. The mourners put a pinch of rice each in the corpse's mouth, following the general Hindu custom. The body is laid in the north-south direction, head towards north and feet towards south. Muthuvans believe that the tiger does not

touch anything that lies in the north-south direction. So, if the body is laid north-south, there is no danger of it being unearthed and eaten by tiger. Implements and personal effects such as bill-hook, fishing rod, betel leaf bag and chakmuk (flint and tinder) that the man used while alive, are buried with him. As earth is shovelled into the grave, the chief mourner, the poojari and the older men incant manthrams (magical chants) to the effect: "May you rest where we lay you down; may you not appear to us in dreams; guard us who are living, we shall prepare a pongal (ritual offering) for you every year".

Two stones are planted over the grave of an adult, one at the head and the other at the feet. The head stone (talakallu) is larger than the foot stone (kal kallu), and it is planted by the deceased's maternal or paternal cross cousins who are his sambadhakar (affinal kin). The foot stone is planted by his maternal or paternal parallel cousins, who are his enabandhukal (clansmen).

Mr. Krishna Iyer mentions an interesting burial custom among the Muthuvans of Deviar Valley.

In Deviar Valley the medicine man first conceives that the grave represents the body of Surya (Sun), and passes a whiff of air through the hollow of his hand. After the grave is filled with earth, he conceives it to be the skin of Surya, and passes another whiff of air through the hollow of his hand. He then forms the impression that the stone planted at the head is the head of the Sun, and passes another puff of air through

the hollow of his hand. He then conceives that the stone planted at the foot is the big toe of the Sun, and passes another puff of air. The idea is that the Sun is guarding the dead, and that no wild animal may do any harm to the dead, if these ceremonies are properly performed. If not, it is said that the tiger will taste the flesh of the dead and kill the people of the village.¹

After the burial, the men proceed to the nearest brook or pool for a ritual dip with clothes on. They return to the kudi with dripping cloth and untied hair, and sit in a circle in front of the deceased's house. The chief mourner spreads three plantain leaves in the middle and places a quantity of pongals on each leaf. The pongals represent three categories of ancestors, namely, the ancestors of the tribe as a whole, the ancestor's of the deceased's clan, and the ancestors of his affinal clan. All the assembled people stand up and bow before the pongals, and then take a pinch of the ritual rice from each leaf.

On the following day a feast is served to the villagers and visitors by the deceased's clansmen. This is the first karmanthram (death ceremony). Only one karmanthram is performed for a child, but for an adult a second and more important death rite is performed on the thirtieth day. Death pollution lasts for thirty days if the deceased

1. L.A.Krishna Iyer, op. cit., pp. 28 et seq.

was an adult, and if child, only for two days.

The second karmanthram is characterised by an elaborate and expensive feast, the expenses of which are borne by the deceased's sambandhkar (affinal kin). The quality and quantity of the feast varies with the status of the deceased. All kinsmen of the deceased are invited to the feast. An important feature of the second karmanthram is that on this occasion a public exoneration in connection with the circumstances of the death is sought to be fulfilled. This is related to the Muthuvan belief in koodothram (sorcery) as a possible cause of all calamities. There is a tendency to suspect that death has been caused by sorcery aimed against the deceased by a hostile person or persons. Hence an opportunity is given to the chief mourner to declare in public his suspicions if he has any. If he says that he believes the death to have happened as a result of natural causes, it is taken to be a public exoneration of all from the guilt of sorcery in respect of the death. If, on the other hand, he says that he has suspicion against someone, the person concerned will be tried by the panchayat at a later date and, if found guilty, punished.

Ancestors are propitiated on the occasion of the second death rite also. All the guests then partake of the feast. Before being eaten the food is ritually purified by the poojari by sprinkling turmeric water on it.

We have considered Muthuvan birth rites, initiation, marriage and death, and seen that in each of these the matrilineal kin have certain ritual functions. Birth, initiation, marriage and death are critical stages in the individual's life when the matrilineal kin emphasise their rights and duties in relation to the individual. While this is explicit in the situations described above, it is loosely defined, but nevertheless present, in certain other situations such as agricultural operations and hunting. In agriculture, there are two occasions when a man might possibly need assistance; these are forest clearing and harvesting. On both these occasions a man may call upon the services of his matrilineal kin. In fact, even if a person does not formally request the assistance of his matrilineal kin, the latter consider it but right and proper that they should lend their assistance voluntarily. When the harvest is over and the grain stored, matrilineal kinsmen entertain each other lavishly. It is usual to find Muthuvans paying long calls, lasting even up to a month, on their kinsmen at the end of the harvest season.

There is yet another instance of the jural element in kinship. A sister's son expects a small share of the harvest of his mother's brother. The sister's son is the future heir of the mother's brother, and his claim to a share of the latter's harvest doubtless anticipates the

future relation between the two.

Similarly, in the distribution of the spoils of a hunt some kinship obligations are to be fulfilled. One's matrilineal kin have a recognised claim over a share of the meat of the animals shot. Failure to fulfil the customary obligations towards one's matrilineal kin in agriculture or hunting leads to petty animosities and recriminations.

By far the most important jural element in Muthuvan kinship structure lies in the matter of inheritance. A man's property passes on to his sister's son. Muthuvans say that when a man dies his sister's son claims every possession of the deceased, "even his walking stick". But nowadays some laxity is permitted in this respect. A man's personal acquisitions such as cash, tools, cardamom land, poultry etc., may be given to his own son, wholly or partly, with the consent of his sister's son. Even with regard to his inherited property, the sister's son is often prevailed upon to give a small share of it to his mother's brother's son. This is in the nature of a gift only, and not as a matter of right. Women take care to hand over their personal property such as cooking vessels, ornaments and cloth to their own daughters.

In matrilocal, matrilineal societies like the Nair the mother's brother is the head of a family of co-resident

sisters and their children. The eldest son of the eldest sister succeeds the uncle as head of the joint family. As a result of this pattern of residence and succession the affective relations between uncle and nephew are much the same as between father and son in a patrilineal, patrilocal society. Therefore, in matrilocal matriliney there is little or no inherent conflict in respect of property inheritance. Muthuvan society is matrilineal and patrilocal. Even if a man moves to his wife's kudi after marriage, he sets up a household of his own with himself, his wife and children. Naturally the bonds of attachment between parents and children are stronger than those between uncles and nephews. This situation may appear to give rise to a certain amount of conflict over property. However, in cross-cousin marriages, the sister's son is also the daughter's husband, so that when property is inherited by the sister's son, it actually goes to the daughter and her husband. In the next descending generation it reverts to the patrilineal grandson, as shown in the chart below, because ego's sister's son is also his wife's brother's son. (see p.252 for chart)

Indeed, if all marriages did in fact take place between immediate cross-cousins in all generations, the ancestral property would continue to be exchanged between matrilineal and patrilineal descendants in alternate generations. In actual practice, however, very few marriages are of this

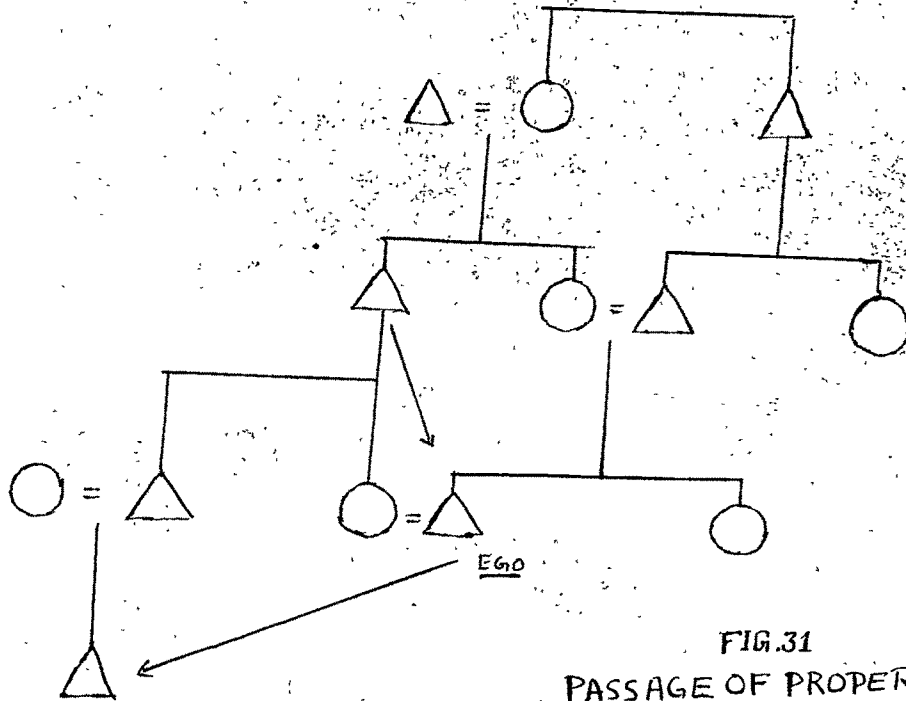


FIG.31
PASSAGE OF PROPERTY

type; the large majority of marriages are between cross-cousins of the third or fourth order, i.e., between children of classificatory brothers and sisters. This does not affect the rule of inheritance; whether the sister's son marries the brother's daughter or not, the brother's property must pass on to the sister's son. Since descent is reckoned in the female line, property passes on from generation to generation among members of the same lineage despite the vagaries in degree of kinship between individual affines. One's own son inherits the property of one's wife's brother, and it continues to be inherited by members of the wife's lineage through the generations.

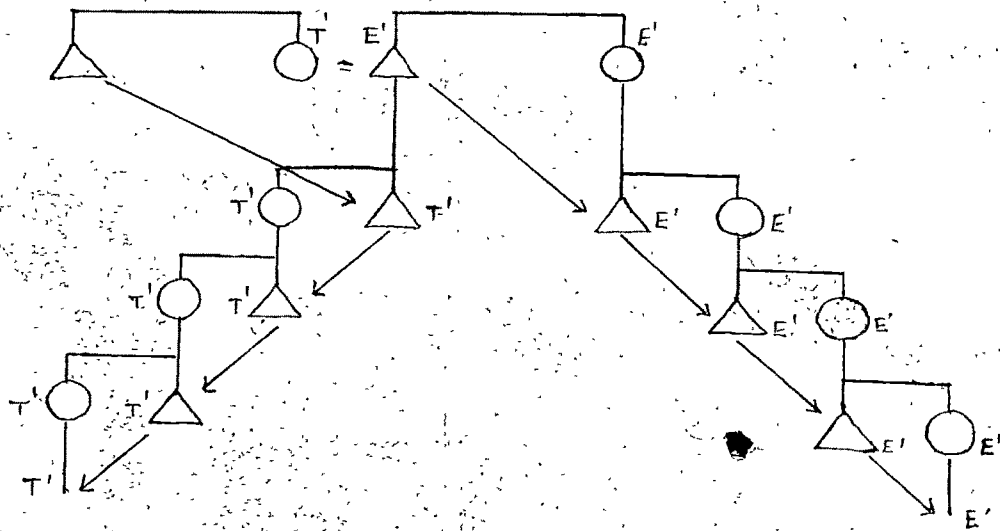


FIG. 32

DESCENT AND INHERITANCE

(The letters E and T stand for particular lineages in clans E and T.)

The fact that the sister's son does not necessarily marry the brother's daughter does contain potential conflicts in respect of claims on property. This is sought to be obviated by a sharing of property between maternal cross-cousins and by the jural function of kinship in initiation, marriage etc. which induces close bonds of friendship and co-operation between matrilineal kinsmen.