

cultural repercussions of childlessness and low fertility in nepal*

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Among the high castes (Brahman and Chhetri) of Nepal, a healthy, growing family brings substantial social reward, while childlessness is punished. Yet childlessness is not only feared because it incurs negative social and cultural sanctions, but also because of the lack in Brahman-Chhetri society of viable, institutionalized alternatives to having one's own children. This combination in Nepal of negative consequences for the failure to produce children and ineffective alternatives open to the childless, provides us with a pertinent context in which to examine cultural repercussions of reproductive failure.

From studies of India, there has already been much discussion of the Hindu belief system in relation to the desire for many children, the concern with son survivorship, women's fear of barrenness and so forth (e.g. Opler, 1964; Mandelbaum, 1974). I will suggest, from the Nepalese example, that the cultural predicament of childlessness and low fertility is additionally related to certain features of social structure that are widespread in the Hindu world. These features will be illuminated by a brief comparison with societies in a markedly different cultural area - sub-Saharan Africa.

It should be borne in mind that the significance of childlessness in Nepal, as anywhere, depends on the individual's particular situation as that situation is defined in the society. Childlessness is not, like cholera, universally abhorred by all Nepalese in all circumstances. For one thing, its relevance is bound by the context of marriage; and married couples will only become seriously concerned with their childlessness after several years of conjugal living. Even here, the extent and the timing of their concern will vary according to other circumstances. For instance, the woman's failure to conceive at all will be far more alarming than her having an initial miscarriage or stillbirth.

At the same time, the threat of childlessness can never be totally circumvented by anyone. One's children may, after all, die at any point --a fact that becomes particularly relevant in areas like Nepal that have had a history of high infant mortality. Thus with the birth of her first child, a woman may escape the stigma of "barrenness," but she and her husband are quite aware that, unless they have several more children, they remain quite vulnerable to childlessness.

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A discussion of childlessness in the Hindu context amounts to a discussion of an extreme - a negative end-point in the spectrum of life's possibilities. It is clear that only a fraction of the Brahman-Chhetri population in Nepal ever face this extreme directly. Childlessness becomes important, however, not as a problem affecting great numbers but as a conceptual model of what a people are culturally induced to fear and avoid. By drawing out the extreme of childlessness, I hope to uncover what, amid the whole complex of social and religious values on children, is really at stake.

This study of childlessness is based on my fieldwork in a Brahman-Chhetri village of Central Nepal¹ and draws from Lynn Bennett's (1976, 1977) studies of woman's roles in a Brahman-Chhetri community in the Kathmandu Valley. Among both these groups, as among their Hindu counterparts in rural India, the high castes are organized into agnatic lineages; virilocal residence is the norm and the joint, extended family the ideal. And among all, bearing children, especially sons, is of paramount importance for similar economic, social, and religious reasons.

Women and Children: Gradations in the Stigma of Childlessness

The ways in which a Hindu woman's fertility profoundly affects her social and religious life have been well documented for India (e.g. Madan, 1965; 102; Mandelbaum, 1970; 87-88; Mayer, 1970; 220-221) and Bennett (1976, 1977) has confirmed that very similar principles of Hindu social organization and religious ideology are operative among Brahmans and Chhetris of Nepal. From these and other reports it is well known that a Hindu woman's status is directly dependent on her fertility and that the childless woman is subject to pity and contempt. Not only is she excluded from many social and ritual activities, she is also very likely to be accused of witchcraft. It is further probable that her husband will take another wife. Although men are also deeply concerned with having children, childless men are spared the ostracism and ritual exclusion that their wives suffer.

That the childless woman faces a perilous position is clear. But what have been less fully explored are the various local categories of childless or subfertile women and the additional light that these categories may throw on our understanding of Hindu values concerning fertility. Brahmans and Chhetris of Nepal actually distinguish several types, or degrees, of women who suffer fertility failure. The worst of these is aputri - a woman who has never conceived. The aputri is considered so unworthy that although she is allowed to do worship, the gods will not accept the food she has offered. Somewhat less inauspicious are the mrit balakh - a woman who has only stillbirths - and the srabad gharba - a woman who always miscarries. But like the aputri, these women will suffer mild ostracism. Part of this ostracism is explained as a means of avoiding the contagion of these women's condition. It is especially believed that repeated miscarriages might be caused by a specific disease called moc. Women are held to be born with moc, but it is

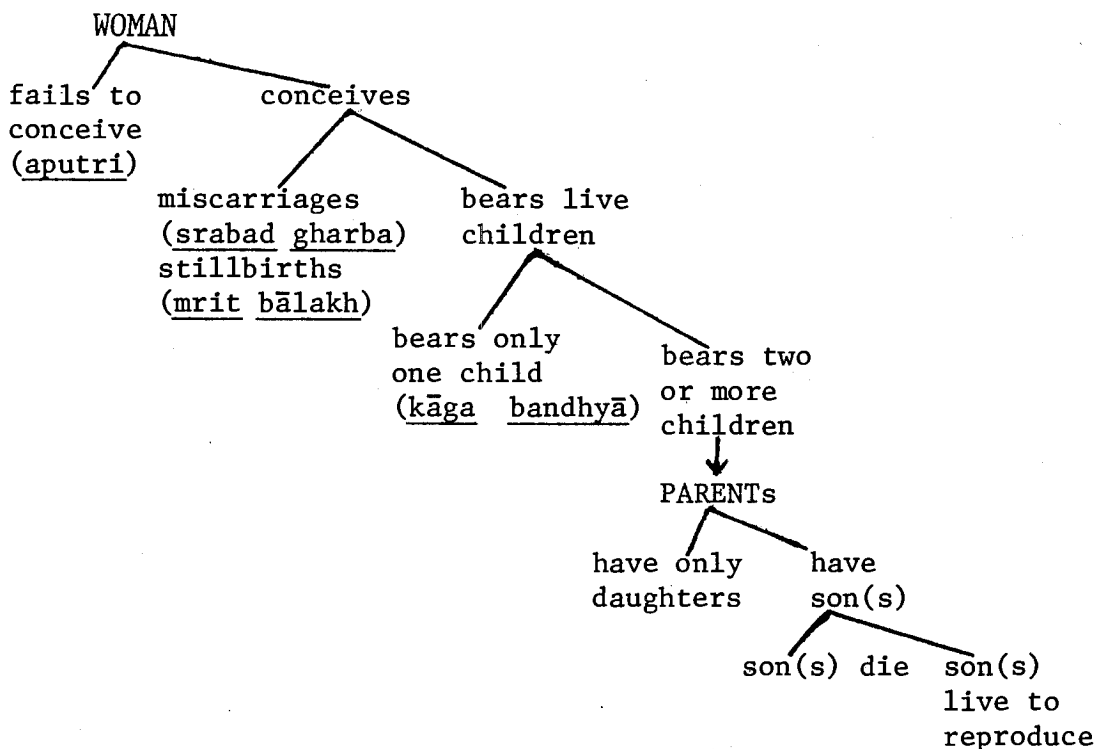
also thought that one woman can catch it from another. The disease is picked up by sitting where a moc woman has just sat, defecating where a moc woman has just defecated, or wearing the used clothing of a woman suffering moc.

In a village of Central Nepal, some of my informants further referred to the slight inauspicious aura that surrounds a woman who bears only one child (male or female) and is thereafter infertile. Such a woman is called a kāga bandhyā. The name "kāga" comes from a type of crow that, it is said, gives birth to only one baby crow in its lifetime, and for Hindus, the kāga crow, like the lowest of castes, is untouchable. To my knowledge, the older, one-child woman does not regularly suffer severe scorn or ostracism in Brahman-Chhetri communities. Nevertheless, in some contexts the mere presence of such a woman is considered unlucky. For instance, it is said that the orthodox should immediately bathe themselves for purification if they spot such a woman upon waking in the morning.

These categories of inauspicious women all underline the strong cultural stress on successful fertility. But there is a measure of difference between these general cultural categories and individual circumstances in real life. Naturally, all women dread being designated as, for example, aputri or kāga bandhyā; but a woman will not actually suffer such a designation until she is advanced in age and her hope for child-bearing is gone (cf. Bennett, 1976: 17). Similarly, although the idea of the one-child woman is clearly inauspicious, if the child of such a woman is a son and if he survives to reproduce, the mother's misfortune becomes a great deal easier to bear.

Thus these categories of unlucky women cannot by themselves tell us how life will in every case be lived; rather, they are important because they tell us about the cultural values that orient social life in Brahman-Chhetri communities. It becomes clear that a major cultural component of "woman" is "as childbearer", and the association of "woman" with a lack of this capacity is something of an uncomfortable contradiction, an aberration. It is also significant that these negative terms for women point to the extremes of fertility failure. Although a woman who has daughters only or whose children all die in infancy, is considered most unfortunate, there are no negative terms for such women, nor a sense of their being dangerous. These women have at least proven themselves to be true to their name. Likewise, the women who miscarry or have stillbirths are less inauspicious than the aputri - the women who never conceive. They too have given initial proof that they are what they seem, though they suffer fault for their failure to produce living children. The unlucky nature of the kāga bandhyā - the woman who has, after all, born a child - is an exception that undoubtedly reflects the villagers fear that only by having many children can one rest assured that at least some will survive. Thus the single child, rather than being stressed as "at least a step in the right direction" becomes a symbol of the unsafe, a dangerous risk for the future. Opler (1964: 208) similarly reports the proverb "one eye is no eye and one son is no son" from village India.²

But most important, perhaps, these Brahman-Chhetri distinctions suggest a rather striking hierarchy of values concerning female fertility, which, for clarity, we may outline as follows:



For women, it is clear that positive valuation culminates in the successful birth of many children. Before the level of "bears two or more children" is reached, all of the oppositions draw out categories of inauspicious women. At every possible step in her fertility history, a woman risks negative valuation until, at last, she has successfully produced two or more children.

The next important feature in this hierarchy of reproductive capacity is whether or not the woman bears a son. It is at this point, too, that the consequences of childbirth become more equal for a woman and her husband. To be sure, a woman may well be blamed for a couple's failure to produce a son and the husband may in this case take another wife. But the woman does not suffer any ritual exclusions and her social acceptance in the larger community is not so perilous. It is also interesting to note that alongside the practice of blaming women for a failure to bear sons, there is another notion that places some responsibility for the sex of a child on men. Male informants in Central Nepal reported a popular belief that the sex of a child is determined by the relative amounts of male and female bij (seed; for men, semen) that combine to produce a child during intercourse. Only if the man is healthy and strong, I was told, can he contribute large quantities of semen and so increase the chances of his child being male.

With these considerations in mind, let us move to a discussion of the importance of sons and the consequences faced by sonless couples.

Parents and Sons

Brahmans and Chhetris of Nepal are organized into exogamous patrilineages, and, like many patrilineal groups, they express a strong preference for male children. It is sons who will continue the line, whereas daughters will be given in marriage to other lineages. Upon marriage, the bride takes the thar (clan)³ name of her husband's family, and her natal group yields all rights to her domestic labour and her progeny.

As residence is virilocal and the joint family the ideal, male children also assume a very practical value: they will remain as corporate members of a household estate, providing labour, possibly income from outside, and, eventually, brides who will further add to the labour supply as well as contribute progeny.

Ideally, sons will remain with their parents until the death of their father, at which time the household estate may be divided, an equal share to each son. As Nepalese Brahmans and Chhetris are largely settled in areas of intensive agriculture, the crucial item of family property is, of course, the land.

A set of brothers may elect to remain together even after their father dies, and this public display of fraternal solidarity is highly approved. But in practice this ideal of a large extended family is rarely achieved. Most brothers in fact separate as soon as possible, either when their father dies or even before. But either way, by the system of property rights and inheritance, a man with sons can virtually guarantee their support and assistance for the duration of his life. Aside from the strong cultural stress on filial duty and respect for senior agnates, a man has a very real hold on his male progeny. Although he cannot deny them their right to inherit, the father will have clear authority over the use and distribution of all family resources for as long as the estate remains undivided.

Even should sons separate from their father before his death, the customary process of separation in this case further reflects the joining of filial duty with economic links. Here, an elderly man may feel that he is no longer able to head a large estate. His sons may be grown, themselves with children, and eager to separate; or they may be quarrelling. The father may then agree to divide his estate before his death. If so, he does not relinquish all his land, but reserves a portion, called jiuni, for himself. This portion is divided among his inheritors after his death, but in life, the jiuni remains as a source of support for an old man and as a wedge of power. At least one son (often the youngest) must work the jiuni land in order to help care for the father in old age, as well as enjoy support from the land himself. Although customarily the father cannot sell or otherwise alienate this land from his sons,

he can rent it out. In this case negligent sons may be deprived of profits from the jiuni land that the father then shares, independently, with his renter.

These links with male progeny are also important to women since the economic power that a man has over his sons is transferred to his widow upon his death. The widow holds the land in trust for the sons of her husband. If the sons are grown and wish to separate, they may do so, but a jiuni must be reserved for their mother.

These rules of inheritance, and their implications for social relationships, become crucial for men and women in their old age. Brahman-Chhetri informants repeatedly stressed to me that having sons was important to guarantee that someone look after them when they are no longer able to do so themselves. As we shall see, there are ways in which a couple without male children may place other kin into the "son" category, but in all of these alternatives, the economic aspects of the relationship are an explicit and integral part.

This important place that sons assume is, not surprisingly, reinforced by religious values and prescriptions. For instance, each patrilineage needs new male members to carry on worship of the lineage gods, the kul-devatā (Bennett, 1976, 7; see also Bista, 1971). But most important for all individuals, it is the religious duty of a son to perform particular death ceremonies for his mother and father. Aside from the son's crucial role in the initial 13-day funeral events (kriyā basne), he must also observe a number of austerities (e.g. shaving his head and wearing white clothing) for one year following the death of a parent. In addition, the son must perform the annual srāddha - a commemorative ceremony in which the deceased is ritually fed - for his parents and for his patrilineal ancestors up to three generations.

It is firmly believed that any failure or negligence in the performance of these ceremonies places the departed soul in utmost peril. The connection between these rituals and the welfare of the dead is not merely an interesting local belief about the afterlife but is an important cultural notion that carries great force. This is perhaps best seen by looking at the symbols through which ideas about death are woven into some major premises of Brahman-Chhetri culture as a whole. Foremost here is the concern with food. The departed are hungry and are directly dependent on their survivors for their srāddha food. As such they continue in death what is everywhere evident in Brahman-Chhetri life: human beings are interdependent and this interdependency is symbolically expressed through the perpetual giving and receiving of food. Within this general use of food as a symbolic affirmation of human interdependency, particular food transfers carry specific meanings in a variety of contexts. Food transfers may be used to mark caste statuses and intercaste obligations, to fulfill the duty of a subordinate to sustain or honour a superior (e.g. the wife's duty to feed her husband, mankind's duty to honour the gods with food) and to signify love (e.g. in the customary giving of

"sweets" to express affection). Brahmans and Chhetris place much emphasis on the desirability of "fatness," for the plump person is one who is cared for (Bennett, 1976: 41), one who occupies an integral (food-receiving) position in the human community. Thinness is associated with detachment and severance from others.

These ideas carry a vivid extension into death: a person whose kriyā and srāddha are not performed (a soul that is unfed) becomes a "ghost" (bhūt, pret, etc.). These ghostly beings are said to wander in painful hunger and inflict harm on the living in order to wrangle food offerings from them. In life and in death, the unfed hover on the fringes of organized society and are a source of danger.

Sons, then, are sustained in life by parents; and in death they will return the favour by ritually feeding, and so sustaining, their parents. If a couple has no son, they will express anxiety over who will make them a proper ancestor instead of a miserable ghost, and who will feed them when they are helpless in the abode of the dead. But these concerns with the afterlife bear out a larger and more "worldly" point: the having of sons is connected to the idea of being acknowledged as a full member of human society, as one who contributes to rather than cuts off the ordered and ongoing linking of human beings together. In terms of the cultural symbolism, those who fail to contribute to the orderly transmission of "duty to feed" are fittingly punished with hunger.

Reproductive efforts are, then, set within a strong hope for male children, and the failure to produce daughters is, understandably, not met with grave concern. Nevertheless, the bearing of daughters is neither a neutral matter nor a perpetual disappointment. It is far better to have daughters than no children at all. This establishes a couple as fertile and, as we shall see, the daughter may become the key to acquiring a surrogate son. Furthermore, a daughter can bring a couple great religious merit (punya) when she becomes their "gift of the virgin" (kanyādān) to a groom.

Alternatives and Options

Married couples without children or sons may adopt strategies to alleviate their misfortune. Once a couple has decided there is reason for concern (and the timing of this may vary according to whether the woman is failing to conceive, having miscarriage, repeated births of daughters, etc.), they may resort to institutions that help the man have children (polygyny) or that will provide the couple with a surrogate son (child adoption and the uxori-local son-in-law). It is important to note that all these institutionalized alternatives for acquiring children primarily improve the condition of the childless male. Although a woman who fails to have children may enjoy the social and ritual benefits of a co-wife's son or a surrogate son, there is nothing which can relieve the stigma of her own fertility failure.

PolygynySecondary Wives by Orthodox Marriage

Orthodox marriages (those performed with Vedic rites by a Brahman priest) can be arranged only between members of the same caste or in a sanctioned hypergamous direction (Chhetris, for example, can marry their women upward to Brahmans). Orthodox marriages, called bihāite, are repeatedly emphasized as a means of insuring caste purity; and high caste Nepalese stress (in word if not always indeed) the strength, importance, and permanence of the marriage tie.

Although nowadays it is officially legal to secure a "court divorce", most village Nepalese do not resort to national law in order to end a state of conjugal living. Instead they simply separate. In this case, the rights and duties of their marriage tie are technically still in force, unless the woman elopes with another man. Such an act would constitute adultery on the part of the wife and would automatically sever her rights to maintenance in her husband's house and affiliation with his lineage. But although a wife's act of elopement will dissolve her marriage, there is one very significant sense in which a notion of finally, or permanency, attaches to marriage: Hindu males are permitted to take any number of legitimate wives, but women may only enter one sanctioned marriage in their lifetime. Women may elope, but they may not remarry, even should their husband die.

Despite the practice of separation and elopement, the cultural ideal is a monogamous bond that endures forever. Thus men may take additional wives, but polygyny is socially approved only if it is arranged on account of a deficiency in the first wife's fertility (Bennett, 1976: 5). This pattern of preferential monogamy with allowance for polygyny in the event of deficient fertility reflects a widespread Hindu practice (Tambiah, 1973: 65).

In Hindu Nepal, orthodox bihāite marriage appears designed to solidify and strengthen the bond between male and female pairs. Marriages are arranged early, monogamy is encouraged, divorce is difficult, and in any case women cannot remarry. It is within this context of orthodox marriage that children become so important, and yet those same rules that guarantee strength to the marriage bond also place limits on the ability of some individuals to acquire children. In bihāite marriage, all goes well enough if the woman successfully bears children. But if she does not, the institution of bihāite serves to compound the problem. The woman cannot, on account of childlessness, legitimately leave her husband to try her luck elsewhere; and the man cannot relinquish his duty to provide for his childless wife. The husband's arrangement of a second, orthodox union is not an easy social or financial matter; and the new woman he brings to his household must adapt to the position of co-wife. In the Brahman-Chhetri use of bihāite marriage we may perceive a conflict between the cultural concern with abundant fertility on the one hand, and the issues of caste purity and strict control of female sexuality on the other.

Secondary Wives by Elopement

Another possibility - and one in which Nepal shows more flexibility than Hindu India - is for the man to arrange a second union by elopement (lyāite). Although childlessness is not the only motive for elopement, lyāite unions can be and often are undertaken as a means of acquiring children after a first union has remained childless. Furthermore lyāite is an option open to both men and women. A woman who is still young and attractive can perhaps cement a lyāite union even though she is so far without offspring.

Lyāite unions, in contrast to the orthodox bihāite marriage, are not sanctioned by Vedic ritual or arranged by kin groups. The man and woman merely take up conjugal living and assume the social positions of husband and wife to one another. Significantly, lyāite unions may violate the boundaries of caste endogamy that bihāite marriage insures. As Brahman and Chhetri men and women are, at least in rural areas, formally married in childhood by their parents, elopements among them are most often secondary unions for both men and women.

Although lyāite unions are, to varying degrees, disapproved among high caste Nepalese, it is well recognized that these unions are both more common and meet with less disapproval than is the case in India (see Furer-Haimendorf, 1960: 30 and Dumont, 1964: 98). Significantly, although the children of intercaste elopement unions are generally excluded from their father's caste, Nepal illustrates that a caste system can nevertheless be maintained in force without strict adherence to caste endogamy (cf. Lionel Caplan, 1973: 41).

There are two important features of the Nepalese caste system which promote this greater toleration for elopement and which distinguish the Nepalese lyāite from mere concubinage. First, the Nepalese system allows for caste and kinship to intersect. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in much of India (see Leach, 1971: 7-8) where the progeny of unsanctioned unions are excluded from affiliation with the father's kin groups. But in Nepal, the son of an elopement union will belong to his father's clan and lineage (even if he doesn't share his caste) and will in this way continue the "name" and the line of the father.⁴

Secondly, heirship is not strongly undermined by the distinction between proper marriage and elopement. In his early work, Furer-Haimendorf mentioned that among the Chhetri, children of a lyāite wife could only claim "1/6 of the share (of their father's estate) to which the son of a fully privileged Chhetri wife is entitled" (1966: 52). But under a more recent Nepalese law, children of lyāite unions may claim an inheritance equal to that of sons of bihāite marriage; and this practice clearly obtains in several areas today (see Lionel Caplan, 1973: 54; Furer-Haimendorf, 1971: 23).

As we shall see, a son by elopement has a much more certain claim to his father's property than do surrogate sons arranged by other means. In addition, as a rightful inheritor, a son of an elopement union is fully qualified to play the social and economic roles of a son: he will be duty bound to care for his parents in their old age, and he may well be a source of pride and fulfillment to them.

Among Brahmans and Chhetris in Nepal, there is variation in the extent of elopement and in the attitudes toward it. In the Nepalese village where I worked, 15% of the marital unions were arranged by elopement. Gabriel Campbell describes the situation in Jumla (northwest Nepal) where Brahmans and Chhetris have expanded the elopement option even further. Here he reports that not only is lyāite practiced, at one time or another, by over half the population (1977: 173) but also that informants explicitly approve widow elopement:

The strength of the values supporting elopement in the face of dharmic (Hindu religious) conflicts was also demonstrated by a conversation I was present for during which the customs of India and the Terai (far South Nepal) were discussed. When the strictness surrounding the rule against widow remarriage was mentioned, all the men laughed and several commented that the men there must be very stupid if they do not make use of a young widow's capacity for still bearing children (1977: 176).

Although my informants in Central Nepal were well aware of the frequency of widow elopement among them, they did not grant it the explicit sanction that we find in Jumla. But the information from Jumla shows us that not all Nepalese high castes maintain the orthodox Hindu stance on widow elopement, and Jumla well illustrates how far Nepalese Brahmans and Chhetris may deviate from the orthodox Indian model.

Along with the very real flexibility of the Nepalese system, the sacrifice of caste purity still remains an important cost of elopement unions in Brahman-Chhetri society. And it is this that my informants stressed as the reason why elopement unions are somewhat "bad". Unless he elopes with an untouchable, a high caste man does not himself suffer any loss in caste status. However, women who elope suffer a drop in caste purity as a rule, and the Brahman male cannot pass on his full caste status to his children of an elopement union. Thus, for instance, if a Brahman male elopes with a Brahman woman, she and her children become members of the distinctive Jaisi caste (a caste formed from unsanctioned unions among Brahmans). And if a Brahman male elopes with a woman of the matwāli castes ("liquor-drinking" castes that are touchable but do not wear the sacred thread), the children assume their mother's caste.

These rules of status designation have a very important consequence: a son of a significantly lower⁵ caste status than his father cannot perform his death ceremonies, the kriyā and srāddha (Bennett, 1977). If, for instance, a Brahman man elopes with a matwāli woman, her sons cannot perform his death rituals. But if the man elopes with a woman of his own caste or a caste which wears the sacred thread, it is likely that the sons will be considered pure enough to perform the rituals. Lynn Bennett (1977, personal communication) reports of a Chhetri informant who performs that annual srāddha for his Brahman father. But here there is a significant restriction: the ceremonial "rice ball" (pinda) with which the son feeds his father's spirit in srāddha, must in this case be made of barley (a ritually neutral food) rather than of rice (the ordinary srāddha food).

However individuals weigh their options for adding wives by elopement or proper marriage, there is some evidence that secondary wives are more commonly acquired through elopement. In one village of Central Nepal, among 224 men surveyed, 14 were supporting two wives, either together or in separate houses (no man supported more than two). But the second wives were properly married to the husband in only 2 cases. It is also significant that in this same village, 92.4% of all elopement unions were intracaste, suggesting that even when marriage rules are violated, there may be a concern with minimizing the difference in caste status between one's self, one's lyāite wife, and one's children by elopement.

Systems for Surrogate Sons

Brothers and Sons: The Root of the Problem

Informants imply that without real sons, there is cause for anxiety over who shall provide for one's spiritual and material continuity. However, by the rules, there are in fact a host of other kin who will assume the related functions of inheriting land, caring for the aged benefactor and later performing death ceremonies. If a man dies without sons, customary law provides an ordered scheme of who stands to inherit his property. And the inheritor is automatically responsible for the death rituals.⁶ My informants gave the following order of inheritance:⁷

wife (in trust for son)

son

son's son

son's son's son

daughter (with permission of the deceased's brothers and with management authority vested in her husband)

brothers

brother's sons

If none of these kin are living, the property goes to the next closest agnate--e.g. FB, FBS, FFBSS, etc. In other words, there is always an heir, except in the extreme case where a man dies literally without kin.

Why, then, do individual men and women consistently express their concern to have a son in these terms? Why is there such emphasis on the necessity to "grow your own" when in all likelihood there will be several kin who will willingly perform those acts for which parents say they need a son? Obviously, real sons are seen as somehow "better" as inheritors and ritual caretakers. Bennett reports that the performance of kriya by someone other than a son "is disturbing to villagers, almost as if the rituals lose some of their efficacy when they are not performed by a son" and that "the further away the chief mourner gets from the category of son, the greater the sense of disorder and anxiety about the spiritual future of the deceased" (1977: 236).

But these sentiments, and the discrepancy between the felt need for a real son on the one hand and the rules that insure heirship on the other, may rest on another aspect of Brahman-Chhetri social organization: the tension between collateral kinsmen. This tension is rooted in the relationship between kinship structure and the distribution of economic resources. This, coupled with sufficient leverage for political maneuvering in the inheritance process, accounts, I believe, for the villagers' anxiety over having their own sons and for the failings of institutions that provide surrogate sons.

The tension between collateral kin is focused in the brother-brother relationship. Conflicts between brothers mark one of the major social cleavages in Brahman-Chhetri society, though these conflicts tend to be hidden behind public gestures of agnatic solidarity. The problem of brothers in the Hindu family has been noted before (see Madan, 1965: 164-181 and Mandelbaum, 1970: 64, on India, and for Nepal see Doherty, 194: 37).

Those agnates who occupy father, son and brother relationships to one another form the core of joint family households. They are, then, a corporate group and they are in competition for the same limited resources. Authority over the use of these resources follows an agnatic hierarchy (based on genealogical distance and, within one generation, on relative age), with ultimate authority vested in the senior functioning male. Since brothers occupy very similar positions within the hierarchy, they are in the most direct competition for limited resources. Further, because brothers may separate their households and partition their father's estate, they carry the potential to become structural equals. Although a younger brother must defer to his elder brother at home, he knows that someday he may become a household head himself, an independent unit of equal status.

Even after brothers have separated their houses and property, ill-feeling and mutual jealousies may persist. In addition, as their independent family units stand in the same positions of marriageability to other wife-giving families, these brothers may be competing for wives for their separate sons. I found in Central Nepal that witchcraft accusations were most frequently aimed at the women of one's family head's brother's household. And often the accusers claimed that "they (the brother's house) wanted our daughter-in-law to be given to them instead."

From this description of brother relationships, it is easy to see how tensions mount when a man has no children: his brothers and after them, their issue, stand to inherit his land. If tensions are particularly ripe, the childless man may also feel uneasy about his collaterals performing his death rituals. He may be mistrustful of their dedication to perform the rituals properly and to insure that their descendants keep up the practice over the generations. But most of all, he may fear that his collateral agnates will be particularly negligent in carrying out the important duty of an heir--looking after their benefactor in his old age. Illustrations of brothers and brother's sons providing for a childless man in a half-hearted way are frequent enough to stand as a warning to all. At least with their own son, a couple will have a chance to imbue in him a sense of filial obligation.

A crucial factor here is, of course, the inheritance rules that allow property to revert to collaterals when a man dies without children. But we should note that a daughter (albeit "with the brothers' permission", see above) has a higher claim than collaterals. It is this factor--female inheritance--that Tambiah stresses as crucial in the development of traditional Hindu law, and which he calls the "rule of lineal before collateral heir" (1973: 79, italics his). Tambiah directly relates this development to the growth of institutionalized "son substitutes" in Hindu India, a development he contrasts with the situation in West Africa:

My thesis is that in India the frequent separation of and partition between siblings displaced the emphasis, when a co-parcener had no male issue, away from survivorship and reversion (i.e. from inheritance by collaterals) and on to inheritance by lineal descendants, even by females directly or indirectly. It is this tendency which culminates in the institutions of the appointed daughter, the uxorilocal son-in-law and adoption, which guard against property developing on collaterals in preference to lineals. Thus we may say that where India in fact emphasizes the lineal before the collateral heir, and stresses partition, adoption, inheritance through the appointed daughter or daughter's son etc., West Africa...emphasizes the rules of male survivorship and reversion to male collaterals, women being rigorously excluded as heirs (1973: 78).

Similarly Goody (1969) has discussed the Eurasian (as opposed to the African) reliance on adoption in connection with the Eurasian emphasis on direct, lineal transmission of property. He further claims that this system of inheritance is related to the necessity in Eurasia to transmit the crucial resource--land--within narrow limits.

What Tambiah and Goody may have overlooked, however, is the residue of "collateral pull" in these systems which renders adoption and similar institutions less than satisfactory in real life. Similarly, in ethnographic accounts from Hindu Asia, the rules for adoption and the uxori-local son-in-law are often simply outlined with an unanalyzed implication that such institutions are perfectly efficacious. Thus, for India, Mandelbaum makes the general statement:

Whatever means are used to assure the inflow of males, the family members do not usually have to ponder difficult choices or manipulate touchy social considerations. They have only to celebrate a birth with proper ritual or, being convinced that a birth is not forthcoming, to secure a suitable alternative with main dispatch and little fuss (1970: 97).

This statement could not be farther from the truth for many Brahmans and Chhetris of Nepal. And for India, there is some evidence of social tension (Berreman, 1972: 163) or outright conflict (Lewis, 1958: 135, Mayer, 1960: 238) surrounding adoption cases. In these cases, as in Nepal, the conflict stems from the same source: the tension between collateral kinsmen.

The inadequacy of institutionalized son substitutes is important to a consideration of childlessness and, indeed, to an understanding of the extremely high stress on bearing one's own children found throughout Hindu Asia. We will move, then, to a discussion of these institutions--adoption and the uxori-local son-in-law--in Brahman-Chhetri society.

Adoption

Nepal shows a close similarity to other areas of Hindu Asia in the form that adoption takes. The preferred adopted heir is a close agnatic kinsman, especially the brother's son (see Goody, 1969: 64). The procedure is informal, and adoption validity rests on the agreement and good-will between the adopter and the child's natural parents. It need not be accompanied by a special ceremony (cf. in India, Madan, 1965: 84; Berreman, 1972: 163). The adopted son assumes full membership in his adopter's kinship groups, becomes an inheritor, and severs ties of kinship and property with his natural parents.⁸ Preferably the child is very young, and his adopter should himself arrange the child's bartaman (initiation) as well as his wedding (Bennett, 1977, personal communication). The adopted son (so long as he is of proper caste status) is fully qualified to perform the death ceremonies for his adoptive parents. Female children are sometimes fostered but are not adopted.

The main problem with adoption concerns, as we have anticipated, the issue of inheritance and kinship relations. We have noted the brother's son, or other close agnate, as the preferential adopted heir. This preference is reflected in the Legal Code (Muluki Ain) of Nepal which in fact gives an elaborate "order of preference" for adoption:

Children of full brothers

Children of half-brothers

Descendants of the same grandfather

Children of daughters

Descendants of the same great-grandfather

Children of sisters

Children of relatives of the same clan

(Nepal Press Digest, 1973: 1)

The Legal Code goes on to make clear that this order of preference must be followed: "Adoption which is made in violation of this order of preference or without fulfilling necessary formalities shall not be regarded as valid" (Nepal Press Digest, 1973: 1). The code is clearly designed to prevent property from straying far outside the patriline. It gives close collateral agnates preference over daughters' sons, sisters' sons and distant agnates. But what this also means is that if close agnates are available, a sonless man cannot easily arrange to transmit his property to anyone else.⁹

One consequence of this system (and one which shows a marked contrast with European society) is that the institution of adoption is not coordinated with the problem of homeless children (cf. Goody, 1969: 58, on Africa). Traditionally in South Asia, one did not look to orphans as a means of solving their childlessness (although nowadays in Nepal and elsewhere it is legally possible to adopt orphans under certain circumstances). This exclusion of orphans has in fact an early basis in ancient Hindu Law. Tambiah (1973: 83) reports that in India a child could only be given in adoption by his living, natural parents, and that an orphan obviously could not be adopted because there was no one with authority to give him away.

In Nepal, and likely in India as well, there is yet another reason why orphans are unlikely candidates for adoption (unless of course, the orphan is a close agnate). The orphan is not merely a parentless child; he is also a property holder. He will have inherited from his deceased parents though someone else will manage the land for him until he matures. Should he die before himself reproducing, this property will go to his collateral agnates. The orphan's kinsmen, then, are unlikely to release

this child for adoption by an outsider because in so doing they would give up their claim to his land (Gabriel Campbell, 1977 personal communication).

On top of all these restrictions on adoption, there is yet another, and one which directly reveals the Brahman-Chhetri emphasis on sons as a crucial possession. By both customary law and the Nepalese Legal Code (Section 12; Nepal Press Digest, 1973: 3) one is not permitted to adopt an only son. Even though it is unlikely that a single-son parent would release the son for adoption, the law steps in to guarantee that parents of a single son cannot lose their child through any ill-advised decisions on their part or through any cunning manipulations of others. By the same token, only-son orphans cannot be given away in adoption by their guardians, and thus the spiritual and material continuity of the deceased parents of an only son is likewise protected by the law.

With these considerations in mind, it is clear that by all the rules, the brother's son (or, if unavailable, another close agnate) is the most satisfactory child to adopt. This choice can assure caste compatibility and meets with the least legal resistance. But it is precisely here, within the agnatic kinship realm, that the potential for conflict over adoption emerges: the brother's son may in fact be the least desirable choice for a sonless man in view of his relationship with his brothers. Successful adoption depends on peaceable and cooperative relations between the parties; and, as has been discussed, this is often not the case with brothers. The sonless man may then attempt to maneuver his property away from his brothers and their issue. But, needless to say, his efforts are not likely to go uncontested. Even if no brother's sons are available, the sonless man's collateral agnates will do what they can to obstruct the passage of property outside their own line.

Watson (1975) has very well demonstrated the conflict between adoption rules and the interests of sonless individuals in Chinese lineages in Hong Kong, and I think a somewhat similar case of conflict can be made for Nepal. Here, a sonless man is often caught between a set of norms that are geared toward the continuity of property in a close collateral fashion and his own desire to separate and transmit property elsewhere.

One case from Central Nepal illustrates this conflict, and gives us as well an insight into the broader social dynamics of childlessness. A Brahman man, Krishna, and his wife, Devi, are now in their sixties and are childless. In her first years of marital relations with Krishna, Devi had a miscarriage and a stillbirth. For the next three years, she failed to become pregnant. Her husband and his senior agnates grew concerned and arranged for another wife for Krishna from Devi's natal kin (Devi's mother's co-wife's daughter--i.e. a half-sister to Devi). This girl was a child at her marriage to Krishna; and three years later, before she had moved to Krishna's home, she died. Her death, Krishna said, marked the saddest period of his life. His second hope for children was gone and he

despaired that he was doomed to childlessness. He also claimed that neither he nor his family was eager to arrange yet another wedding for him. Nor did he consider elopement, an act that he designated as "shameful" among Brahmans.

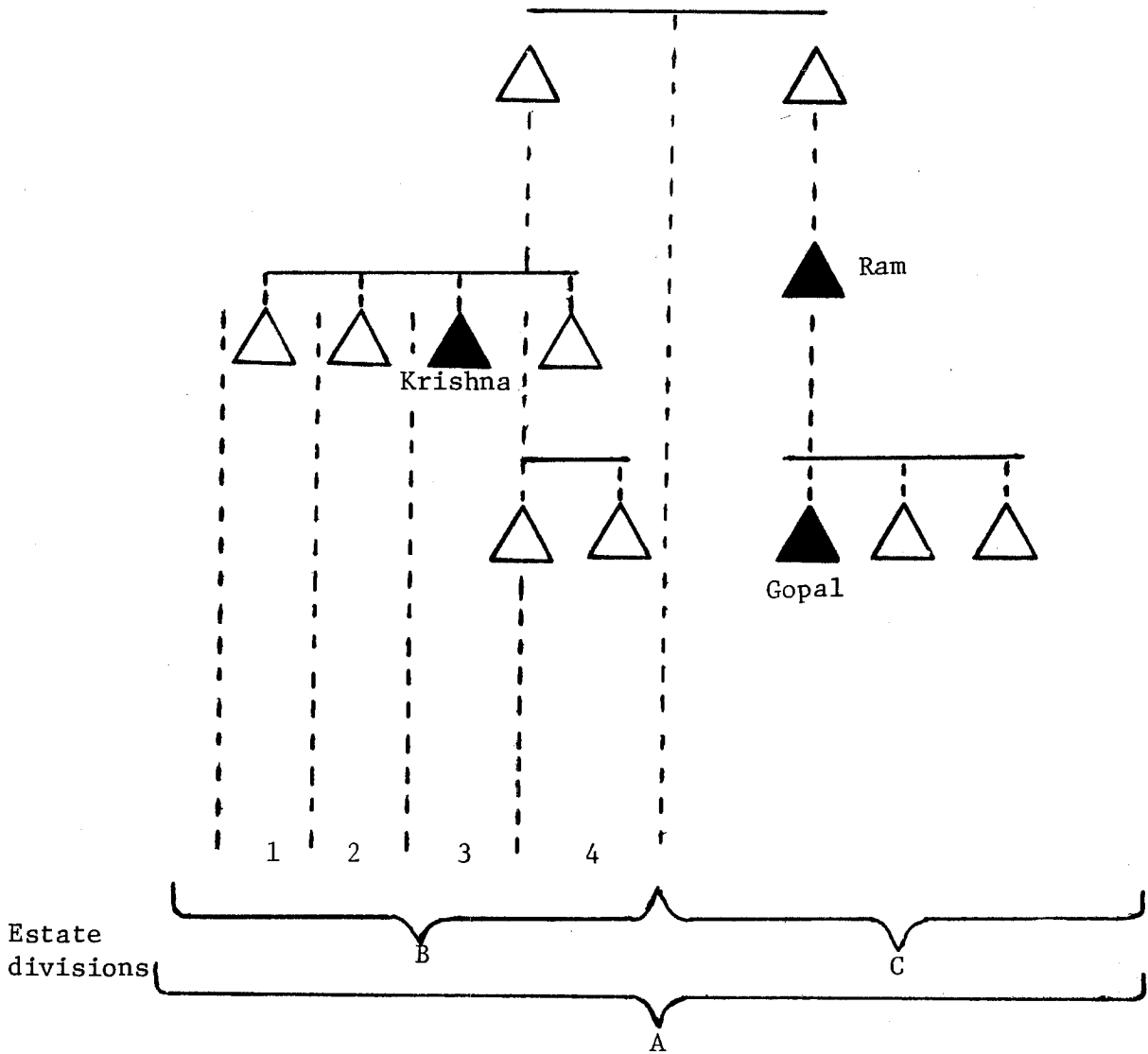
Krishna's problems were compounded by his growing desire to separate from his father's estate which, following the death of his father, he shared with one elder and two younger brothers. Quarrels among the brothers were constant, but Krishna was reluctant to leave since he had little hope for sons of his own on which he could build a security for his future.

At this time, Krishna's father's brother died. As this man's wife had died previously and the husband had not remarried, their only son, Ram, became an orphan. Ram is a classificatory "younger brother" to Krishna (FBS, younger in age to ego). Krishna saw in Ram an opportunity to deal with both his problems of childlessness and his desire for partition. Krishna offered to foster the orphaned Ram. Later he himself arranged the boy's marriage and, following the birth of a daughter and a son (Gopal) to Ram, Krishna separated from his brothers, taking along his wife, Ram and his wife, and their children.

What Krishna sought was to share fatherhood with Ram and toward this end he joined his property with Ram's (the portion inherited from his deceased father) and arranged Ram's marriage. No formal ceremony or legal registration attended Krishna's "adoption" of the future sons of Ram. It is simply understood by all participants that as Krishna reared and married Ram, Krishna will be allowed to share fatherhood with him as long as the two maintain joint property that Ram's sons will inherit.

Yet this arrangement, though valid in the eyes of Krishna, Ram, and many members of the larger community, is invalid in the eyes of Krishna's brothers. Should Krishna die without descendants, they would stand to inherit his land.

To understand the principles on which these factions are operating, it is helpful to draw out their relationships and the divisions made in the earlier, corporate estate:



Let us assume for the moment that Krishna dies childless and that he never attempted to share fatherhood with Ram. In this case his property goes to Devi, his widow; but on her death the property reverts to Krishna's brothers. Now upon Krishna's death, his brothers will argue that by these rules of property transmission, they have the highest claim. They will point out that originally all the property was one estate ('A' on the diagram) and that of this Gopal and his brothers should only inherit portion 'C'. They should not inherit portion 'C' plus '3' because

'3' belongs to segment 'B' which has already been divided from 'C'. The portion 'C' in their view should continue to pass in a lineal fashion, and they will dispute Krishna's right to pass it in a lateral direction away from their lines.

This inheritance problem becomes more dramatic as Krishna and Devi advance in age. As long as Krishna is an able and functioning household head, both he and Devi enjoy profits and maintenance from their land. They claim that later, when they are more aged, the extent to which Gopal and his brothers care for them will depend on the security of Gopal's belief that the inheritance will pass to him.¹⁰

We have traced the conflict between the norms of adoption and the far more complex realities of individuals' lives. In this case, the normal allowances for adoption are somewhat thwarted by the very real tensions between kinsmen, which are themselves set by the relationship between kinship structure and control over economic resources in rural Nepal.

The "House-Son-in-Law"

A man with daughters but no sons is in a rather different predicament from the childless man. First, if his wife is bearing daughters, the fertility of their union is at least established and they may long maintain hope that a son will be next. Hence, the man may bypass polygyny or adoption opportunities and be, indeed, quite advanced in years before he is forced to confront the fact that he may die without leaving a son.

At the same time, daughters provide an alternative which is not open to the childless. A man may marry his daughter to a groom who agrees to live uxorilocally and himself become the surrogate son. The uxorilocal son-in-law is a widespread institution in South Asia. In Nepal, this man is called a ghar juwai (literally, "house son-in-law"). He contributes labour to his father-in-law's house, cares for his wife's parents when they are aged, inherits management of the family estate, and performs the death ceremonies for his parents-in-law. However, the ghar juwai does not become a member of his father-in-law's lineage. He retains identification with his own kin even though he forgoes rights to inheritance from them. What is even more significant, the ghar juwai's son will also be a member of his lineage and not that of the sonless father-in-law. Further, the father-in-law's srāddha is only performed in one descending generation (by the ghar juwai himself), and this duty is not transmitted to the ghar juwai's sons. For the sonless man, then, the ghar juwai is the end of the line.

Although this severe limitation on the ghar juwai alternative obtains in most Brahman-Chhetri areas in Nepal, Campbell (1977) reports an exception from Jumla. Here the ghar juwai's sons assume the thar of their mother and thus continue the name of their sonless grandfather, as well as the srāddha obligations to him. In addition, Campbell reports

that the thar of the ghar juwai becomes ambiguous in Jumla. For some purposes he retains the thar of his original family, while in other contexts he assumes the thar of his wife's father. Campbell describes a very interesting case where one man is a ghar juwai in one village but has another orthodox bihāite wife in another village plus a lyāite (elopement) wife in yet another place. In Jumla, then, the ghar juwai institution appears more flexible than in other Nepalese areas¹¹ and this flexibility favours the sonless man. We have already seen that elopement, too, is common in Jumla and that widow elopement is explicitly condoned as a means of acquiring children, Campbell (1977 personal communication) speculates that this greater flexibility of options may obtain in Jumla because childlessness there is a greater problem. Although we as yet lack statistics to compare Jumla with other Brahman-Chhetri settlements further south, it is quite probable that infant mortality and sterility there exceed that in Central and Southern Nepal. In any case, the Jumla alternative offers the important suggestion that a high incidence of infertility may bring about significant accommodations in Hindu institutions.

For most of Nepal, however, the ghar juwai alternative proves far from satisfactory. For one thing, timing is important. A man must cease his hopes for his own sons before he has married off all his daughters to other men. If a man fears he will not have a son, or if he loses a son after his daughters are married, he may ask one of his sons-in-law to become a ghar juwai after the fact. But such requests may be refused and usually are unless the son-in-law would stand to acquire a great deal more land from his wife's father than from his own father.

A related problem is that in this strongly patrilineal society, becoming a ghar juwai is far from prestigious. There will always be suspicion that the groom is somehow deficient; otherwise, he would have better prospects for marriage. And he will be the outnumbered outsider to his wife's kin in his new home, a glaring reversal of the norm. But for all concerned, the ghar juwai institution is likely to be uncomfortable because it obscures the religiously-sanctioned hierarchy of relationships between affines. As with other Hindu areas of South Asia, the bride's family is ritually lower than the groom's.¹² Throughout their lives, a couple must in several ways show deference and humility before their son-in-law. But in the ghar juwai institution, the father-in-law is in a position of secular authority over the son-in-law. At the same time, the bride escapes the usual subservience to her husband and his family. Thus the gharjuwai becomes something of a religious contradiction, and for this reason many sonless couples elect not to take a ghar juwai even if they are in a position to do so. One sonless couple explained to me that they would have felt sinful (pāplāgchha) had they taken a juwai (son-in-law) into their ghar (patrilineal home). They are now aged and but poorly cared for by the man's brother's son.

Finally, the ghar juwai institution, like adoption, may draw the participants into an eventual land quarrel. Here, the daughter has a clear right to inherit, but, as noted earlier, this is contingent upon the permission of the deceased's brothers or brothers' sons. Lynn Bennett (1977) suggests that public opinion generally favours the daughter and

her husband in such cases and that social pressure may be put on the deceased's brothers to grant their permission readily. Nevertheless, it may happen that the brothers of the deceased will withhold their permission, not as a means of denying the daughter her inheritance, but as a way of securing a portion of the estate for themselves by "making a little trouble."

Childlessness and Social Options: Some Comparisons With Sub-Saharan Africa

We have outlined the cultural roles of children in Brahman-Chhetri society and the economic and religious consequences of childlessness. It is evident that not only are there pressures on married couples to have several children, but there are very few viable means of compensating for the failure of a man and wife to have their own children. Polygyny, either by a second, orthodox marriage or unsanctioned elopement, in many ways proves to be the most satisfactory possibility open to a man. Yet both of these options are neither simple nor without cost (and they only open possibilities; they do not offer a "guarantee"). Adoption and the uxorilocal son-in-law provide living, surrogate sons, but these alternatives are even more problematic in view of the nature of inheritance rules and kinship relations. In addition, none of the alternatives discussed can alleviate the stigma of barrenness for an individual woman.

The particular nature of the Nepalese situation can be illuminated by comparing Nepal with some traditional African societies, where the cultural stress on fertility and the importance of having children is equally strong. First we can consider the position of women. As with Nepal, childless women of many African societies are blamed for marital infertility, socially ostracized, and suspected of witchcraft. However, in clear contrast to Nepal and other Hindu areas, the African woman is less limited in the means by which she can alleviate her childless condition. In general, the childless African woman may more easily divorce her husband to test her fertility with another man; and in the matrilineal societies of Africa, she is positively encouraged to do so (e.g. among the Ahanti, Fortes, 1965: 280). There are numerous reports from Africa that a childless man will discreetly arrange for a friend to sleep with his wife in hopes that she will become pregnant and bear children in her husband's name (e.g. among the Zulu of South Africa, Gluckman, 1965: 184; the Fort Jameson Ngoni in Rhodesia, Barnes, 1951: 4; and the Bangwa of the Cameroon, Brain, 1972: 113). Some African societies have instituted the "linked co-wife"--a woman who joins a man in order to bear children to the name of his first, childless wife (e.g. the Ibo of Onitsha, Henderson, 1969: 147; and the Zulu, Gluckman, 1965: 185). A few African societies offer the distinctive "woman-woman" marriage as a option for childless women. Here, a woman obtains a "wife", hires a male to impregnate this woman, and becomes herself a legitimate social father to the children of this union (e.g. the Nuer of the Sudan, Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 108; the Bangwa, Brain, 1972: 60). And finally, widespread practice of the levirate in Africa keeps widows in automatic circulation and affords them a legitimate means of continuing to bear children.

For the childless man, too, Africa abounds with options. Some societies have even made use of "ghost marriages"---whereby a kinsman of a deceased, childless man marries a woman in order to produce children to the dead man's name (e.g. among the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 110-111; the Bangwa, Brain, 1972: 113). Ghost marriages offer a further guarantee that all men will eventually have social progeny. In such societies children are desired for the same general reasons that they are in South Asia--for heirship, to "continue the line" and to provide a person to worship one's spirit after death. In African societies practicing "ghost marriages," even the childless man dies with the reassuring knowledge that children will be born to provide all of these functions for him.

Clearly, not every African society is so arranged that childlessness is easily overcome, and alternatives to having one's own children may not be as prestigious as successful reproduction. But in general, Africa has developed a great variety of cultural means that expand the options for those who are unable to reproduce. And in some African societies the options are so numerous that long-term childlessness becomes practically impossible. Brain writes of the Bangwa of the Cameroon that -

A Bangwa needs a son and heir to succeed him and to worship his skull. A childless man runs into difficulties here since there is no system of adoption (1972: 112).

The necessity for sons is stressed, and it is clear that childlessness quickly becomes a serious problem for a Bangwa man. Yet immediately after this passage, Brain writes -

A slave, however, may succeed a childless man and make sacrifices to his skulls and produce a successor with his widows. ... Another means at the disposal of the childless man is to exhort his widows to remain married to him after his death, raising seed to him by taking lovers. This is a common situation in Bangwa. An impotent man may achieve the same result by allowing his wives to take lovers secretly. A man who has daughters but not sons will arrange for one of them to deliver children out of wedlock so that he may be pater to their children, one of whom will succeed him and worship his patriline skulls (1972: 112-113).

The multiplication of options here is evident. Among this same group, women may easily divorce their husbands if they suspect the latter's sterility (Brain, 1972: 162) and woman-woman marriage is also practiced (Brain, 1972: 60). It is clear that as a means of acquiring children, adoption among the Bangwa and most other African societies would be unnecessary, or redundant (cf. Goody, 1969: 75).

In this comparison, it is clearly seen that with regard to childlessness, the difference between Africa and South Asia is not so much one of cultural values (and their accompanying sanctions) but of the number and variety of means whereby individuals can exploit an alternative to bearing their own children. Childlessness is no less a tragedy in Africa, but it becomes less of a trap. This contrast with Africa also underlines the importance of social institutions, as well as cultural belief systems, to the problems of infertility in traditional societies. Some African societies have uniquely combined strong cultural pressures on fertility with institutionalized options for those individuals who fail to reproduce.

Childlessness and Social Change in Nepal

The view of childlessness among Brahmans and Chhetris presented here derives from a consideration of the interplay between traditional cultural values and institutions. These values and institutions constitute ongoing features of contemporary life in rural areas. At the same time, Nepal is facing important social and economic changes; and we may be able to specify (or at least anticipate) how these processes are affecting the phenomenon of childlessness.

One crucial factor influencing many aspects of life in rural Nepal, particularly in the hill areas, is increased pressure on the land. The problem is deforestation and soil erosion amid increasing population pressure, and the result is a diminishing viability of hill agriculture. Although many villagers are unaware of the particular ecological relationships that are undermining their economy, they sharply perceive that they are, in general, getting poorer. They are well aware that with each generation of sons, landholdings become smaller. Older men nostalgically speak of their "father's time" when the farming household controlled greater resources and enjoyed more plentiful supplies of food. As yet there is no evidence that this condition is encouraging people to limit family size, or that it is promoting, say, social approval for smaller families. On the contrary, the most notable response to these conditions has been an exodus of Nepalese from the hills to the recently-opened Terai--the southernmost section of Nepal.

As pressure on the land increases, we might predict that quarrels over its transmission will become more frequent, and that the social tensions which surround cases of childlessness are likely to become more acute. Mayer suggests from Central India that the very distant agnates of a man who dies intestate do not commonly make claims to inheritance, "But if pressure on land ... becomes very intense this might start--for men would seize any opportunity to claim from distant intestate kin" (1960: 246). A similar result might be predicted for Nepal, and we may find a wider network of agnates disputing the claims of a daughter or an adopted son, or quarrelling among themselves over the land of a sonless man. Under these economic conditions, the intensification of inheritance quarrels will be further likely if both customary and official laws remain flexible and manipulatable.

Another significant factor reshaping Nepal is public education (begun in the 1950's) and the steady increase in the numbers of young males attending school. Outside of urban areas, very few females attend school; and many of my village informants in Central Nepal were of the decided opinion that educating women was both useless and possibly dangerous.¹³ But for males, education is highly valued in rural Nepal; and literacy is seen as the key to new (non-farming) opportunities.

Boys who attend school, particularly if they advance to high school levels, quickly learn that their literacy and student status affords them a great deal of prestige. They are led to feel that their education distinguishes them as superior to the common peasant farmer. For as long as they can maintain their student status, they (in sharp contrast to most other household members) are virtually exempt from farm labour. In school they become increasingly exposed to a world outside their home and village. They become intrigued with what they hear of life in urban India, the West or, what is even more accessible to them, with Kathmandu.

But these same males have been married in childhood; and, in rural areas at least, the age of marriage for Brahmans and Chhetris does not appear to be rising. As a result, by the time he reaches high school, the young man of the village is caught between two conflicting roles. On the one hand he is reaching out to explore the new world of the modern and the educated. He dreams of going on to college in Kathmandu or of taking military service or a job there. Ultimately, he hopes that he will not have to take up farming as his life's work. But by another set of values, it is time for him to start a family and assume the roles of husband, father, and, ultimately, the head of a household. Young male students are explicitly reluctant to take on these responsibilities and so attempt to delay the onset of sexual relations with their wives.¹⁴ Several student informants have told me that they hope to avoid having children "until later" because the responsibilities of fatherhood will tie them down to the village and to farming. They want children after they have secured themselves a means of leaving the village way of life. In this process there is a clear negative effect on one other person: the young man's wife. She, being quite left out of education and new opportunities, is anxious to improve her status by the old means: child-bearing. Thus, as young men delay the onset of sexual relations with their wives, the period of low status for the childless wife/daughter-in-law is correspondingly lengthened for women. This period of low status childlessness for women could, of course, be shortened again by a rise in the age of marriage; and Lynn Bennett (1976; 2) reports that the age of marriage for woman is definitely rising in Brahman-Chhetri settlements closer to Kathmandu.

Needless to say, a young man's attempts to retreat from the roles of husband and father are the focus of innumerable family dramas. His parents will be anxious to have a grandson, and on this score will side with their daughter-in-law. At the same time, they desperately hope that their son will secure a non-farming source of income to contribute to

their household, and to this end they will encourage him to become a man of the world, even if this means he will spend a great deal of time outside the village and in urban areas. In general, the outcome of these conflicts rests on how quickly a young man is able to demonstrate that his education will pay off in economic terms. If, after high school, he is unable to secure a job, enter college, or otherwise show promise, he becomes something of an unproductive appendage to his household. Gradually, he will be given farm chores (drastically underlining a contrast with his former student days) and increasingly his parents, wife, and other kin will pressure him to start sleeping with his spouse. He will know, too, that in this context of village life and farming pursuits, his own hopes of being treated as a social adult, of securing independence and economic viability also depend on his having children. As outside, non-farming jobs become more difficult to secure in Nepal, this type of outcome to the young man's dilemma is likely to become more common.

Finally, along with other forms of development, family planning services are being made available to Brahmans and Chhetris in both rural and urban areas. Although the availability of contraception may have an impact on overall fertility, family planning services and education cannot by themselves reduce the fear of childlessness nor alter the effects of the cultural concern with childlessness on behaviour. Anthropologists and sociologists have repeatedly pointed out that a cultural belief system is a powerful factor that promotes a desire to have many children (and a morbid fear of producing few or none). Their argument is that "family planning education" is insufficient to motivate such people to limit their fertility. Opler, for instance, has written of population control programs in village India that -

...too often the analyses and the plans which see ignorance and poverty as the prime obstacles assume that there is a vacuum of need and receptivity which can be filled once these first barriers are overcome. Actually, there is no facet of Indian life where there are more profound and solid convictions than in the area of procreation and family life. It is only by taking into account this realm of practice and belief that those who are concerned with population control can appreciate the currents of thought and action which can aid or hinder them and which they will have to utilize, counter, bypass, or ignore (1964: 201).

In this examination of childlessness in Nepal, I have suggested that the concern with fertility is related to features of social structure in addition to the belief system. We have seen how a fear of childlessness can undoubtedly serve as a powerful motivation in reproductive behaviour. But this fear rests not only on the cultural beliefs and values surrounding children, but also on the fact that current social institutions among Brahmans and Chhetris severely limit the options of those who suffer reproductive failure.

Footnotes

1. My fieldwork in Nepal (1973-1975) was carried out under a fellowship granted by the Foreign Area Fellowship Program of the Social Science Research Council. However, the conclusions, opinions, and other statements made here are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Fellowship Program.
2. Notions that a single child is insufficient or marks a precarious state are common in many societies. In America, for instance, we find the saying, "An only child is a lonely child." Molnos (1968: 113-116) discusses the negative responses to the one-child woman in East Africa and notes the association of "one-child woman" with "almost barren." Among the Nuer of the Sudan, Evans-Pritchard reports that the transfer of bridewealth cattle (used to establish the marriage tie) only becomes fully nonreversible after a wife has borne two children for her husband. After this point is reached, a woman cannot officially divorce her husband or remarry. Even if a woman abandons her husband and lives with a lover, all her future children will belong to the husband if she has borne this husband two or more children (see Evans-Pritchard, 1965: 91-92 and 115).
3. Although the thar may be loosely translated as "clan", it does not represent a grouping of kin all of whom have rights and obligations to one another. Nor are all people of one thar necessarily related agnatically. Nevertheless, thar identification among Brahmans and Chhetris is transmitted agnatically and the thars are considered as ideally exogamous.
4. In these cases, the important ritual distinctions surrounding differences in caste status are still observed. Thus, for example, a high caste man cannot publically consume the boiled rice prepared by his lower caste offspring (or his lower caste wife).
5. The boundaries of "significantly lower" may not always be clear and there is likely variation on this point within Nepal, just as there is variation on caste orthodoxy and consensus of caste ranking between regions or even among individuals.
6. There may be cases where the inheritor, although responsible for the death rituals, lacks sufficient ritual purity to actually perform the ceremonies himself. This happens if a woman inherits or if the deceased's male heir is the product of an intercaste elopement union. In these cases, the inheritor may hire a Brahman male to perform the ceremonies or ask any male agnate of the deceased to perform them (Bennett, 1977: 235-237).
7. This order basically agrees with what Bennett (1977: 171) acquired from her informants. There are two minor differences: 1) in Bennett's order the agnatic, lineal transmission is only taken to the second

descending generation (SS) and 2) Bennett points out (and I suspect this applies to Central Nepal as well as in the area of her work) that another person, the son's wife, would inherit over the daughter.

8. Gabriel Campbell (1977) reports from Jumla that an adopted son may have an ambiguous patrilineal identity. If the adopted son belongs to a thar other than that of his adoptive parents (i.e. if he is not a close agnate already) and if his original thar is known, the son will be identified as a member of both his original thar and the thar of his adoptive parents. Thus he must still observe mourning for his real parents if they are known.
9. This code (effective since 1963) actually provides some legal flexibilities in adoption. Although Section 1 (quoted here) confirms a pressure to adopt close agnates, Section 4 specifies that orphans below the age of 5 whose parents are unknown may be adopted "notwithstanding the existence of a relative prescribed by law for purposes of adoption" (Nepal Press Digest, 1973: 2); and a Section 4A (added in 1970) grants that any child under 16 may be adopted if the child's father is dead and if the child's mother, guardian, or orphanage gives consent. This is allowed "Even if an agnate relative within seven generations who can be adopted according to the law is available" (Nepal Press Digest, 1973: 2). Nevertheless, customary law strongly favours agnates, and unless a sonless man (a) knows the official law and (b) knows how to use the law, it is unlikely that he can validly adopt an outsider in preference to close agnates. And in any case, his attempts to adopt an outsider will bring about quarrels with his agnates who would otherwise inherit from him.
10. At the time of my fieldwork, Krishna and his family expected a grueling land quarrel to take place upon the death of Krishna. More recently this family informed me that Krishna successfully managed to "sell" this property to Ram so that it will be inherited by Gopal and his brothers. Unfortunately, I have not had a chance to trace this recent development or to check whether Krishna's brothers have agreed not to contest this alienation of the property.
11. Campbell also notes the high incidence of ghar juwai (or matrilocal) marriages in the Jumla area: in one village these marriages accounted for 16% of all marriages (Campbell, 1977: 176). This contrasts with the village of my work in Central Nepal where only a couple of the 209 households had a ghar juwai.
12. In contrast to much of India (see Dumont, 1957, 1966) the Nepalese do not marry upward into superior ranked segments of their castes. Instead, it is the act of marriage itself that establishes the superiority of the groom's family (cf. Furer-Haimendorf, 1966: 32 and Bennett, 1977: 263). Thus Nepalese intracaste hypergamy obtains after the fact.

13. Gradually my informants confided that they feared to educate girls because after girls become literate "they will be able to write love notes." Their idea is that girls in school might be attracted to the males and literacy would only give them a new tool by which to carry on amorous liaisons. Most villagers of the older generation are illiterate, and, as one of them commented, "We could not even read their (the girls') love notes or know what they were up to." This sentiment well reflects the villagers' traditional conception of literacy as providing one with a great and mysterious power. As such, literacy would in many senses threaten the social control of females.
14. Some young men complained that while they were attempting to avoid the onset of marital sex, their wives were forever attempting to seduce them. This kind of public stance that young men assume on the issue of sex is not new but rather continues the traditional notions held by Brahman-Chhetri men that women "need" sex more than men and are generally prone to overindulge in this somewhat sinful act. For further discussion of this idea and for a look at what women have to say about it, see Bennett (1976, 1977).

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