

the kinship basis of a nepalese rural ward¹

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The rationale for this paper is that, just as a physician has a knowledge of the anatomy (structure) and physiology (function and processes) of the human body, it is necessary for rural development planners and workers to have a knowledge of the structure of rural Nepal and the functions and processes of its various parts. Perhaps a better way of putting it, since large quantum of information already exists among Nepalese planners and among researchers, is that this knowledge deserves to be consciously systematized, written down and disseminated for application in national development planning.

It is also suggested that in carrying out rural development projects, rather than approaching the population of a delimited area as an undifferentiated mass, an awareness of its structure in terms of kinship and localization can facilitate such work. It enables, for example, quick identification in a given location of leaders and other influential people who can spur or, if they feel ignored, hinder projects, recognition of lines of authority and communication within groups, assessment of the strength of possible alliances or, conversely, factions among the groups, estimation of manpower resources available for a project since cooperative labor within kin groups is necessary to release them, utilization of blood or marriage linkages among groups in different locations to give momentum to projects, and so on.

Further, the awareness of the possibility of the existence of kin groups each inhabiting a distinct locality or neighbourhood carries significant implications for surveys based on population samples whether random or cluster or stratified.

This paper discusses an aspect of the social structure of rural Nepal: the kinship basis of a rural ward. Its argument is that, with particular reference to the pahad or midland Hills Zone of Nepal,² the rural ward is basically composed of several patrilineages or unilateral descent groups in the male line which typically cluster together in a given section, neighbourhood or locality of the ward. These localities almost invariably have a name and are called "villages" in common parlance, not altogether in error since they were often discrete entities³ before their incorporation into a new administrative system in 1961. Conceivably a ward may be made up of one patrilineage. More usual, however, is that the maximum size of a patrilineage in one locality is about a dozen or 15 households; thus, a simple generalization is that the larger the ward, the more the number of patrilineages found in it. There is a general population limit imposed on the size of the ward since nine of them (each numbered from 1 to 9) make up a gaon panchayat (or Village Council) area, the basic self-contained administrative unit

in the Nepalese system of local self-government. Most gaon panchayat areas conform more-or-less to a population requirement of about 2,500 for its establishment (Kaphley, 1967: 71). Much larger ones, however, are sometimes found as, for example, Chitlang Gaon Panchayat Area in Makwanpur District which had in 1971 a population of 7,152 divided into 1,303 households (HMG, 1973: 3:136), an average of 145 households per ward. The general trend, however, appears to be for a pahad ward to have between 30 and 70 households.⁴ In any case, whatever its size may be the ward is a component of, and the smallest identifiable administrative unit in, the gaon panchayat area.

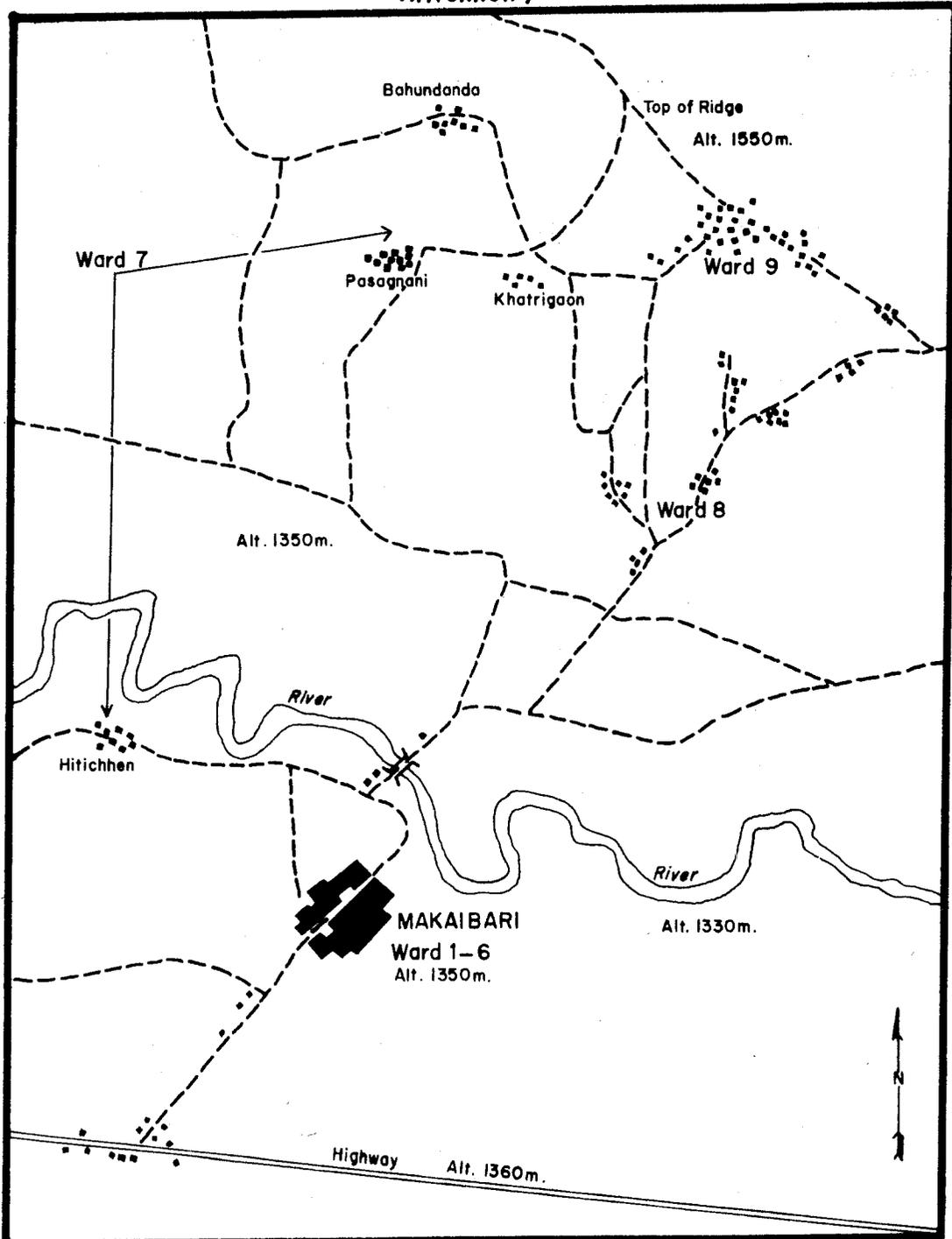
One noticeable feature of the gaon panchayat area is that specific ethnic groups, castes and sub-castes tend to cluster in certain wards. This becomes quickly apparent, of course, for those groups which happen to be in the minority in a given gaon panchayat area. In Janagal, Kavre Palanchok District, predominantly Chhetri in caste, all the 22 households of the Sarki caste were found concentrated in Ward 8 - and at least 14 of them belonged to the Mijar sub-caste, the implication being that they formed one kin group. Also in Ward 8 were 24 Chhetri households and 20 of them were of the Thapa sub-caste. Out of 46 Chhetri households in Ward 1, 18 were of the Khadka sub-caste and 15 of the Khatri. Thirty of the 34 ethnic Tamang families in Janagal resided in Ward 5, as did all the few Damai caste families found.

Again, in Deupur, Parbat District, all of its 23 Thakuri households were located in Ward 1 and 21 of them were of the Hamal sub-caste. About half of Deupur's Chhetri households, 36, were living in Ward 7 and all were Khadka-Chhetri. Thirty-five of the 43 ethnic Gurung households were found in Ward 9.

These examples can be repeated time and again in the gaon panchayat areas of the Pahad Zone and in order to analyze the situation more closely, a rural ward was selected in a gaon panchayat area which will be called Makaibari. The ward chosen will be designated as Ward 7. (See Sketch plan.)

Makaibari lies within the Valley of Kathmandu in Central Nepal on one of the motorable roads that radiate out from the capital city of Kathmandu. Part of it, comprising Wards 1 to 6, a compact settlement, with some scattered houses on and near the highway, is situated on a river terrace at an altitude of about 1,350 meters. With the exception of one locality (to be known as Hitichhen) of Ward 7, which lies west of Makaibari proper, the remainder, three wards, lies on the slopes and top of a ridge across the river to the north. In June, 1971, Makaibari had a population of 2,604 divided into 412 households. Ward 7 was then composed of 234 people in 39 households (HMG, 1973: 3:110). Four years later, there was scarcely any change numerically in Ward 7: in June, 1975, 235 people and 40 households were counted in a house-to-house survey.

SKETCH PLAN OF MAKAIBARI GAON PANCHAYAT AREA
 (Ward 7 is Comprised of Bahundanda, Pasagnani, Khatrigaon and Hitichhen)



LEGEND

- Village
- Highway
- Footpath
- River
- Bridge

Approximate Altitude in Meters.



Approx. Scale

The clustering of these 40 households in four different localities seemed to offer a clear-cut model of the hypothesis submitted in this paper. It was hoped that investigation would reveal the basic pattern of the kin structure of a rural ward, a pattern which would be applicable to the understanding of other rural wards, although with permutations and changes in detail. In the event, it turned out that each locality was indeed inhabited by a distinct ethnic or caste group and each was also a kinship grouping.

Table: Groups in Ward 7, Makaibari

Locality*	Population No. and %	Households No. and %	Language Group	Religion	Ethnic group/ caste
Pasagnani	78 (33.0)	15 (37.5)	Newari	Hindu	Newar (Shrestha)
Hitichhen	62 (26.5)	12 (30.0)	Newari	Buddhist	Newar (Tandukar)
Bahundanda	60 (25.5)	8 (20.0)	Nepali	Hindu	Brahmin (Poudyal)
Khatrigaon	35 (15.0)	5 (12.5)	Nepali	Hindu	Chhetri (Khatri)

*The names are fictitious.

The basic kin organization in all four groups was the patrilineage, khala (Newari) or santan (Nepali). While the santan is a unilateral descent group, there are elements of bilaterality in the khala which, however, do not affect its basic patrilineity, as will appear in the following discussion.

First, however, a word on the accompanying diagrams which show the relationship among the heads-of-household of each group. The oldest living male in the household has been designated as its head though, in some cases, his widowed mother may live with him and claim the title. People, living or dead, not essential to the discussion have been eliminated. Nor are unmarried daughters and minor children shown; with the exception of a widow with a 20-year old unmarried son among the Shrestha, the last generation in each group, therefore, does not appear in the diagrams. Counting the original settler in the locality as the first generation, three groups, Shrestha, Tandukar and Poudyal, are six generations deep. The Khatri santan has a depth of five generations.

The headman (Nepali: thakali) of each lineage has been designated as No. 1 in the diagrams. The remaining numbers indicate the order of succession to this post and it runs in order of seniority of generation and of age within the generation.⁵ It will be noted

that brothers may live together in one household, in which case the elder is considered its head, and that married sons who live with their father (who is the head-of-household) have been assigned numbers which reflect their positions on the roll of succession to the lineage headship.

And lastly: the Shrestha patrilineage is discussed in more detail than the others because it is the largest one in Ward 7 and because its patrilineal structure is replicated by, or at least clarifies, the others.

The Shrestha Khala (Diagram 1)

The Shrestha of Pasagnani Locality are divided into 15 households the heads of which, with the exception of two, are descended in the male line from a common male ancestor. This ancestor was the father of two brothers (the first generation in the diagram) who came to settle in Pasagnani; how long ago is indirectly indicated by the fact that the oldest survivor of the lineage, a great granddaughter born in 1896 of the elder brother, is still living in Pharping Town⁶ whither she had gone in marriage. Six heads-of-household (Nos. 2, 10, 11, 12, 13 and 16) claim direct descent from this elder brother and seven, including the lineage headman, are descended from the younger (Nos. 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9).

The remaining two heads-of-households, A and B, trace their connections through a mother and a wife respectively but are not afforded the full privileges of the lineage; in fact B is a virtual outsider and is included in lineage affairs, when he is, more as a matter of courtesy than of right.

Though of senior status in the lineage, being third in line of succession to the headship, No. 4 is not designated as a head-of-household as he lives with his elder brother, No. 2. No. 2, a widower in his seventies, could conceivably live with his daughter who resides in Pasagnani but presumably does not wish to do so because her husband is B, referred to above. No. 3, also a widower in his seventies, lives with his two married sons, Nos. 14 and 15. Living with his 45-year old widowed mother is No. 16 who, though unmarried, is 20 years old; he has therefore been designated a head-of-household. His mother does run the household in fact but she cannot represent it in certain lineage ritual affairs.

Though two males (Nos. 2 and 3 in the fourth generation) are older than he, No. 1 is lineage head by virtue of his being the sole surviving male member of the third generation, the youngest grandson, born in 1912, of the younger of the two original settlers. Two other representatives of his generation are his wife and the widow of a classificatory brother, the mother of No. 5. As lineage head he is the spokesman for, and representative of, the group (as for example when dealing with khala composed of more distant kinsmen in other locations) and oversees the social and religious aspects of

lineage life. Lineage meetings are held in his house and he leads the regular ceremony of worship to the lineage deity. He is also head of the funeral guthi or association of Pasagnani, an association which makes the necessary arrangements when a member dies and extends the necessary aid, financial or otherwise, to the surviving members of the household. That this guthi is not necessarily strictly organized along lineage lines is indicated by the fact that both A and B are also members.

One of those older than the lineage head, No. 2 in the fourth generation, is the oldest surviving male. He was born in 1899 and is regarded as the sage of the lineage to whom people go for advice on, and discussion of, usually personal, not lineage, matters. Though the other nonagenarian, No. 3 born in 1903, is also consulted, his role is not as institutionalized as that of No. 2.

Another leader of the group was a man who died recently. He was the Ward Representative, the elected spokesman of Ward 7, including Hitichhen, Bahundanda and Khatrigaon, to the Village Council of Makaibari on all official matters involving the ward and, indeed, the Makaibari Gaon Panchayat Area. He was 63 years old, the same age as the present lineage head, and the father of Nos. 11, 12 and 13. He would have been No. 4 on the list of head-of-household, had he lived, and his by-passing of Nos. 2 and 3 (both nonagenarians) might indicate some element of pragmatism, coupled with that of age, in recognition of leaders particularly in non-lineage affairs. In any case, no successor has as yet been elected in his place. One wonders whether the Shrestha of Pasagnani would put up the present No. 4, born in 1925, as a candidate to stand for election as the new ward representative.

The social and religious aspects of khala membership and the linkage of one khala with another in a different location may be briefly and perhaps more clearly outlined by discussing some of the rights and obligations of Households A and B who are comparative outsiders in the locality and whose formal ties with it, aside from those attendant on residence, mainly lie in their membership in the funeral guthi of Pasagnani. In land holding, too, they are at a disadvantage since their original plots were those given to their wives, smaller than those given to the males, and opportunities to extend their holdings were limited, first, because most of the available land had already been taken by the main lineage and, second, its male members would do their best to keep the land to themselves in the face of an increasing lineage population living off a limited amount of land.

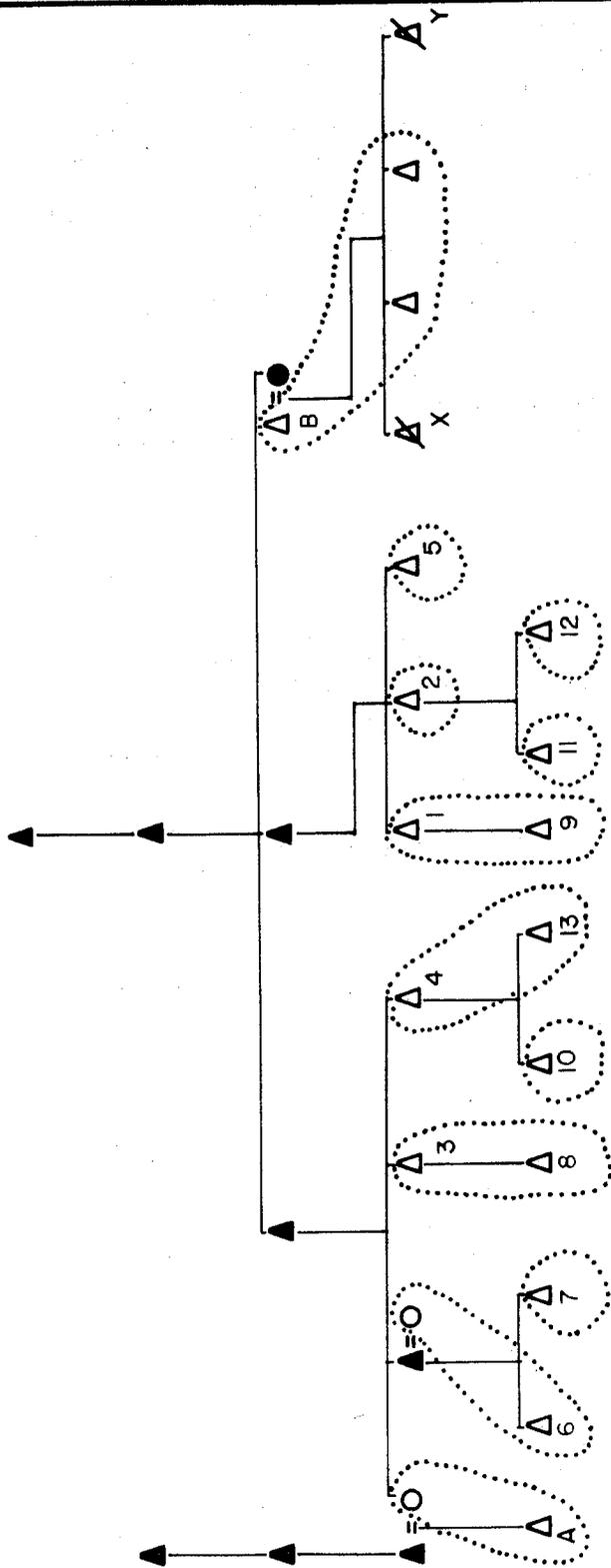
In the case of Household A, a great-granddaughter, now deceased, of the elder of the two original settler brothers, married a Shrestha from Pharping Town but, rather than her going to Pharping as, it will be remembered, one of her classificatory sisters did, he came to settle in Pasagnani. Head-of-Household A is his only son who not only belongs to his father's khala (in Pharping) but also his mother's

(in Pasagnani). Descent in a khala therefore has some aspects of bilaterality. A woman and her children, whether sons or daughters, belong to the khala of her birth. Her children, of course, also are counted as members of their father's khala. Head A, however, is neither on the roll of succession to the lineage leadership in the Pasagnani khala, because his descent is not in the male line, nor, presumably because his father moved away at marriage, in the Pharping khala. He can be considered head of his own khala in Pasagnani except, in actuality and at this time, it has only five members: himself, his wife and his three minor daughters. It is therefore to be considered more of an incipient lineage, assuming sons are born to him, than an actual one. Moreover, while he has some ritual and social obligations to the Pasagnani khala (mother's lineage) he is, for instance, not compelled to mourn the death of a member of it. He can, if he wishes to: he has a choice. On the other hand, he must attend the death rites and mourn the death of a member of his father's lineage in Pharping: he has no choice. Again, in actuality, because he is not resident in Pharping, he may not perhaps observe all the details of the mourning ceremony and for the full period customary for a relative of a given degree of kinship. He does, however, lead his family in Pasagnani in worship of the Pharping lineage deity.

The head of household B is apparently even more of an outsider to the Pasagnani lineage. His ritual and formalized social obligations to Pasagnani are even less than A's since it is his wife only, and his children through her, who belong to the Pasagnani khala. B's khala ties are elsewhere, with his father's and his mother's respective lineages. Unless an invitation to, say, a wedding ceremony in the Pasagnani khala specifies that the couple is invited, he may not even attend formal ceremonies or the formal aspects of a ceremony; his wife and children, however, are automatically included in them (where women or children are allowed). Though by virtue of his residence in Pasagnani he may have given up some or all real property inheritance rights or a leadership role in his father's khala, in this case it was close by, in Makaibari proper. B's ties with it are still strong but his claim to these rights, if indeed he has any, may very well be disputed by his paternal kinsmen. The situation was not clear. But it was clear that, at least on occasion, he leads worship, restricted to his wife, his twin 17-year old sons, and three daughters, to the deity of his patrilineage.

It appears, then, that each individual Shrestha, male or female, belongs to two khala, respectively of each parent. For a man his paternal khala is paramount in terms of real property inheritance, leadership role and ritual (particularly in worship of the lineage deity) and formalized social obligations with special regard to death of relatives. These may be loosened or lost if he moves away physically from the lineage. Emotional ties with the maternal khala are often quite strong. He is automatically included in many of its rituals and ceremonies. And a mother often takes her children for informal visit with her khala kinsmen of either parent.

DIAGRAM 2: THE TANDUKAR OF HITICHHEN



EXPLANATION OF SYMBOLS

- △ Male
- Female
- ⚭ Left the Locality
- ▲ Deceased
- Deceased
- Adoption
- Occupants of One Household

While a child is a link between two khala, such linkages may be further strengthened by a custom whereby a man's sister may be given in marriage to a family from which his bride has come. At least four such exchanges have taken place in the Shrestha khala, with two families in Ichangu and one family each in Matatirtha and Damaitar. While other Pasagnani girls have tended to go in marriage to certain locations from which brides come to Pasagnani, as for instance Panga, Pharping, Naikap and Ichangu, it is not known whether exchange marriages were involved in these cases.

Finally, in their relationship with other localities of the ward, the Shrestha engage in an institutionalized system of labour exchange (Nepali: parma) respectively with the Poudyal of Bahundanda and the Khatri of Khatrigaon. These include such as planting and harvesting of rice and wheat but not the watching of cattle which is done mainly by kinsmen.

The Tandukar Khala (Diagram 2)

There are twelve households in Hitichhen, all Tandukar, and ten of them are descended in the male line from a man (the first generation in the diagram) who settled in Hitichhen and whose eldest living descendant is a great-granddaughter born in 1895. The male heads-of-household descended from him are numbered from 1 (the lineage head) to 7 and 10 and 11. Nos. 8 and 9 live with their respective fathers while No. 12 may perhaps not be considered a head-of-household since he is a young man, 19 years of age, who having become a Buddhist monk lives alone. (In passing it may be noted that his father's younger sister became a Buddhist nun some years ago and left Hitichhen).

No. 1, the lineage head, is the oldest male in his (fourth) generation, having been born in 1910, and his duties and responsibilities parallel those outlined previously for the head of the Shrestha lineage, even to the leadership of the funeral guthi which is found in Hitichhen. There are two people older than he. One is the 80-year old woman referred to above who married (on an exchange marriage basis) into a second, much smaller, patrilineage in Hitichhen and whose sole adult male representative is her son (Head-of-Household A). Counting the original founder who came from Banepa Town to Hitichhen and minor children (not shown in the diagram) his lineage is five generations deep but is comprised of only six members at present. Part of the reason for this small number may be that A has only sisters, one of whom is unmarried at 40 years of age and living with him while the others have married and moved away. Since, however, his great-grandfather had come to Hitichhen early enough to acquire a fair land-holding, A is relatively comfortable economically. Because of the small number of his family, A, a lineage head in his own right, plays a subordinate role in Hitichhen affairs.

The other older person (Head-of-Household B) is a male from Basantapur in Kathmandu City who settled in Hitichhen after marriage with a girl of the main lineage. He is now 78 years old (born in 1897) and though his wife is dead, he has four married sons and eleven grandchildren (of whom eight are males); thus his line seems to have a good chance of continuing but perhaps not in Hitichhen entirely. It may be of significance in terms of land-holdings and leadership roles in Hitichhen, which are restricted for B and his line, that two of his sons (X and Y) have emigrated to Chitawan District, where, starting some 20 years ago, large tracts of land have become available with attendant development of new communities and economic opportunity. But for this, B might have achieved some or more leadership role in Hitichhen affairs by the weight of numbers of his incipient lineage.

While the roles of A and B in Hitichhen generally parallel those of A and B in Pasagnani, including membership in the funeral associations of their locality, in Hitichhen A is the head of a numerically small but true patrilineage and B has, or had, enough descendants to form a powerful faction.

Because of their physical isolation from the rest of Ward 7 the Tandukar of Hitichhen exchange labor in agricultural activities with nearby people of Makaibari proper.

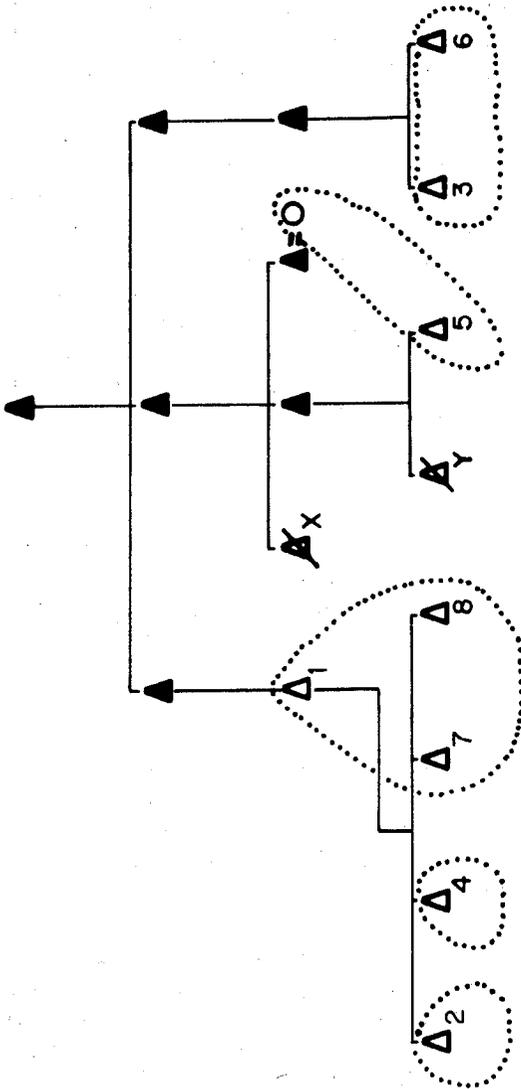
The Poudyal Santan (Diagram 3) and the Khatri Santan (Diagram 4)

The relationships of the heads-of-household of the Poudyal of Bahundanda and the Khatri of Khatrigaon are relatively simple. They are, respectively, members of a unilateral patrilineal descent group.

The eight households of the Poudyal are headed by Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 11, 13 and 14 who are all descendants in the male line of a man who came from Naikap to settle in Bahundanda. Descent is traced through his two sons (the widow, born in 1888, of the younger is still alive) to four grandsons of whom two, Nos. 1 and 2, born in 1909 and 1919 respectively, are also still alive, the former being the lineage headman. Other relevant male descendants are Nos. 5 and 15 who each live with an elder brother, and living with their fathers are Nos. 7, 9 and 10 as a group, No. 8 and No. 12.

Nos. 1 and 2 are sons of the aged widow mentioned above. She is known as the "mother of the lineage" (Nepali: santan ko mata) and evidently is still a formidable person living up to her name. She lives with No. 2 (and his elder son, No. 8) but her 52-year old daughter-in-law (No. 2's wife) has moved into another house with the younger married son where she can be the mother-in-law and rule domestic affairs. Of the four sons of No. 3, No. 12 lives with him and No. 14 has set up a separate household. No. 13 became the adopted son (Nepali: dharam putra) of the widow of No. 3's younger brother who had no children. No. 15, still young and unmarried, also lives with his brother in this last household.

DIAGRAM 4: THE KHATRI OF KHATRIGAON



EXPLANATION OF SYMBOLS

- Δ Male
- \circ Female
- Δ_X Deceased
- Δ Deceased
- \bullet Deceased
- Adoption
- \circ Occupants of One Household

While they exchange labor in agriculture with the Shrestha of Pasagnani, the Poudyal do not cooperate with their other nearby neighbours, the Khatri, because of bad blood resulting from a dispute over land.

The Khatri are linked in kin with another Khatri santan in Ward 9 whom they join particularly in observance of dewali ceremonies to their kul deuta, a blood sacrifice held annually to the tutelary god of a kul, a group of people who, real or imagined, consider themselves related through descent from a common male ancestor in the remote past. As Bista (1972: 56) points out in his detailed discussion of this ceremony, the term kul has a large range of meanings: a clan, a tribe, a lineage and so on; but its depth of generation obviously exceeds that of the santan which runs from about four to seven. A group of related santan, acknowledging a common male ancestor, might therefore form a kul.

The linkage with Ward 9 resulted because the founder of the Khatri santan in Ward 7 was the illegitimate son of one of the Ward 9 Khatri. Probably because of restrictions caused by his status on real property inheritance and leadership rights, he settled in Kha-trigaon and the present five heads-of-household are his direct descendants. They are his grandson (No. 1, the lineage head, born in 1905 but not the oldest male survivor of his generation), and seven grandsons of whom Nos. 2, 3, 4 and 5 are counted as heads-of-household. Nos. 7 and 8 live with their father, No. 1, while No. 6 lives with his elder brother.

The oldest male survivor is a classificatory brother of No. 1 (in the third generation). He (marked X) was born in 1900 but has moved away from Kha-trigaon with his wife to live with their only daughter, married and residing in a neighbouring gaon panchayat area. In the fourth generation, too, one man (Y) has emigrated to India.

Concluding Remarks

In sum, the inhabitants of Ward 7 of Makaibari can be divided into four major distinct kin-groups each inhabiting a separate locality in the ward. These kin-groups are based on descent in the male line and elements of bilaterality in the Newar khala do not go counter to this basic patrilinearity.

The Shrestha are organized into one main khala and two incipient separate khala while the Tandukar are organized into one main, one separate minor and one separate incipient khala. The incipient khala resulted from matrilocal or uxorilocal residence and are therefore related to the main khala through the female side. Both the Poudyal and Khatri santan are clear cases of patrilineages which are localized in these examples.

It is suggested that the situation obtaining in Ward 7 of Makai-bari is essentially the kinship structural pattern found in most of the rural wards in the midland Hill Zone of Nepal and that, whether or not the localities are physically separated, distinct kin groups can, in the main, be identified in association with distinct localities.

While a detailed social survey of every rural ward in Nepal is not advocated as a preliminary to development projects, it is held that this kind of information needs to be made explicit to rural field workers, whether in training courses or through guidance by their supervisors. Its application in a field situation will facilitate their work.

FOOTNOTES

1. This study was carried out under the auspices of the Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University. I am grateful to Messrs Nirmal Shumsher Rana and Bhaskar Shumsher Rana for their work in the field and to Messrs Bihari Krishna Shrestha and Purna Harsha Bajracharya for discussions of the data. None of them is, however, responsible for any errors.
2. Nepal's division into three broad altitudinal and environmental zones running east to west across the country is accepted for this paper. From north to south, they are the Himal (Mountains), Pahad (Hills) and Tarai (plains) zones. (See Gurung, 1971).
3. In 1952/54, out of 28,780 towns and villages, 24,439 had less than a population of 500 each. These small villages (gaon) were inhabited by 4,071,437 people (close to half the total population of the country then), an average of 166.6 per village. (HM Government of Nepal, 1957: 53-54).
4. Population and household figures were collected from the 1971 National Census of Population (HMG, 1973) on 26 gaon panchayat areas in the Pahad Zone. They were selected because they were under consideration for development projects; therefore, they do not represent a random sampling. Of their 234 wards, however, totalling 13,527 households, 157 (67.1%) ranged in size from 30-69 households, the mode being 40-49 households (in 48 wards or 20.5%). The median was 51.4 houses. At the extremes were five wards (2.1%) with less than 20 households and two wards (0.8%) with more than 180 households each.
5. The dynamics of succession to the headship of a patrilineage clarify the dynamics of succession to the hereditary prime ministership of Nepal during Rana days (1846-1951). In essence, much internal strife among the Rana is explainable in terms of violation, or attempted violation, of rules of succession to the headship of patrilineage which coincided politically, in

this instance, with the prime ministership.

6. The terms City and Town are used here and later to denote the relative urbanism of settlements and is not necessarily a legal or administrative distinction.

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