

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, ECONOMY AND KINSHIP AMONG THE JIRELS OF EASTERN NEPAL

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Introduction

The ethnographic literature on the Jirels is extremely sparse. Brief general descriptions may be found in Bista (1980), Fournier (1974, 1978), Valeix et al., (1972), and Williams-Blangero and Blangero (1990). This paper is intended to fill some of the gaps in the ethnographic literature by providing an outline of Jirel ethnogenesis, social organization, and kinship system.

The Jirels inhabit the Jiri-Sikri Valleys, located in the Janakpur Zone of the Dolakha District, in eastern Nepal. Jiri is situated 190 kilometers east of Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. With an average elevation of some 2,000 meters, the Jiri area is comprised of several small independent valleys. Two major rivers, the Tama Koshi and Likhu Khola form its borders to the east and west, respectively (Valeix et al. 1972).

The total Jirel population is between 3,500 to 4,000 individuals (Blangero 1987; Williams-Blangero et al., 1998), the majority of whom live in villages nestled on the slopes of the Jiri and Sikri Valleys. These villages include Chetrapa, Jungu, Upper Sikri, Lower Sikri, Kharayoban, Dhunge, Bhandar, Upper Kot, Lower Kot, Ratomate, Gompaling, Yarsa, Raate, Sizer, Renje, Gunsa, Tapka, and Tasite. Several other ethnic groups live in the Jiri area as well, these include the Sherpa, Tamang, Sunwar, along with the Brahman and Chhetri people of the Hindu castes.

Economic organization

The Jirels have a subsistence economy based upon the cultivation of millet, maize, wheat, barley, potatoes, and some rice, which is grown in the lower part of the valley (cf. Metz 1989). Over the past few years or so,

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Jirels have also started to produce leafy vegetables for the markets. Turmeric, ginger, and other spices are cultivated as well for local consumption. The Jirels also maintain goats, cattle, pigs, and buffaloes, and virtually all households keep numerous chickens. A few families raise rabbits, and some manage to keep beehives for honey production.

In the past, many Jirel households kept sheep as well. Sheep wool was used in making coats and rugs. But when the Government of Nepal took direct control of the forests and pastures in 1957, the Jirels were deprived of access to the higher altitudinal ecological zones. These areas had traditionally been used as communal grazing grounds for sheep (cf. Ghimire 1992). The result was that today there are no sheep tended in the Jiri Valley.

Given the limited amounts of arable land available, few families are able to produce enough food to last them the entire year. While some households can provide for their subsistence needs from their farms for about six months out of the year, others manage to produce enough for nine or ten months, depending on the amount of land they own and the number of adult laborers in the family. The majority of Jirel households have to sell chickens and goats in order to supplement the family's income. Many households also produce *raksi*, a distilled alcoholic drink made from fermented millet or corn. This is sold at wholesale prices to non-Jirel shopkeepers who maintain booths at the local bazaars. Individual families produce anywhere from the equivalent of 60 to 600 bottles of *raksi* per year. Some families also supplement their income with wage labor, working in the local clinic and hospital, schools, forestry office, and other governmental posts.

The family is the basic productive unit, to which all members contribute. Jirels exert considerable effort in order to provide food for the family, as well in the performance of other essential tasks, such as gathering firewood and taking care of the livestock.

Ethnogenesis

The origin of the Jirels is lost in antiquity and Jirel oral tradition contains several conflicting accounts concerning their ethnogenesis. One account suggests that the Jirels are descendants of an ancestor who was the offspring of a mating between a Sunwar man and a Sherpa girl, some 8 or 10 generations ago. Quantitative genetic studies appear to confirm this ancestry (Blangero 1987). Additionally, the Jirel's "hybridity" is also thought to be evident in Jirel cultural and linguistic features (Williams-Blangero et al. 1998).

The Jirels speak their own distinct language, called Jirel, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language group. Strahm and Maibaum (1971), linguists working in the area have noted certain similarities between Jirel and the Sherpa language, and the Jirels themselves are aware of the similarities. Indeed, one informant noted that numerous Jirel words appear in the Sherpa Tibetan religious book, the *Lama Doma*. In addition to these common linguistic features, the Jirels also share a common religion with the Sherpa, namely Buddhism.

The Jirels' Sunwar heritage is posited on the basis of Hindu ritualism found in Jirel religious practices. Jirel exogamous patrilineal clans are also similar to that of the Sunwars (Williams-Blangero et al. 1989:374). It must be noted, however, that the Sunwars adopted Hinduism and Brahman priests during the Rana period (1846-1950), to Hinduize their Buddhist ritual practices in a status-seeking endeavor (Bista 1980:70). The Jirel's Hindu ritualism, therefore, does not appear to have a Sunwar origin, but rather is explicable in terms of the influence of the Brahman and Chhetri castes, who came to the Jiri region during the military expansion of the Gurkha King Prithvi Narayana Shah in the late 1700s (Fournier 1974).

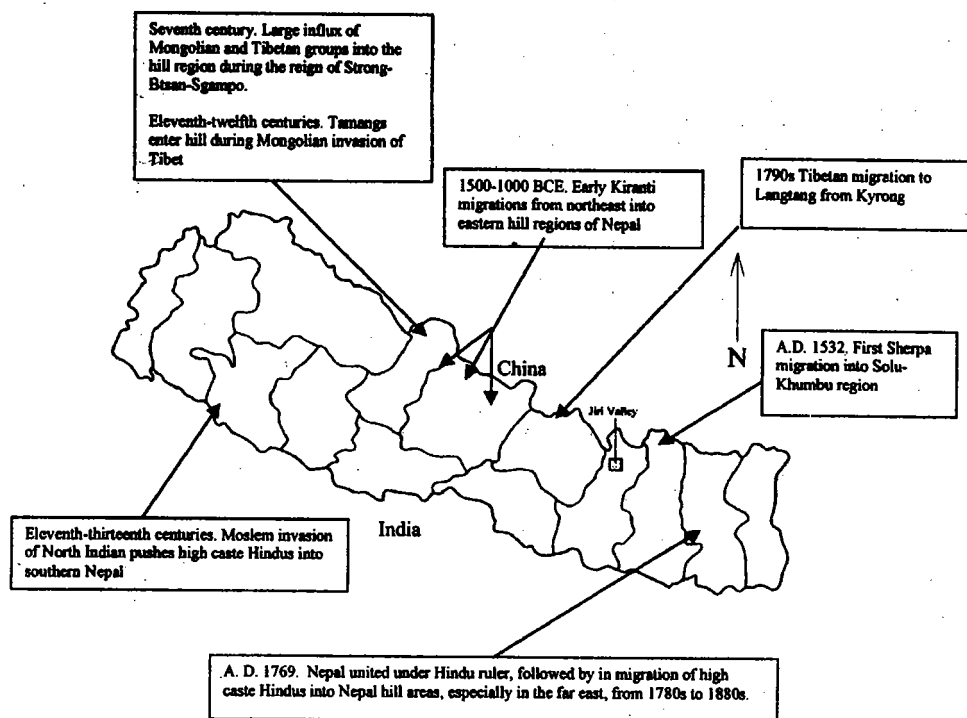
Another account suggests that the Jirels came from Simraungarh (Simraungadh), in the eastern Terai (Bista 1980:69). Muslim invaders destroyed Simraungadh in the 14th century and its Hindu ruling families and other survivors became refugees (on Simraungadh, see Miller 1997:113-114). After a long period of hardships in the Terai, they escaped to Dolakha. This account is noteworthy, because several Jirel clans worship gods said to dwell in Simraungarh. During religious rites (*puja*), the Jirel priest, or shaman, called a *Phombo*, beckons the clan god and the spirits of clan ancestors to come from their original homeland, Simraungarh, and manifest themselves in the *puja* place (see Sidky et al., "Jirel Religion: A Preliminary Look at the Rites and Rituals of the Jirels of Eastern Nepal" and "*Phombos*: A Look at Traditional Healers Among the Jirels of Eastern Nepal", in this volume).

A third account indicates that the Jirels were a branch of the Tibeto-Burman speaking Kiranti tribes, which migrated from the northeast into the north eastern hill regions of Nepal (see Map), starting around 1000 BC (cf. Poffenberger 1980:31).

The local account has the Kiranti ancestors migrating to Jiri from Simraungarh, in the Terai. The Kiranti have been a part of the military and political history of Nepal for millennia and are famous for their bravery and prowess in battle. They are mentioned in the Hindu epics, *Ramyaana* and *Mahabharata* and were the ancient rulers of the Kathmandu Valley (Bista

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1980:33). As such, they offer an impressive pedigree to anyone claiming to be their descendants.



Map: Migration Patterns in the Hills of Nepal (after Poffenberger, 1980)

When asked how the various Jirel "clans" are related, the clan elders of the Thurbido, Devlinga, Chungpate, and Thungba affirmed that "before we had one ancestor. He is unknown, but he was Kiranti; then we divided into clans and could intermarry." Other clansmen provide a more detailed account. It appears that a long time ago a Kiranti royal family in Muklichhetra, having been defeated in war, fled to the Terai. There the family established itself for some 15 generations. These Kiranti were the descendants of five princes, Lal Singh, Ram Singh, Man Singh, Dhan Singh, and Sur Singh. Then, when the Muslims attacked, these Kiranti fled to Kathmandu, then the kingdom of Badgaun (Bahkhtapur), and after obtaining permission from the king settled in the eastern hills. The descendants of Sur Singh, the youngest of the five Kiranti princes, settled in the Jiri area to become the ancestors of the Jirels. Names such as *Kiranti-Khasa* (buildings) and *Kiranti Thursa* (graveyard) are mentioned as places in the retelling of the Jirel's Kiranti ancestry (Jirel 1990:12). Descendants of the other brothers are said to have become the ancestor of the other ethnic groups in the region, such as the Sunwars, Rais, Limbus, etc.

When clan elders were asked how Jirel clans can intermarry, given that according to this origin myth they all had the same common ancestor, the reply was that the clans are related in a "*kutumba*" relationship. The Jirels described this relationship saying that from now on you are "other" and so our people can marry your people.

There is a difference of opinion among the Jirels themselves regarding their ethnogenesis. Those who are politically conscious prefer the Kiranti pedigree. This may reflect modern day political realities, in which ethnic identity can be a significant factor. Moreover, there is also the fact that in traditional Nepali society hybridity has been equated with being impure and low status. There is considerable social stigma attached to such an identity. Thus, it is no surprise that the Jirels have constructed an origin myth that enables them to claim descent from high-caste Hindu rulers of the Terai as well as the distinguished Kiranti. The historical accuracy of this ethnogenesis is dubious because of the absence of tangible documentary evidence. It is, however, important as a cultural construct of the Jirels and how they view themselves and wish others to view them.

Social Organization

The Jirels are divided into 23 patrilineal, patrilocal descent groups, referred to in the literature as "clans" and "sub-clans." However, careful genealogical analysis of these groups suggests that they are better viewed as major and minor lineages. In the past, each of these descent groups held communal property rights under a system of land tenure called *kipat*. Individual households held hereditary rights to farmland, forest and pasture by virtue of their membership in a descent group. However, the criterion on the basis of which land and pasture were allocated to individual households is unclear (cf. Regmi 1976:88-92). Although each household owned and farmed their land individually, the *kipat* lands were in principal under communal ownership and could not be sold to outsiders and the descent group itself had reversionary rights (Regmi 1976:88-92).

There are 12 major Jirel "clans" and 11 "subclans." These clans and sub-clans are made up of patrilineally-extended, patrilocal families, comprised of parents, unmarried sons and daughters, and married sons, their wives and children. Jirel families, however, undergo change over time, as a result of deaths, daughters moving out upon marriage, brides being brought in by the sons, and the birth of grandchildren. Thus, at any given time one can expect to find nuclear families as well as extended families. Usually, when the family's first son marries, the new couple will reside with the groom's father's family. When a second son in the family is married, the eldest son and his wife and children will move out and establish their own household.

Only the youngest son will continue to live with his parents, forming what is called a "stem family" (cf. Goldstein 1977: 58; 1975), this domestic cycle of the Jirel family is similar to that of the Timling Tamang; described by Fricke (1994). Upon the death of the father, each of the sons inherits a share of the land and livestock. The youngest son, however, receives his share as well as the house and the contents of the house itself. Daughters usually do not receive land, but may get jewelry and other items at the discretion of their fathers at the time of their marriage.

Jirel clans include Thungba, Chawe-Thungba (sub-clan), Deppa, Thabo, Chawe-Thabo (sub-clan), Devlinga, Thurbido, Jupule, Serba, Chawe-Serba (sub-clan), Palpali, Myokpa, Chyaba, Garasamba, Chungpate, Garchiga (sub-clan), Jupule (sub-clan), Kyambole (sub-clan), Neware (sub-clan), Rarenje (sub-clan), Tumpule (sub-clan), Tungule (sub-clan), and Urbido (sub-clan).

Jirel sub-clans apparently were formed in several ways. If a person broke group exogamy rules, e.g., if he married his paternal cousin, the consequences would be expulsion from the clan, which would lead to the creation of a new kin group. The sub-clan Chawe-Serba was formed in this way. If a man broke the rule of group endogamy he would also be expelled. The Garchiga sub-clan was said to have formed as a result of such an infraction, but Garchiga elders could not name the ancestral group from which they broke off. Breaking the rule prohibiting celebrations during times of mourning, or not attending clan god worship, could lead to expulsion as well. This is said to be how the Chawe-Thungba sub-clan originated. After a sub-clan is formed, it is considered to be a separate descent group and intermarriage with members of the main group is permitted. Thus, members of the Thungba may intermarry individuals from the Chawe-Thungba without breaking the clan rule of group exogamy.

Referring to the Jirels in terms of "clans" and "sub-clans" is somewhat problematic and requires careful analysis. Lineages emerge out of patrilineality and patrilocal residence and tend to be corporate in nature, holding property in common. Members of lineages typically can trace their descent from an apical ancestor through known genealogical connections.

Lineages and patrilocal residence are conducive to a fissioning or segmentation process, leading to the subdivision of the lineages. For example, this would involve B, a son of A, who upon marriage, establishes his own residence apart, either for reasons of limited resources, or due to some ritual infractions. B's sons will retain their ties with their original parental lineage, but in accordance with the rules of patrilineality, they will refer to their new aggregations by a new appellation, such as the name of their immediate ancestor, i.e., B. Over time these groups may in turn break off

into sub-lineages of their own, let's say C and D, which would be organized on the basis of identical principles (cf. Murphy 1989:119-120). Members of these sub-lineages may trace back their founding ancestor B for four or five generations, but tracing ancestry to A, may involve a depth of 10 generations or more. If A had several other sons, X, Y, and Z, who also established their own lineages in the process described, the greater the depth of genealogical reckoning the larger and more inclusive the group would become.

Lineages are components of clans. Clansmen believe in their common descent, but are unable to demonstrate the linkages to a common ancestor. Once they reach the apical ancestor of their respective lineages, the genealogy terminates. This is precisely the case when one looks at the pedigrees for any of the Jirel "clans." For example, all the Thungba trace their ancestry through known links, six generations deep, to an apical ancestor named Bajraman, and similarly, the Chawe Thungba, which is referred to as a sub-clan of the Thungba, can reckon their descent through known links, five generations deep, to a common ancestor named Lolaman. This is true of all the other "clans" and "sub-clans" with the exception of two, the Jupule and the Palpali. The Jupule comprise two lineages, each about four generations deep. Members of both groups claim common ancestry and refer to themselves as Jupule, but they are unable to specify the apical common ancestor. Jupule elders noted that these two sub-clans are called middle-Jupule and lower-Jupule. The Palpali is comprised of five lineages, each with a depth of five generations. Members of these five groups refer to themselves as Palpali on the basis of a common ancestor, but are unable to name him. Thus, only the last two descent groups fit the definition of clans.

Members of any particular Jirel clan or sub-clan can trace their ancestry through known links for only about five or six generations. None of the 23 "clan" and "sub-clan" elders interviewed were able to provide actual genealogical links to the common or apical Kiranti ancestor for all the Jirels. In other words, the links between the various Jirel descent groups to the founding ancestor, as in the case of the elusive Sur Singh, and the Jirel's Kiranti pedigree, is based on a belief in common descent, but that is entirely putative.

Thus, it would be more appropriate to characterize Jirel social organization in terms of exogamous major and minor lineages that emerged through a process of fissioning or segmentation as described above. These descent groups held land in common, and traditionally followed lineage exogamy and group endogamy. Having pointed out these problems, we

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shall nevertheless use the terms clans and sub-clans in this paper, as these approximate Jirel emic categories.

Some Preliminary Observations on Jirel Kinship Terminology

All Jirel kin terms carry meanings that distinguish sex and relative age from ego's own generation up. In ascending generations, (G+1) ego's parents generation and (G+2), ego's grandparent's generation, other features of meaning such as lineality and collaterality (father's or mother's side) are significant in distinguishing the kin terms (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

The interpretation of Jirel kin terms can be expressed in classical terms, e.g., Hawaiian, Sudanese, etc. From ego's own generation down, the Jirel system applies the same terms to brothers and sisters and cousins (brother and sister terms), and ego's children and cousin's children (son and daughter terms). This would be labeled as the Hawaiian kinship terminology system. The ascending generations, however, could be classified as either Sudanese or Iroquoian (G+1) and Hawaiian (G+2). If compounds like *goppo chete* or *adjing tiki* are treated as primary lexemes, the system could be called Sudanese. If they are treated as adjective noun pairs, they would be called Iroquoian and Hawaiian.

The Jirel kin term system does make the distinctions that the Sudanese classification would require for the first ascending generation, but syntactic grounds alone are insufficient to claim otherwise. On the other hand labeling ego's grandparents' as Sudanese appears to be inaccurate. For instance, *goppo tiki*, refers equally to father's father's elder brother, father's mother's elder brother, mother's father's elder brother, and mother's mother's elder brother. Since the significant element here is relative age, the system resembles the Hawaiian terminology.

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Jirel kin terms represent one example on the theme of seniority that shows up in other aspects of Jirel life. Inheritance is based on seniority, as is the relative prestige of various ethnic groups. The Jirels consider themselves lower on the prestige scale than the Rais, Limbus, and Sunwars, because the Jirels were descendents of Sur Singh, the youngest of the five Kiranti princes, from whom all these ethnic groups are said to have descended.

Table-1
Kin Terms and Their Extensions

KIN TERM	EXTENSION
G+2	
Gammu	MM, FM
gammu chete	MMEZ, FMEZ
gammu tikti	MMYZ, FMYZ
goppo	MF, FF
goppo chete	MFEB, FFEB
goppo tikti	MFYB, FFYB
G+1	
ama	M
ama tikti	MYZ
ama chete	MEZ
adjing tikti	MYB
adjing chete	MEB
aba	F
aba tikti	FYB
aba chete	FEB
ani tikti	FYZ
ani chete	FEZ
EGO'S OWN GENERATION	YB; FEBYS, FEZYS, MEBYS, MYZYS, ETC. EB; FEBES, FEZES, MEBES, MYZES, ETC. EZ; FEBED, FEZED, MEBED, MYZED, ETC. YZ; FEBYD, FEZYD, MEBYD, MYZYD, ETC.
noa	
adju	
adji	
noma	
G-1	D; EBD, YZD, ETC. S; YBS, EZS, ETC.
pumo	
phujung	

Distribution of Jirel Clans

Members of Jirel clans and sub-clans are distributed among various villages. For example, the Thungba (45-50 households) are to be found mainly in the village of Kot, where they make up 46% of the total population, but some households are located in Dhunge, Bhandar, and Ratomate (percentages based on Williams-Blangero 1990:64). The Chawe-Thungba (14 households), a sub-lineage of the Thungba, are found in Bhandar, Takpa, Nabok, and Dhunge. The Deppa (35 households) reside mainly in Kharayoban, where they constitute 86% of the total population, but there are some households located in Lower Sikri and Ratomate. The Thabo (26 households) are concentrated mainly in Bhandar (46% of the village population), but some also reside in Gompaling, Yarsa, Raate, and Kot. The Devlinga (44 households) are concentrated in Kot, comprising over 26% of the total population there, but some households are to be found in Bhandar, Sisel, Ratomate, Junge, and Chetrapa. The Thurbido (15 households) are found mostly in Upper Sikri (26%), with some households located in Kot and Chetrapa.

Of the Jupule (45 households), the majority are found in Lower Sikri (63% of the total village population), but some households are to be found in Upper Sikri, Kharayoban, Dhunge, Bhandar, Kot, Junge. The Serba (47 households) are located in Upper Sikri (33% of village population), Lower Sikri (22% of the population), Ratomate (39% of the population), Dhunge (38% of the village's population), some households are also located in Gunsas, and Jungu. The Chawe-Serba (15 households), a sub-lineage of the former, are found in Lower Sikri, Renge, Ghunsa, and Sisel.

The Palpali (20 households) are found in Jungu (21% of village's population), Chetrapa (17% of the total village population), and some households are located in Dhunge, Lower Sikri, Upper Sikri, Bodle, and Takpa. The Myokpa (17 households), are located mostly in Chetrapa (30% of village population), Dhunge (21%), and Ratomate. The Chyba, (15 households) are situated in Bhandar, Tasite, Jungu, and Chepte.

The Garasamba (7 households) are found mainly in Bhaiselumbu. The Chungpate (8 households) are located in Ratomate (16% of the village population), Upper Sikri, and Lower Sikri. The Garasamba and Chungpate, although considered major descent groups, have very low membership. The reason for this, according to the elders of these clans, is migration of numerous households either to Kathmandu or India.

These data suggest that Jirel villages are composed of people affiliated with several descents groups, with particular clans predominating numerically. Inter-group relationships between these clans occur on a day-to-day basis taking place at the village and household levels.

Clan Relations and Inter-Clan Ritual Variations

Beyond the patrilineal descent lines utilized, the primary attributes that differentiate one Jirel clan from another are variation in ritual activities, the deities they worship, and the food taboos which they observe. For example, some clans, such as the Thungba, Jupule, and Garasamba worship the deity *Chen*, a male god, while the Chyaba and Chungpate worship the goddess *Chyomu*. The Chungpate do not offer blood sacrifice to their goddess, while the Thungba slaughter goats and chickens during their clan god rituals (see Sidky et al., "Jirel Religion: A Preliminary Look at the Rites and Rituals of the Jirels of Eastern Nepal," in this volume). These clan rituals took place at specific times of the year and were sponsored by rich families, who were obligated to conduct the rites for three consecutive years. The sponsors were expected to provide abundant quantities of food and drink, which was distributed among clan members and other guests. This process functioned as a mechanism for the reciprocal distribution of surplus foodstuffs and acted as a wealth leveling mechanism.

With respect to food taboos, all Jirels abstain from eating beef, following the Hindu practice. They may eat buffalo meat, but not yak's meat. The rationale given was that yaks and cows can mate and are therefore placed in the same animal category. Cows and buffaloes, however, cannot mate, therefore buffaloes are viewed as belonging in a different category. Some clans do not eat buffalo meat, e.g., the Deppa, while others do. The Deppa explained this by saying that their clan god hates buffaloes and so they will not eat its flesh. However, they are permitted to drink buffalo milk. The Deppa clan god is also said to hate sheep, and it is for this reason that members of this clan never kept any sheep, whereas other clans did so in the past. In previous times, none of the clans ate pork, but now they do, but to avoid the wrath of their respective gods, pork must be cooked outside the house. There are additional variations among the clans regarding other foodstuffs. Some clans eat stinging nettle, for instance the Thurbido and the Chungpate, while the Thabo have a taboo against it.

Jirel clans today do not hold communal lands, the ownership of which devolved upon individual households following the termination of the *kipat* system. However, clans do perform corporate functions by organizing labor for agricultural production. During crucial times in the agricultural calendar, such as millet planting or harvest, clan members pool their labor resources and work communally on their fields. According to their means, the host families provide food and *chang*, local beer made from fermented millet, for everyone.

Clan Structure and Marriage

Clan structure plays an important role in regulating marriages, and traditionally, the Jirels practiced clan exogamy. On the other hand, group endogamy was proscribed, and there was considerable stigma attached to marriage with non-Jirels. The offspring resulting from such a union would be pejoratively referred to as *themsing*, or "half-breed." Today, this rule is no longer observed and an analysis of the spouse selection patterns for the Thungba clan reveals marriages with women belonging to the Rai, Tamang, Magar, Sherpa, Sunwar, and Limbu ethnic groups. Additionally, it might be noted that Thungba men have also married Chhetri, Brahman, and Shrestha (Newar) caste spouses. A number of Thungba women as well have married into these ethnic groups.

In general, patrilineality and patrilocality were the rule among the Jirels. Most marriages were monogamous, although there were a few cases of polygyny reported in the valley, especially among the more affluent Jirels. Traditionally, the families of prospective spouses arranged their marriages. But marriages based on romantic love are fairly common now. In the past, group endogamy resulted in a pattern of between-village residence changes, since numerical dominance of a particular clan in a woman's natal village influenced the potential mate pool size. This led, in turn, to the selection of mates from other villages. Geographical proximity influences mate selection. For example, clans living in the village of Chetrapa and the neighboring Jungu, which are located some distance from other villages, tend to intermarry more frequently (Williams-Blangero and Blangero, 1990). Among the residents of the other villages, most of which are clustered together, a pattern of preferential mate exchange has been detected among certain clans (see Williams-Blangero 1990).

Sociologically, marriage establishes alliances based on mutual economic support and reciprocal obligations between descent groups, symbolically affirmed with the exchange of gifts after the wedding and at various other times, such as the birth of the new couple's first child, or in other life-cycle rituals. Additionally, the bride's family was obligated to attend rituals hosted by the groom's clan.

Clan Leadership

Clan leadership was traditionally based on age. The role of clan elders, as both the oldest and wisest of all, was to resolve conflicts both within and between clans. Clan members would also seek elders' advice in settling disputes in matters relating to clan protocol. Moreover, the clan leader had authority to intervene in disputes and thus functioned in a role that ensured

harmony and solidarity among clan members and lessened disputes between clans. Issues of mutual interest between two or more clans were dealt with on an informal basis, through a meeting of clan elders.

As a society based on descent groups, the Jirels had a rather diffuse, decentralized political system, similar to other inhabitants of the eastern hills, such as the Rais, Limbus, and Sherpas. This does not mean there was an egalitarian organization, since some clans had higher prestige than others. Members of the major clans consider themselves to be equals, sub-clans, however, occupy a somewhat inferior position with respect to the clan from which they broke away. Thus, the Thungba and Serba have a higher status with respect to their sub-clans, Chawe-Thungba and Chawe-Serba. Historically, the most prestigious and politically powerful Jirel clan was the Serba. In 1795, these clansmen obtained, through a treaty with the Gurkha King, rights to all of the land in the Jiri Valley, or the Jiri *kipat*.

Under the *kipat* system each part of a patrilineal descent group was connected with a specific geographical territory and given individual hereditary usufruct rights to land, forest and pasture by virtue of affiliation with a descent group. *Kipat* land was owned and farmed by individuals, but in principal was under communal clan ownership and could not be sold or alienated to anyone outside the community. The clan had reversionary rights over the land in the case of abandonment by families who had previously used it (Regmi 1976:88-92). It is likely that all of the various Jirel clans had their own *kipat* lands in the Jiri Valley, prior to the outside intervention of the central government in Kathmandu.

The Serba were in fact granted the Jiri *kipat* by the government in exchange for the performance of certain duties. This was part of the overall strategy used by the Gurkhas to bring the eastern hills people under their control (cf. Rose and Scholz 1980:19; Regmi 1976:90). Under agreement, Nayadanre, the head of the Serba clan, would be the *mulmi*, the King's representative in the region, with the power to collect taxes from the Jirels in exchange for rights to farmlands and pastures which they occupied. Through the control of land, the Serbas also gained control of fodder and fuel-collecting rights, as these activities were conducted on *kipat* land. A stipulated fee was collected mainly in the form of *ghiu* (clarified butter), and probably other foodstuffs, from each household, regardless of the size of the fields and amount of pasture it used.

In practice, however, very little of the tax collected actually went to the district headquarters because of Jiri's remoteness. Thus, under the *kipat* system, the Serba became fairly wealthy with respect to the other clans, but they lost their prominent position as a result of the encroachment of literate, rich high-cast Hindus, mostly Chhetris, who settled in the region.

As outsiders, Chhetris could not acquire land directly, but they could and did arrange mortgages of *kipat*. This "possessory mortgage" (cf. Regmi 1976:95) was tantamount to ownership rights, which the Chhetris obtained in return for their money-lending services, in a process very similar to that which occurred elsewhere in the eastern hills of Nepal (cf. Rose and Scholz 1980:20).

As a result, much of the Jiri-*kipat* fell into Hindu hands, leading to the establishment of a large Chhetri community in the Jiri Valley. The *mulmi*'s power was thus undermined, and the Chhetri became a dominant economic and political force in Jiri. The Serba clan continued to collect taxes on the lands it still controlled. The *kipat* system, already undermined by Hindus who controlled much of the land and cash in the eastern hills, ended in 1968, with new national legislation bringing communal lands under the direct authority of the central government (cf. Poffenberger 1980: 52; Regmi 1976:102-103).

Since the 1950s a number of other factors have impinged upon traditional Jirel society as they were pulled into Nepal's national economy and political administrative structure. The effects on the Jirel economy resulting from direct government control of pastures and forests have already been noted above. The construction of the Lamosangu-Jiri Road and other developmental efforts, such as the establishment of schools, a hospital, and opportunities for wage labor, have monetarized the traditional Jirel economy, which had been based on reciprocity.

One may attribute the breakdown of group endogamy, in part, to these changes. The criterion of upward social mobility has become increasingly important in spouse selection, as young Jirel men and women seek educated spouses from economically well-off ethnic groups. Being a *themsing* no longer has the stigma once attached to it, provided that the mix-married couple is economically successful. Clan reciprocity has weakened considerably, as families now compete for economic advancement and status in a cash economy. This is an economy that is largely controlled by non-Jirels. The lure of cash compelled many Jirels to sell their land to petty businessmen who moved into the valley following the completion of the Lamosangu-Jiri Road, which then became the main route to the Mount Everest Base Camp. These opportunistic merchants had been owners of businesses on the old trail to the Everest Base Camp, a distance of several hours walk away from Jiri. This led to a further reduction of land resources under Jirel control (see Hamill et al., "Some Sociocultural Consequences of Transportation and Development in the Jiri Valley, Nepal, in this volume; for the negative effects of such developmental activities elsewhere in Nepal,

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see Karan and Ishii, 1994; B. Shrestha, 1992; and N. Shrestha, 1997, 1992, 1985).

Finally, one indicator of the breakdown of clan solidarity is the total cessation of the public clan god worship rituals, which previously functioned to reaffirm group solidarity and operated as a wealth-leveling mechanism and a means of reciprocally distributing wealth. The numerous clan elders interviewed noted that no such ceremonies have been held for at least 20-to-30 years, and the reason given is that such ceremonies are too expensive.

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