



Eastern Nepalese Marriage Customs and Kinship Organization

Victor Barnouw

Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 11, No. 1. (Spring, 1955), pp. 15-30.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0038-4801%28195521%2911%3A1%3C15%3AENMCAK%3E2.0.CO%3B2-A>

Southwestern Journal of Anthropology is currently published by University of New Mexico.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/unm.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is an independent not-for-profit organization dedicated to and preserving a digital archive of scholarly journals. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

EASTERN NEPALESE MARRIAGE CUSTOMS AND KINSHIP ORGANIZATION

VICTOR BARNOUW

IN EASTERN NEPAL the Jimdārs (Rais) have a marriage system which differs rather strikingly from those of their neighbors. The Tibetans, the Lepchas of Sikkim, the western Nepalese, and the Indians of Bengal generally have arranged marriages. Among the Jimdārs, however, individual courtship seems to be the rule. There is an element of secrecy about this courtship. The alliance is announced as a *fait accompli* by the boy and girl, who do not reveal their new status to the girl's father until three days after the boy has taken her to his home. The Nepali term for this form of marriage is *chōri bīhā*, or theft marriage. It is also known by a more Hinduized term, *gāndhārvā bīhā*, and is believed to be very ancient, although still the most prevalent form of marriage among the Jimdārs.

Jimdār marriage customs and some aspects of their kinship organization will be described in the following pages. The information in this paper was collected from eastern Nepalese informants during a period of two months (January-March 1953) in the town of Darjeeling, West Bengal, India, located near the eastern border of Nepal. Darjeeling is heavily populated by Nepalese, most of whom are Jimdārs.¹ These Darjeeling Nepalese are a rather acculturated group, and so it cannot be assumed that the customs described by them are necessarily the same as those of Rais still living in Nepal. However, in many cases, their customs have probably remained the same. *Chōri bīhā*, at least, cannot have been borrowed from either the Tibetans or the Bengali Hindus who have influenced their culture in other respects.

No ethnologist has yet done field work among the Rais and Limbus in Nepal itself, although a few writers have briefly described some of their customs.² The present paper, being based upon oral testimony rather than close personal observa-

1 In 1931, out of a total population of 19,903, there were 10,449 Jimdārs in Darjeeling (Census of India, 1931: Bengal and Sikkim, vol. 5, part 2, Calcutta, 1933, p. 231). The older Rai families are constantly added to by new immigrants who continue to cross the border, principally to work in the tea-gardens of Darjeeling.

2 Brian Houghton Hodgson, *Miscellaneous Essays Relating to Indian Subjects* (Trübner and Co: London, 1880); Eden Vansittart, *Notes on Nepal* (Office of the Supt of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1896); W. Brook Northey and C. J. Morris, *The Gurkhas, Their Manners, Customs, and Country* (John Lane, The Bodley Head: London, 1928); Leonhard Adams, *The Social Organization and Customary Law of the Nepalese Tribes* (*American Anthropologist*, vol. 38, pp. 533-547, 1936).

tion, cannot close the gaps in our knowledge. More than half of my data, including the kinship terminology, came from a single informant, although I tried, whenever possible, to check his information with the three or four young men who served as my other informants. Their pooled information, however, seems to present a consistent picture which is in agreement with previously published accounts. Despite my awareness of its deficiencies, therefore, I would like to offer this paper for the light that it can throw on an interesting area little known to present-day ethnology. Let me express my gratitude here to the Jimdārs who served as my informants, especially to Mr. Kolsing Rai, my principal informant and interpreter. I am also indebted to H.R.H. Prince Peter of Greece, who read the first draft of this manuscript, and who offered some helpful criticisms.

CASTE

Although the Jimdār marriage system differs from the traditional Hindu form, the Hindu caste system has diffused into this area and plays a part in the choice of a marriage partner. A Jimdār youth will usually not court a girl of higher or lower caste status. However, there is some flexibility here, providing loopholes for those who wish to marry a person of another caste.

The Jimdārs, or Rais, were once a tribe or collection of tribes which, along with the Yākhā and Limbū tribes, formed the eastern Nepalese group known as Kirāt or Kiranti, occupying the region between the Dudh Kosi River and the eastern border of Nepal.³ But the Jimdārs now refer to themselves as a caste.

Ideally, under the present system, a Jimdār should marry a Jimdār, but may also marry a Yākhā or Limbū. These three groups are regarded as being on a plane of equality. They may not marry into higher castes, such as Brahman and Chhetri (Ksātriyā), nor may they marry into the castes below them—Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Kami, Damāi, etc. Cooked black *dāl* may be accepted from members of the higher castes, but married men and women may not accept such food from inferior castes. This rule does not apply to unmarried men and women. No one, however, may accept water from an untouchable. A certain amount of intermarriage has taken place between Limbūs and Lepchas: these two groups are often

3 Northey and Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 213. According to Brian Hodgson, the Kiranti were once extremely powerful, their hegemony possibly extending as far as the Ganges delta before they suffered a series of defeats, of which the last and most decisive was at the hands of the Gurkhas (Hodgson, *op. cit.*, pp. 397-398). When the Gurkhas conquered the Kiranti tribes, the Gurkha kings established some of the Jimdārs as local rulers and gave them the title of "Rai," which means "Chief." Limbū headmen were given the similar title of "Subha." In the process of time the use of these names spread to include almost the whole population. Thus, Jimdārs are now called Rai, Limbūs Subha, while Yākhās are called Dewān. All the Jimdārs I met in Darjeeling had Rai for their last name (see Northey and Morris, p. 215).

found in close association.⁴ Marriage with Lepchas is rarer among the Jimdārs and Yākhās, who do not seem to approve of such marriages.

Mechanisms are available for those who wish to marry someone of another caste. There used to be a formal ceremony whereby a non-Jimdār girl could be "adopted" as a Jimdār. On this occasion an elderly Jimdār asked the girl if she wished to become a member of his caste. If she said "Yes," he pierced the tip of her tongue with a needle made of pure gold. Some blood had to come out if the ceremony were to be considered effective. There are some Nepalese women in Darjeeling nowadays whose tongues have been pierced in this manner. However, a new adoption ceremony has been introduced, which is much simpler. One of my Jimdār informants recently married a (higher caste) Chettī girl. This took place at Toong Soong, the particular village-community at Darjeeling which formed the focus of my studies. A member of his caste "adopted" the girl, making her a member of his caste. At a gathering of the more important men of the Jimdār community at Toong Soong, the girl distributed *dāl*, curry, and rice. Since her dishes were accepted, she was automatically accepted as a Jimdār. These adoption ceremonies, it should be added, would not be extended to untouchables.

COURTSHIP

From a western point of view, it would seem that the Jimdārs do not have the kind of training that would prepare them for free courtship. Boys and girls are segregated at an early age and play in different groups from around five or six. They are not encouraged to talk together and are expected to be shy. Nevertheless, in spite of this preparation, they apparently arrange their own marriages successfully. A girl is apt to reject a suitor above the age of twenty-five as being too old. Twenty, incidentally, is considered a bad age for marriage: it is better to marry at nineteen or twenty-one. The age of marriage is late in comparison to plains India. Sexual attractiveness is probably the main consideration in the selection of a marriage partner. Family is another important consideration.

Boys and girls are not supposed to talk together in public. In order to arrange meetings, therefore, they send messages through younger children, who act as go-betweens. In this way assignments are arranged. The boy and girl agree to meet in some secret place, where they will not be observed. It is customary for the boy to offer the girl *pān* (betel nut) or cigarettes on these occasions, for smoking is common among the women of this region. The boy's offer of *pān* is said to sometimes provide an opportunity for the working of love magic. This is known as applying *mohonī*. The boy is supposed to put something into the *pān*, which he buys

⁴ See Sir Joseph Hooker, *Himalayan Journals* (John Murray: London, 1854), vol. I, p. 138.

in the market, and then to recite love spells, which may be aided by theft of some of the girl's clothing. This practice, which is considered very evil, is believed to make the girl fall deeply in love with the boy. Boys are frequently reported to apply *mohonī*, but girls are not said to resort to it, in spite of the fact that it is women, rather than men, who are generally suspected of working black magic and casting the evil eye.

In the course of their secret meetings, which may become daily after a while, the boy may offer the girl small presents in addition to the *pān* and cigarettes. They will try to keep their liaison a secret as long as possible, but after a while people will begin to see the two together and guess what is going on. This public recognition may speed up the betrothal, or it may put an end to the courtship. If the girl's family does not approve of the boy, they warn him to stay away and to leave the girl alone. Fights sometimes break out between a suitor and the girl's brothers or cousins. But if the boy is acceptable to the family, there will be no interference. There may sometimes even be an element of parental arrangement in this courtship system, although it is subject to the free choice of the young couple. The girl's parents may hint to the boy's parents that their daughter would be available as a mate for their son. The boy's parents, in turn, may pass on the suggestion to their son, who may then arrange a private meeting with the girl. On the other hand, the courtship may be a purely private matter between the boy and the girl. Moreover, they may succeed so well in maintaining secrecy that the girl's parents may be genuinely surprised when they receive the announcement that their daughter has started living with the boy.

The clandestine meetings between the boy and girl may end if either begins to feel dissatisfied with the other. Consequently a boy or girl may have meetings of this kind with three or four possible mates before finally reaching an agreement. The courtship period lasts a few weeks or several months. During this time (at least, so I was informed) there is no love play. The young couple just talk together. It is said that the girl would be very ashamed to be touched.⁵ Kissing does not seem to be a Nepalese pattern. The Nepalese in Darjeeling are familiar with the kiss, since Western movies are shown in the city and have become popular. They are nevertheless quite shocked by the amatory behavior of Hollywood heroes and heroines. Nepalese men and women never touch each other in public, I was told. One of my Jimdār informants (a married man) told me that men do not kiss their wives even when they are alone together; nor do mothers kiss their children.

⁵ Risley, however, writes: "Khambus [Rais] marry their daughters as adults, and tolerate sexual license before marriage on the understanding, rarely set at defiance, that a man shall honorably marry a girl who is pregnant by him" (H. H. Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, Bengal Secretariat Press: Calcutta, 1891, vol. 1, p. 459). See also the section on adultery below.

MARRIAGE CEREMONIES

If the boy and girl are agreed after a series of clandestine meetings, the boy takes the girl to his home. He must inform his father about his new step, but will usually be afraid to do so directly. He is more apt to speak to one of the female members of his household, who will then convey the message to the father. One of my informants told me that he first approached his older sister; the latter spoke to his mother, and the mother then broke the news to the father. Meanwhile, the bride-to-be must wait in the street—perhaps for an hour or more—until arrangements are made for her reception.

At last, however, a special ceremony is performed to welcome her. A chicken is killed and some of its blood placed on three plantain leaves, which are set down just inside the door. The girl must step over the blood-smeared leaves when she crosses the threshold. This is known as a *sagūn*, a term given to an auspicious *rite de passage*. There are three *sagūn* for a girl in the course of her life—Naming Ceremony, First Feeding, and marriage. For a boy there is also the Haircut Ceremony, when his hair is cut in his third year by his maternal uncle. Some months are considered more auspicious than others for the marriage *sagūn*. Marriage should not take place during the month of *Pūs* (about January). *Mangsir* (about October) is regarded as the best month for marriages, for it is a time of plenty, a harvest season.

The girl lives for three days at the boy's home. During this time the two are regarded as man and wife, even though they have not yet notified the members of the girl's family, nor have they gone through the ceremonies which will validate their new status. The girl's parents may know where their daughter is, or they may realize that she has gone to live with a boy, although they may not be sure which one. In some regions it is customary for the girl to leave some money under her pillow on the day she goes to the boy's home. When her parents find this money the next morning, they realize what has happened. The girl's father then appoints two members of his caste to represent his family, in preparation for the negotiations which take place on the third day.

On this day two emissaries are sent to the girl's home by the boy's family. They are known as *kaliyā* and must be members of the boy's caste and familiar with the regulations concerning marriage. These two men meet with the *kaliyā* who have been selected to represent the girl's family. The girl's father is informed through these representatives where his daughter is staying. If he objects to the alliance, he may go to the boy's home to bring the girl back. But this is not so likely to happen.

Arrangements for the marriage festivities are made by the four *kaliyā*. A

jotishī, or Brahman astrologer, may be consulted to determine the best day for the wedding. Actually, there are two ceremonies. The first is at the boy's home, to which, curiously enough, no members of the girl's family are invited. Some time later a ceremony is held at the home of the girl's family, to which members of the boy's family come. At the first ceremony the girl is accepted by the boy's mother and father. The groom, who is completely dressed in white, applies a streak of red powder to the central parting in the girl's hair. Her own dress may be of any color, but is usually bright. She wears a green glass bead necklace of nine strands which has to be given on this occasion by the groom. He may also present her with some gold bangles and earrings, which may be put on the girl by his female relatives.

The climax of the occasion is the moment, known as *lagān*, when the boys' parents give their official recognition to the marriage by placing a rice *tikā* (forehead mark) on the brow of both boy and girl as they pronounce their blessings: "May you have a long life"; "Have plenty of children!"; "All happiness to you!" Similar sentiments are expressed by the guests, who also file by, applying a *tikā* to both bride and groom, and presenting a silver rupee to each. A brass *lotā* (bowl) with flowers should always be placed nearby when this is done, together with a lighted candle.⁶

Among some other Nepalese groups, such as the Chettri, Newār, Gurung, and Magar, a Brahman *purohit* (priest) is called in to officiate at weddings. But among the Jimdārs there is no Brahman priest present on such occasions, and there is no reading from the Vedas. Nor are the bride and groom decked out with flowers and garlands. But, as in the weddings of plains India, there is an orchestra playing from morning till night. This is an orchestra of Damāis, the caste of tailors who provide music on such occasions. They always play outside the house, since they are untouchables. As in the plains, a feast follows the wedding. It consists of pork, curry, rice, and *dāl Kodo*, a millet brew, must be served, presented in a bamboo bucket and sucked up through bamboo tubes.

The ceremony at the home of the girl's parents may take place two weeks later, or perhaps a month or two afterwards, depending upon everyone's convenience and perhaps also upon an auspicious time indicated by an astrologer. Two sums of money are given on this occasion by the family of the boy to the family of the girl. The first of these is known as *chōri dandā* and is regarded as a fine which must be paid to the girl's father in atonement for the theft (*chōri*) of the girl. In spite

⁶ "My informant tells me that it is not correct to say that a lighted candle should be placed with a brass *lotā* near the bride and bridegroom. It should correctly be a *diyō*, he tells me, that is a small crucible made of copper" (Prince Peter of Greece, personal communication).

of the fact that it is their ancient and still prevailing form of marriage, the Jim-dārs seem to regard *chōrī bhā* as being somehow less proper and correct than the much more rarely employed form of arranged marriage. This, at least, is implicit in the payment of the "theft fine," which may be about five rupees.

The attitude of guilt is underlined in a curious description of a Limbū marriage which appears in both Eden Vansittart's *Notes on Nepal* and in Sarat Chandra Das' *Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet*:

He [the bridegroom] brings, as a rule, three things—one bottle of arrack, the entire carcase of a pig, and a silver coin—as presents to the bride's parents. Just as he goes to make the presents to the bride's parents, they are bound to fly into a passion and threaten to beat him, whereupon he entreats them not to beat him, and tries to pacify them by producing another rupee from his pocket. The bride's parents then interrogate him in an angry tone, saying, "Why did you steal away our daughter?" and so on. When their anger subsides, he pays the price of the bride, which, according to his means and resources, varies from Rs. 10 to Rs. 120 or more.⁷

In addition to the *chōrī dandā*, the girl's family provides a sum known as *rit bhāth*, or rules, regulations. Each member of the girl's family is offered meat, wine, and a silver rupee by the groom. Those younger than himself will be given eight annas and no meat or wine. The money thus expended is known as *rit bhāth*.

All meat presented on this occasion must be pork. It is cooked at the girl's home by the women of her family, but the raw pork is brought to the house by members of the bridegroom's party, who carry it in a special basket made of bamboo, known as *perengo*. When the party arrives at the girl's home, rice is thrown at the young couple, a lot of noise is made, and blank cartridges may be fired. At this gathering, the girl's parents put *ṭikā* on the foreheads of the bride and groom and give their blessings. The new son-in-law touches the ground before the feet of his wife's parents and the other elder members of her family. As on the previous occasion, there is no Brahman priest present. A Damāi orchestra may or may not play. A feast takes place, in any case, and the pork and wine are consumed. Festivities may last until late at night. Bride and groom spend the night at her parents' home, but the next morning he takes her to his own place.⁸

7 Vansittart, *op. cit.*, p. 138. Sarat Chandra Das, *Journey to Lhasa and Central Tibet* (John Murray: London, 1902), p. 11.

8 Prince Peter of Greece wrote the following comments on this section: "The first visit of the *kaliyās* (who may be more than two, but must always go in pairs, so that their number must be even—two, four, or more) is called *sodhani*. Their second visit is named *magani*. My informant tells me that the *perengo* is not a bamboo basket but a wooden pot which not only contains meat but also curds and two fish. It should be carried on the shoulders by means of two sticks tied on either side, and with it, although outside of it, go a hen and a cock and two bottles of wine. The fowl are killed at the girl's house by the bridegroom with his *kukri*."

One final ceremony takes place three days later. This is a visit paid by the newly married couple to the wife's former home. Nothing special occurs on this occasion, but the visit must be paid.

ARRANGED MARRIAGES

Less common than *chōri bihā* but sometimes resorted to is the arranged or "Vedic" marriage. Under this system the parents of the boy decide upon a girl for their son, and two *kaliyā* are sent to the girl's home. They never bluntly state their purpose, leaving it to the girl's father to divine their intentions from hints and general references. On such occasions the *kaliyā* present him with two bottles of wine. This gift probably helps him to realize what they are after. The father says nothing on this occasion, however. A week or two later the *kaliyā* visit him again with two bottles of wine, this time framing their proposal in explicit terms. If the father of the girl agrees, the *kaliyā* ask him what marriage customs he wishes to have observed and how much *rit bhāth* he expects to receive. No *chōri dandā*, of course, need to be offered in a marriage of this type. The wedding, if agreed to, takes place the same day at the girl's home. In all other respects the procedures are exactly the same as those described for the *chōri bihā* ceremonies. The parents of the girl and all her relatives bless the young couple with *tikā* and gifts. The next morning the groom takes his bride home. In either form of marriage the girl follows the custom of stepping over the blood-sprinkled plantain leaves at the door of the groom's home.

ZUWĀRĪ MARRIAGE

There is a third form of marriage which is very rare nowadays, but which still occurs now and then in the more rural regions. This is a marriage which results from a singing contest (*zuwārī*) between a boy and girl. One of my informants told me that his grandfather and grandmother had been married through a *zuwārī*. A recent case occurred at the town of Bijanbāri near the border of Nepal. In order to comprehend this custom, it must be understood that the improvisation of songs is an accomplishment highly developed among some Nepalese families. The tune is standard, but questions and answers are fitted to the music on the spur of the moment, so that two persons can keep up a kind of musical badinage for several hours. A spontaneous entertainment of this kind may develop at a *melā* when large numbers of pilgrims have gathered together for a sacred occasion. In the evening, when there is need for relaxation, some individuals may produce musical instruments, and a *zuwārī* may get under way. In such a setting it sometimes happens that an unmarried boy and girl become *zuwārī* rivals. The boy sings a song, concluding it with a question which she must answer. The girl sings a reply, ending

with a question for him. So it goes, back and forth, until one of the two contestants breaks down, unable to improvise quickly enough. If the girl wins the contest, the boy must bow before her and present her with a bottle of wine and some money. If the boy wins, he may make her his bride. As already noted, however, this form of marriage is quite rare.

ADULTERY

The former punishment for adultery consisted in cutting off the nose of the faithless woman and cutting off the head of her lover. Bishop describes an alternative Nepalese punishment for the man: he was made to crawl below the raised leg of the husband in humiliation.⁹ These customs evidently belong to the past. I was told that nowadays, if adultery occurred in a household, the injured partner would be apt to leave, and a divorce would automatically take place. But, for various reasons, this does not always happen. A wife may continue to remain with a husband who is having an affair with another woman. If the latter is unmarried, the man may make her a second wife, for polygyny may be practiced. There is only one case of polygynous marriage at Toong Soong, but it is a common practice in Nepal itself. Usually the wives live in separate houses and maintain separate establishments. The second wife has less status than the first; no marriage rites are performed in her case. Her children have little claim on their father's property through inheritance. A man, however, uses the same kinship terms for her relatives that he employs for his first wife's relatives and follows the same patterns of respect, avoidance, etc. The second wife is likely to be younger than the first.

Another way of handling the issue of adultery is a standardized payment made by the lover of a woman to her husband. When the husband accepts this sum, he renounces all his claims upon the woman. This custom is associated with the saying "*Sāthī or kāṭṭī*" ("Sixty or cut"). In other words, the injured husband has a choice. He can either accept sixty rupees from the adulterer or he can cut the latter's throat.

If the woman goes off with the other man, her husband may send word to him that on a certain date he will appear to collect *zārikal*. This refers to the sixty rupees, plus whatever clothes and ornaments he may have given his wife before her infidelity. The local *pañchāyat* (council) is summoned to appear on this occasion. In the presence of the *pañchāyat* the clothes, ornaments, and the sixty rupees are handed over to the husband. Then, at the order of the *pañchāyat*, the husband pulls open the buttons on the shirt of the adulterer. This gesture means that this man is now free. The husband now abandons all claims upon his wife; henceforth she belongs to the other man.

⁹ R. N. W. Bishop, *Unknown Nepal* (Luzac and Co.: London, 1952), p. 67.

A recent case of infidelity at Toong Soong was dealt with by an informal *panchāyat*, but this case involved some complicating factors which made it an untypical instance. An unmarried girl, not from Toong Soong itself, became pregnant, and alleged that a man at Toong Soong was responsible. An informal local *panchāyat* was drawn up by members of the community, before which the girl appeared to give her testimony. So far, this procedure is much the same as would have been followed in Nepal itself. If the girl had mentioned an unmarried boy as her lover, the *panchāyat* would then have seen to it that the couple were married as soon as possible. Even if the man were married, he could still have taken the girl as his second wife. But the complicating factor was this: the girl's lover in this instance was a married man who was a Christian. His religion did not allow him to take a second wife, and his wife did not want to leave him. So the *panchāyat* saw no way of arranging for the girl's marriage. They did summon the offender, however, and asked him to pay for the girl's maintenance, which he promised to do. This case is considered very shameful by the people of Toong Soong, and the girl is looked down upon by members of the community. I am told that in Nepal a girl with an illegitimate child would have been driven from her home.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH AFFINAL RELATIVES

Considerable respect is shown to parents-in-law by bride and groom, who remain quiet in their presence. A girl should not look at her father-in-law, although she need not actually avoid him. A definite avoidance relationship, however, exists between a man and his wife's older sister, and between a woman and her husband's older brother. No conversation should take place between the man and woman in these cases, nor should they look at each other if they can help it. If the one enters the house, the other should leave it. The woman should be particularly careful to cover her hair, which should never be seen by the man.

A joking relationship, on the other hand, obtains between a man and his wife's younger sister, and between a woman and her husband's younger brother. In these cases the woman is addressed familiarly by the man, and sexual allusions may be made in conversation. A man, for example, says to his wife's younger sister, "I don't like your sister. I'd rather sleep with you." But, according to my informant, who jokes in this way with his sister-in-law, no actual advances are ever made. The joking remains on a purely verbal level; they never touch each other.

These joking partners are potential mates. Sororal polygyny is sometimes practiced in Nepal. Moreover, the custom of sororate also occurs. A man, after his wife's death, may marry his wife's younger sister, but not her older sister. Simi-

larly, a woman may marry her dead husband's younger brother, but not his older brother. Widows and widowers may also marry into another family. According to the orthodox Brahmanic law widows may not remarry, but Jimdārs do not follow this regulation. Although the levirate is sometimes observed, there seems to be no custom here—such as exists in some parts of India, and which Gorer has described for the Lepchas—of a man sleeping with his older brothers' wives. An older brother's wife's sisters are also potential mates, but no sexual joking takes place with them. Instead, a mutual respect relationship prevails.

A man treats his wife's older brother with respect, for the latter is the potential head of his wife's family. Once a year, on the tenth day of the Dasara festival, a man must visit the head of his wife's family, whether it be the father-in-law or brother-in-law. He takes along a bottle of wine and a leg of mutton. The family head places a rice *tikā* on the foreheads of the man and wife and their children, and gives them all his blessing, as well as some money for *dakshinā*. Then there is a feast at which the mutton and wine are consumed.

The wife's brother continues to play an important role in relation to her family. At the age of three a Jimdār boy goes through a ceremony known as *Pāchnū*, or Haircut Ceremony, in which his maternal uncle gives him his first haircut. The boy may later have occasion to repay this tonsorial service, for it is he who must shave his uncle's head after a funeral. After the death of a father or mother (but not at the death of a wife, brother, sister, son, or daughter) a man's head must be completely shaved except for the top-knot or *tūpi*. Eyebrows, beard, and mustache are also shaved.¹⁰ This office should be performed by a sister's son or else by a mother's brother, but never by a father's brother or brother's son. Ties between maternal uncle and sister's son are supposed to be close. There is a Nepalese proverb which runs: "One must respect even a dog which comes from the village of a mother's brother."

The older brother of a man's father is treated much as the father, for he, again, is the potential head of the family. The father's younger brothers may be treated more familiarly, but attitudes of respect are still maintained.

KINSHIP ORGANIZATION

A list of kinship terms is appended to this article. They are not presented in the Jimdār tongue, but in Nepali, the general language of Nepal which bears many resemblances to Hindustani. Some of the kinship terms, therefore, will be recognized as being the same or similar to kinship terms used in parts of India.

¹⁰ During a man's lifetime his sons should never shave their mustaches. In Darjeeling, however, young men have recently taken to violating this rule, particularly those who have gone to work or study in the cities.

One feature of this system is its bilaterality. The terms used for "grandfather" and "grandmother" may be applied to either the father's or mother's parents. Similarly, "grandson" and "granddaughter" are used bilaterally, while the terms for brother and sister are applied to the sons of both the father's and mother's brothers. Another feature of the system is the stress placed upon the relative age of siblings. Different terms are used for older and younger sister, and also for their respective mates. This distinction between older and younger appears in the terms for father's brothers but not for his sisters, while in the mother's family the distinction is made with regard to her sisters but not her brothers. The term *bariāmā* is used for both mother's older sister and father's older brother's wife; *barābābū* is used for both father's older brother and mother's older sister's husband. The distinction between older and younger is also employed with regard to brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. The wives and husbands of the latter are equated with one's siblings in the kinship terminology.

Despite the bilaterality evident in this system, there is, in everyday life, an emphasis upon the patrilineal line, which determines membership in the *pācchā*, an exogamous clan-like unit, as well as membership in the *thar*. Unfortunately, I was not able to get much information about these Jimdār social units. Northey and Morris refer to the *thar* as so many tribes,¹¹ while Leonhard Adams says that the *thar* are clans which he thinks show indications of having formerly been totemistic.¹² I do not think it is correct, however, to identify the *thar* as a clan. One may marry someone from the same *thar* but not from the same *pācchā*. Both of these social units are very numerous. At Toong Soong there seem to be almost as many *thar* and *pācchā* as there are families. We need more information about these aspects of eastern Nepalese social organization.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP

The importance of the patrilineal line is evidenced by the three sacred stones found in orthodox Jimdār households. These "hearth stones" or *chulā dhūngā* as they are called, are believed to be inhabited by the most recently departed spirits of the family. One stone is occupied by the father's spirit, another by the paternal grandfather, and the third by the paternal greatgrandfather. When their tenure is upset by the death of the head of the household, whose spirit must move into one of the stones, the family summons a *bijuwā*, a kind of medicine man, who performs a ceremony whereby the homeless ghost is enabled to enter one of the *chulā dhūngā*. This usually takes place a year after the death, during which time the soul of the deceased is believed to be wandering about on earth. At the cere-

11 Northey and Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

12 Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 537.

mony of installation the *bijuwā* recites some sacred texts (not Vedic, but texts peculiar to eastern Nepal) and invites the ghost to enter the stone which has been occupied, until this moment, by his father. As he does so, the father moves out and goes into the stone just being vacated by *his* father. The latter, in turn, moves into the third stone, whose occupant now steps forth into "immortality."

The *chūlā dhūngā* are kept in a secluded part of the house, which may be visited only by members of the family. A married daughter and her husband cannot go there. At the time of the Pittrā ceremony, held once a year, when the head of the family sacrifices a cock to the ancestors, no one is allowed to visit the family, and beggars are turned away from the door without alms, for this day is reserved for exclusive attention to the ancestors. If others were to partake of their food, the ancestors would make them fall sick. It may be noted, incidentally, that the ancestors are often held responsible when children fall ill. It is believed that the ancestors have been made angry by some lapse in the ritual observance owed to them, and that they have struck at the children in retaliation.

This cult surrounding the ancestral stones, which are somewhat reminiscent of Chinese tablets of the dead, indicate a stress on the patrilineal line. It may also be noted that women do not inherit property to any extent, although women generally have a high status in eastern Nepal, as evidenced by the customs relating to divorce and the remarriage of widows.¹³ My principal informant acknowledged as correct the following information from Northey and Morris:

Among the Limbus and Rais of Eastern Nepal, the distribution of property of a dead man is usually made by a small committee formed of six or seven of the elders of the village. Here, the largest share . . . is usually given to the eldest son, or should there be no offspring, then to the eldest surviving brother of the deceased. Amongst the last-named tribes a pretence is usually made of apportioning shares to the sisters and daughters of the dead man, but in actual practice they invariably receive nothing at all. . . .¹⁴

DISCUSSION

The Jimdār courtship system, as we have seen, contrasts with the arranged marriages of their neighbors, the Tibetans, Lepchas, western Nepalese, and Bengalis. Associated with the Jimdār system is a later age of marriage than in most of the latter groups. There is no child marriage among the Jimdārs. Another difference which may be noted is that instead of a dowry offered by the girl's father, some money is given by the father of the boy to the girl's father, although this may also be found in India, especially among the lower castes.

The caste system is present in this area, but loopholes are available for those

13 See Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 545.

14 Northey and Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

who wish to marry someone of another caste, provided that this not an untouchable. A relatively democratic attitude prevails among these mountain peoples. In this connection we may also point to the *mit* relationship. Along with other Nepalese groups the Jimdārs have a kind of ceremonial friendship which is initiated by a simple ceremony and which commits the two partners to a quasi-familial relationship. A friend of this type is known as a *mit*. Women may also have such a friendship among themselves. A woman friend is known as a *mītinī*. The ties established in this way bring about incest barriers between a man and members of his *mit's* family, and an avoidance relationship develops between a man and his *mit's* wife. It is interesting to note that the *mit* relationship may be entered upon by men of different castes, except (as in the case of marriage) for untouchables. The wife of my principal informant had a *mītinī* who belonged to a caste lower than her own.¹⁵

One gets the impression that the eastern Nepalese have a greater degree of freedom from institutional restraints than the Bengalis of the plains. The average Jimdār does not seem to be markedly restricted by either family or caste in his social relationships. He is allowed areas for self-assertion and free choice which are not similarly available in the plains. Jimdār kinship is markedly bilateral, and the relationships between the families of bride and groom are characterized by a good deal of reciprocity. Women have a relatively high status, and widows may remarry.

With regard to bilaterality, the comparative equality of the sexes, and the importance of relative age, there are similarities here to the Burmese kinship system, as described by Charles Brant and Mi Mi Khaing. Among the Burmese, where there is also individual courtship, one may note as well some similarities in the relationship between a man and his wife's younger and older sisters.¹⁶

Some readers of this paper may perhaps suspect a previously "matriarchal" condition linking these two areas, following the argument of Ehrenfels, who has drawn attention to the northeastern matrilineal tribes of India, the Khasis and Garos. Ehrenfels cites various aspects of culture which he believes may represent "survivals" associated with former matriliney in various parts of India. Some of these are characteristic of Jimdār culture—importance of the mother's brother, blood-sacrifice of cocks, bride-price, and remarriage of widows. On the other hand, other aspects of culture listed by Ehrenfels are not found among the Jimdārs, such as female puberty ceremonies and the inheritance of wealth by women.¹⁷

15 See Adam, *op. cit.*, p. 541.

16 Charles S. Brant and Mi Mi Khaing, *Burmese Kinship and the Life Cycle: an Outline* (Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, vol. 7, pp. 437-454, 1951).

17 See Omar R. Ehrenfels, *Mother-Right in India* (Oxford University Press: London, 1941).

These historical problems are difficult to solve with the limited information now available. Before tackling them, it might be best to get more data about the present-day ethnology of India, Burma, and Nepal—research which would also clarify some functional problems. For a comparative analysis of systems like *chōrī bihā* on the one hand and arranged marriages on the other might lead to a clearer understanding of the respective consequences of free choice or parental arrangement in the contracting of marriages. What are the characteristic psychological and sociological concomitants of these two systems? Further research among the peoples of eastern Nepal and their neighbors might help to provide an answer.

KINSHIP TERMS

bāzēi	grandfather (either father's father or mother's father)
bōzū	grandmother (either father's mother or mother's mother)
bābū	father
āmā	mother
barābābū	father's older brother, mother's older sister's husband
kakā	father's younger brother
māmā	mother's brother (either older or younger)
bariāmā	father's older brother's wife, mother's older sister
kākī	father's younger brother's wife
maizū	mother's brother's wife
fūpū	father's sister (either older or younger)
chēmā	mother's younger sister
pūsāi	father's (older or younger) sister's husband
kanchabābū	mother's younger sister's husband
dāzū	older brother, father's brother's son, mother's brother's son
bhāi	younger brother, father's brother's son, mother's brother's son, husband of sālī, husband of nandā
didi	older sister, father's brother's daughter, mother's brother's daughter, wife of jethān, wife of jethāzū
baihinī	younger sister, father's brother's daughter, mother's brother's daughter, wife of sālā
bhaujū	older brother's wife
soltī	older brother's wife's brother
soltinī	older brother's wife's sister
buhārī	younger brother's wife, son's wife
venāju	older sister's husband
jūwāi	younger sister's husband, daughter's husband

lōgnē	husband
swāsnī	wife
sāsūrā	father-in-law (of either man or woman)
sāsū	mother-in-law (of either man or woman)
jethān	wife's older brother
sālā	wife's younger brother
jetīsāsū	wife's older sister
dājū	husband of jetīsāsū, husband of āmāzū
sālī	wife's younger sister
jethāzū	husband's older brother
dewār	husband's younger brother
bahīnī	wife of dewār
āmāzū	husband's older sister
nandā	husband's younger sister
chōrā	son
chōrī	daughter
nātī	grandson
nātinī	granddaughter

NEW YORK, NEW YORK