CHAPTER V

ASPECTS OF SOCIAL LIFE

FAMILY, KINSHIP AND MARRIAGE

The most important primary social group is the family, which performs a wide range of socio-psychological, social and economic functions and tasks, regarding its members as well as community and society. Leslie (1982) has stated that the main functions and purposes of family could be summarized as satisfaction of sexual needs and biological reproduction, common residence, socialization of children and economic co-operation. In common, it is said that the essence of the family is kinship relations while the essence of the households is domestic activities. The term family in the context of the peasant
communities is frequently used to refer to jurally define corporate kin groups whose central function is the control over property particularly land. But in a wide range of societies, property and land holding or other economic functions are performed by groups other than the family. Goodenough (1970) has stated that the universal nuclear family is composed of a woman and her dependent children. According to him, when the woman’s husband is included then it is termed as the elementary nuclear and when the woman’s consanguineal relatives (other than children) are included then it is termed as consanguine family. However, Goodenough has not particularised the functional components of these relationships. Fortes (1969) has considered the family to be the ‘reproductive nucleus’ of the domestic group. Wider consanguineal and affinal ties are thus analysed under the more general rubric of kinship, which does not pre-suppose the primacy of any group or unit. Murdock (1949), has defined the nuclear family consisting of mother, mother’s husband and children. Thus, underlying all these definitions and studies of family, there is an evolutionary postulate that the family is the basic and universal productive, reproductive and social unit upon which other kinship, locality or political groupings are historically super imposed.
For performing the various functions and tasks, family organises a specific social group with roles and interaction patterns, which follow on one hand the dominant norms of society and on the other hand reflect the unique experiences, beliefs and values shared only by the members of a particular family. In this context family has also to be seen as a permanent interaction process with family members exchanging expectations and information, interpreting, negotiating and defining norms and rules, communicating emotions, sharing tasks, etc.

The central point of family organization with regard to performance of tasks and function is the pattern of divisions of labour among the family members, while the central point from the viewpoint of family as interaction process is the authority structure or decision making pattern of the family.

Besides consisting of functions, roles, values and interaction patterns, family being a social institution, follows certain customs and rules regarding its foundation and break-up, marriage, inheritance, etc. regulating the family process which means "the creation and extinction of nuclear families, the creation of new members by birth, the loss of existing members by death, the establishment of affinal relationship by marriage; the
supplementation of these ties by ties of filiation as the children are born, and affines become kin’s kin” (Harris 1970).

Joint family is a typical feature of Indian family system. Even though nowadays joint family in its original form is not existing any longer, the concept of joint family still has its implications for contemporary family life. The term joint family denotes the composition of a family as is the case with terms nuclear family and extended family. It also indicates a certain authority pattern and utilization of family property as well as certain pattern of worship and religious practices. O’Malley (1975) has defined joint family as follows: “In its complete form a joint family has a common property, a common house with a common kitchen and common worship of a family idol or idols”.

Of course, common residence is not a necessary property of a joint family even though rural joint families generally reside together. Thus, a joint family might consist of several separate households, which again might be extended ones or nuclear ones.

Marriage is a social bond approved by society between two or more people, involving economic co-operation and culturally approved sexual activity. In general, the universal core functions of marriage as an institution are control of rights over sexual activity and the legitimation of children. Highlighting on the
legitimation, it is stated that marriage is a universal social institution, which establishes the legitimacy of children. Of course, there are societies where this is not a function of the marriage relationship. Leach (1962) is of the opinion that there are a number of distinguishable classes of rights, which may be allocated by the marriage relationship. These rights include the establishment of legitimacy of man's or woman's children, the granting of rights of control over the spouse's sexuality, over domestic or labour services, or over the property of the spouse, the establishment of a relationship of affinity between the husband and the wife's brothers. But these rights may vary from society to society.

Generally, two types of marriage exist: endogamy, i.e. marriage between people of the same social group or category; and exogamy-marriage between people of different social groups and categories. A marriage may include two or more partners. Monogamy usually involves two individuals in the marriage. Though this is the most prevalent and familiar form of marriage, many societies even practise some form of polygamy. Polygamy is a marriage, which involves a spouse of one sex and two more spouses of the opposite sex. There are two forms of polygamy: polygyny – marriage between one husband and two or more wives,
and polyandry – marriage between one wife and two or more husbands. Though the majority of the world’s populations currently practise monogamy, polygyny is a common form of marriage and is associated with 80 per cent of human societies, many of which have relatively small populations. Polyandry is very rare and it is found only in a few societies in the world.

Family is the basic and universal kinship grouping. A man’s kins are those persons with whom he is genealogically connected through his father and mother (Evans-Pritchard 1951). Kinship is social relationship based on real, putative or fictive consanguinity or on the model of consanguineal relations. In most societies, a child is regarded as offspring of both parents, and shown as relationship of kinship traced through both. Those kins traced through the father are termed paternal and those traced through mother are termed maternal. The totality of maternal and paternal kin recognized by a person within a certain degree is sometimes termed his kindred. Lineal kin are the direct ancestors and direct descendants of an individual whereas collaterals are the other descendants of one’s lineal kin. Primary kin are one’s parents and their offsprings and one’s own offspring (father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter). Secondary kin are the primary kin of these (father’s father, mother’s brother, brother’s daughter, etc.).
Tertiary kin are the primary kin of the secondary kin, and so on. In fact, almost all kinship systems recognize bilateral relationship, i.e., relationship to both maternal and paternal kin. Among the more important cultural usages of kinship ties are rules of inheritance, succession, group membership and marriage. Often it has been found that the significance of kinship in pre-industrial society is more far-reaching and systematic than in modern industrial societies. Thus, it is frequently stated that kinship constitutes the basic organizational principle of pre-industrial or small-scale societies. In many such societies the universe of kin and affines is the universe of significant social relationship, all persons who enter into relationship with ego being defined in terms of some kinship status, whether or not their exact relationship to ego is known.

THE FAMILY

The Assamese Nepalis of Hirabari, Kiringbori and Tekeliakur Grant refer the family, whether it is an extended or nuclear as parivar. Six different types of families have been distinguished among the Assamese Nepalis of the three study villages, on the basis of the composition of the family households:
1) Incomplete nuclear families without dependents: It consists of one of the parents with children. The nuclear type of family is the most common family type among the Assamese Nepalis of the three study villages. Its dominance might be due to the common habit of setting up a separate house and household soon after marriage.

2) Nuclear families without dependents: A nuclear family without dependents consists of parents and children.

3) Nuclear family with dependents: This family has a widowed parent or a widowed sister or an unmarried sister or brother as an additional family member.

4) Lineally extended families without dependents: This type consists of parents with married children and grand children.

5) Collaterally extended family: When one or more siblings, in this case brothers, continue to live together after marriage, it is understood as a collateral family. This type of family is negligible.

6) Lineally and collaterally extended families with dependents: This type of family combines both the characteristics of a lineally and of a collaterally extended family.

Table 20 and 21 show the different family types and family size in the three study villages.
TABLE 20: FAMILY TYPE OF HIRABARI, KIRINGBORI AND TEKELIAKUR GRANT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Family</th>
<th>Hirabari</th>
<th>Kiringbori</th>
<th>Tekeliakur Grant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete Nuclear family</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(33.33%)</td>
<td>(20.00%)</td>
<td>(17.24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Family without Dependents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(13.33%)</td>
<td>(30.00%)</td>
<td>(19.83%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear family with Dependents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(26.67%)</td>
<td>(32.50%)</td>
<td>(27.59%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lineally Extended Family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Dependents</td>
<td>(13.33%)</td>
<td>(7.50%)</td>
<td>(9.48%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaterally Extended Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>(6.67%)</td>
<td>(5.00%)</td>
<td>(14.65%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lineally Collaterally</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Family with Dependents</td>
<td>(6.67%)</td>
<td>(5.00%)</td>
<td>(11.21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
<td>(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The family types have been distinguished based on Kolenda's classification of family types (Kolenda 1968)
Table 20 indicates that in all the study villages, the number of nuclear families with dependents is the highest. Lineally extended family without dependents and lineally collaterally extended family with dependents are comparatively less than other family types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 21: AVERAGE FAMILY SIZE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hirabari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiringbori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tekelikur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution of family households among the Assamese Nepalis of the three study villages by size is shown in table 21. In Hirabari, out of 15 family households, 1 household belongs to the small category (between 1-4 persons within each household) and
14 belong to the medium category (between 5 to 10 persons in each household). There is no household in the large category in this village.

In Kiringbori, out of a total of 40 family households, 7 belong to the small category (between 1-4 persons within each household), 24 belong to the medium category (between 5-10 persons within each household) and 9 belong to the large category (more than 10 persons in each household).

Out of a total of 116 family households in Tekeliakur Grant, 41 belong to the small category (between 1-4 persons within each household), 71 belong to the medium category (between 5-10 persons within each household), and only 4 belong to the large category (more than 10 persons within each household). In the three study villages, the highest numbers of family households belong to the medium category (between 5-10 persons).

The siblings share an intimate relationship. During childhood, they play together. Both brothers and sisters work for the family and there is mutual co-operation, help and faith between them. The unmarried daughters help the mother in the performance of household chores, while sons help the father in the economic activities. Even after either's marriage, the relationship between brothers and sisters remain more or less
cordial. Only in rare cases, minor disputes or conflict worsen their relationship.

The father expects his sons to be devoted, submissive and obedient. As a head, he exercises his control and authority over them and guides them in all matters. The children develop an attitude of respect and reverence towards their parents. They love, honour and obey them. When the son attains adulthood, the intimacy between them gradually decreases. The son develops a tendency of respectful avoidance towards his father. He feels comfortable in an agricultural unit, if his father is absent as he cannot smoke freely in his father's presence. After the son's marriage, the distance between the father and son further widens.

Generally, the son keeps a more intimate and close relationship with his mother than with his father. The son gets more affection from his mother than from his father. He can express his views frankly to his mother and mother is often blind to the faults of her son.

The parents of the spouses enter into a new relationship, which is established by marriage. Their relationship is very informal. A man has to maintain a cordial relationship with his wife's family. All the members of his wife's family treat him with affection.
When the son separates from his parental family, the partition takes place within the same house site or the son goes to stay somewhere close by. The children are treated with the same affection as before and they move freely in both the houses. The sons, even after staying separately, consult the parents or their elder brothers on certain problems like arranging marriage ceremony of their sons and daughters, economic matters, etc. Besides, they all get together for festivals and the ceremonies connected with the important crises of life—birth, marriage and death.

FORMATION AND BREAK-UP OF JOINT FAMILIES

The formation and break-up of joint families have been examined by investigating the mode of inheritance and the instances of separation of the younger generation from the family.

In respect of separation from family, the usual practice is that at the time of marriage, the son requests separation from his parental family. If he is not urged by his parents to set up a separate household, the son might also stay on with his parent's family. The parents provide space and essential construction materials and household goods. As a consequence, the newly married wife has to be integrated in the working pattern, status hierarchy and communication pattern of the females of the family.
Again, with the emergence of a new sub-group e.g. wife and husband, the question of contribution to family income and consumption arises.

In general, causes for separation from the family after marriage pointed by informants from all the three study villages are quarrels and conflicts between mother and daughter-in-law, among daughters-in-law and even between daughter-in-law and unmarried sisters mainly because of status conflicts and distribution of work. Another equally important cause can be quarrels among brothers over contribution to family income and expenditure for consumption. O'Malley (1975) has discussed the dissolution of joint families in India in general and cites similar reasons: “Family disputes are the most usual cause of the dissolution of families in separate branches. In particular, earning members who contribute to the family resources are disgusted by a system under which idle relatives are a drain upon them, and their wives, devoted to their husbands’ interest, keenly resent their energies being exploited”.

Of course, the dissolution of the extended families does not mean the end of the relationships. A year or so after the son’s marriage, particularly a second son’s marriage, starts the dissensions and quarrels among the women members of the
family. Within a year or two, these result in separation—usually in the same house. Soon after they begin to live independently, their relations become cordial again. They all come together for feasts and festivals and even food is often exchanged. Children of all the separated families spend most of the time with the grandparents or any other elderly persons.

Krishna Subba (aged 49 years) of Kiringbori is a cultivator. At the age of 33, he married Kumari Devi of Kumarikata (Baska District), around 75 Kms. from Kiringbori. Soon after the marriage, he and his wife lived in his parents’ house. But after the birth of their first child, they separated from the parental family and constructed a house within the same compound. According to Durga Devi (Krishna’s mother), Kumari had to undertake the bulk of the household chores but she did not lend her a helping hand. After the birth of her first child, she was unable to carry on her daily activities such as cooking, cleaning utensils and washing clothes, etc. As a result, conflict arose between Kumari and her mother-in-law. Unable to tolerate his mother’s behaviour, Krishna decided to separate. Durga Devi then allotted 1 katha (2880 sq. ft.) of land in her own compound where Krishna and his family live separately. Two similar cases were also noted in Hirabari and Tekeliakur Grant. But Tanka Gautam (aged 56 years) of
Tekeliakur Grant informed that in their family, soon after their marriage, each brother set up separate household. Even his father soon after his marriage separated himself from his grandfather's family.

The separation usually occurs within the same house structure or the son goes to stay somewhere nearby. Even when the sons stay separately, they always consult the parents or their elder brothers regarding certain problems like economic crisis or finding a suitable match for the marriageable son or daughter, and so on. Moreover, they all come together for festivals and the ceremonies.

**DIVISION OF LABOUR IN THE FAMILY**

Both men and women take an active part in the agricultural production. The male members carry on the whole process of cultivation except transplantation of seedlings of the paddy, which is done by the women. Both males and females take part in the harvesting activities. Even the aged persons and young generally work together. There is no discrimination in this regard.

All the household duties like cooking, cleaning, scrubbing, childcare are to be done by the womenfolk. They also go for fishing during the rainy season and look after the kitchen garden and the domesticated animals. The male folk help them by preparing
various household activities like making baskets, mats, hand fan, etc. They have no fixed duties of their own.

The children of the study villages are very industrious. Those who do not go to school look after their younger brothers and sisters and also lend a helping hand to the parents. The boys help in harvesting and storing while girls help their mother in cooking, scrubbing, cleaning, looking after younger brothers and sisters and domesticated animals, etc.

Almost all the households of the three study villages have cattle more or less. It is the task of the males to rear the cattle. The womenfolk clean the cowshed, feed them grass, straw and water. In the field, generally males go to rear them. Sometime, the womenfolk help the males by attending the cattle, bringing grass from field or hill. There is a good co-operation and understanding between the males and females in cattle rearing.

**MODE OF INHERITANCE**

The mode of inheritance is similar in all the three study villages because it is established on the custom that old parents and sons equally share assets as well as debts. If the sons separate during the lifetime of the father, the father gives them their shares of the family property. After the father’s death, his widow is in-charge of all the property till the partition takes place.
If she wishes to stay separately, she is given a share of the property. If a deceased son is survived by a son, the latter gets his father's share of the family property.

If there are no sons, then the property goes to unmarried daughters. If there are sons and unmarried daughters, provision is made for the marriage expenses of the latter. Again, if there are unmarried brothers or sisters of the deceased staying with him, a part of the property is kept for their marriage expenses.

Daughters are not given any share other than the ornaments, household utensils and furniture given to them at the time of marriage. In the case of a divorced girl who comes back to stay with her parents or a married girl and her husband who may come to stay with the married girl's parents, they are given a part of the homestead land to set up their own house. Moreover, a married daughter can claim property if her husband is a gharjowai (a resident son-in-law). The gharjowai gets a share of property of his father-in-law, fully or partly. However, no case of gharjowai has been found from the three study villages.

In the case of absence of direct descendants, the property is distributed between the brothers of the deceased or their sons. The next inheritors are the deceased person's father's brothers
and their sons. If there is no any relative, the property becomes a public property of the village.

The main items of property for an Assamese Nepali consist of the house structure with the furniture, utensils, agricultural tools and implements, ornaments, cattle, etc. The ornaments are the women's property and they usually go to the most loved daughters and daughters-in-law or their children. The house and the household appliances are divided among the claimants. The clothes of deceased are usually burnt near the village cremation ground.

The family deities remain in the house, and the one who owns the latter has to perform the required ceremonies regularly. All the members equally share the expenses incurred in performing the religious ceremonies.

KINSHIP

Among the Assamese Nepalis of the three study villages, the intensity of interpersonal relationship between various relatives in the villages depends upon the spatial proximity or remoteness and closeness of kinship relationship. Members of a family are more intimately related than other relatives in this respect.
The relationship between the kin among the Assamese Nepalis of the three study villages is more or less informal, depending on the degree of intimacy and contact. In general, the eldest male who is the head of the family is at least nominally the authoritarian figure within the family. All the members of the family honour him. He in turn discusses all important problems of the household with all the grown up members of the family.

The relationship between the daughter-in-law and her father-in-law is generally cordial. A newly married girl is expected to be polite, obedient and humble. She must show respect and reverence to her father-in-law, just like her father. Similarly, the father-in-law is supposed to regard his daughter-in-law as his own daughter. She is supposed to keep her head covered (chul dhaknu) in front of her father-in-law.

Of course, the relationship between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law is not always cordial. Generally, when the daughter-in-law first comes to her in-laws’ house, she behaves well and her in-laws also treat her well. But gradually the affection and love of the mother-in-law towards her daughter-in-law lessen. The mother-in-law expects that her daughter-in-law should be always submissive to her. As a result, conflict starts and their relationship becomes strained. It is only in rare cases that the
mother-in-law and daughter-in-law share a very affectionate relationship. The son’s affection towards his wife creates tension and the mother-in-law cannot tolerate her daughter’s-in-law domination over her son.

In the case of the male members of the family, the brothers of the father-in-law and the husband’s elder brothers are treated with respect. Except in the case of emergency, the daughter-in-law never talks to them directly and does not appear before them with her head uncovered. However, an informal relationship can be seen between the younger unmarried brothers of the husband and his wife with whom she can talk freely.

The daughter-in-law keeps friendly relationship with her husband’s sisters. They share household duties and involve in gossiping whenever they get the time. It is seen that sometimes the unmarried sisters (even married sisters) create trouble and make life miserable for the sister-in-law.

The daughter-in-law maintains a very cordial relationship with her husband’s brothers’ wives. They share household chores and help each other. But when conflict takes place between them, the intimacy gradually disappears. Some small incidents give rise to quarrels. When the situation gets out of control, it results in separation. If the parents are alive, they somehow try to resolve
the problem and urge them to stay together. But soon after their
death, division of property takes place and the couple starts living
separately.

The consanguineal kins (bangsha) of an Assamese Nepalis
are considered closer to one self than the affinal kins. The father's
brothers and their wives are like the fathers and mothers
respectively. Their sons and daughters are considered as brothers
and sisters. They come together for religious ceremonies. In the
case of a death in the family, all the bangshas are in ceremonial
impurities for twelve days. The Assamese Nepalis use the term
bangsha for the patrilineal kinsfolk belonging to one's own village
and elsewhere. The term bangsha corresponds to a descent group,
the members of which trace their descent from a common male
ancestor. The term bangsha covers the kin, living or dead, close or
remote with whom relationship is supposed to be traceable on the
parental side.

KINSHIP USAGES

It is seen that in all societies avoidance of one kind or
another is observed between certain relations. Likewise, among
the Assamese Nepalis of the three study villages, avoidances of
some kind are observed. A daughter-in-law does not appear before
her in-laws' without covering her head. A distance is always
maintained in their relations. She never talks to them directly unless an utmost need arises.

The son-in-law also maintains a formal relationship with his parents-in-law, which is characterised by respect and consideration. The daughter-in-law also treats her husband's elder brothers with respect. She never appears before them without covering her head and never talks to them directly or face-to-face. But soon after the birth of a child, her relations become somewhat informal.

The reverse of the avoidance relationship is an extreme degree of familiarity expressed through joking relationships. Such informal relationship can be seen between the younger unmarried brothers of the husband and his wife's younger unmarried sisters.

**KINSHIP TERMS**

The study of the kinship system of the Assamese Nepalis of the three study villages has revealed that kinship is bilateral. The Assamese Nepali kinship terms\(^2\) are characterised by the simultaneous use of both classificatory as well as descriptive terms. Classificatory terms are those, which refer to more than one type of relationship, for example, 'aunt', 'uncle', 'grand father'

\(^2\) Appendix II
and 'cousin'. Descriptive terms are those, which refer to one type of relationship only, for example, 'father', 'mother', and 'brother'.

It may be pointed out here that the Assamese Nepalis of the three study villages speak the same local dialects of the Nepali language. Of course, no distinction is made between paternal grandparents and maternal grandparents, but distinction is made between the sexes.

In the three study villages, the terms *hajurba* and *hajur amoi* are applied commonly to ego's grandparents and even great grandparents (ego's father's father's father). Reciprocally, there is no term of address for grand children as they are addressed by name by the grandparents. But in referring to them, the terms *nati* and *natini* are used for the grandson and granddaughter, respectively. With regard to a woman's relatives in her husband's father's household, there are terms of reference, *sasura* and *sasu* for husband's father and husband's mother, respectively. But in addressing these relatives she uses the terms *pita/baba/buwa* and *mata/ma/ama* for father-in-law and mother-in-law, respectively. A daughter-in-law in turn is referred to as *bowari*. Similar is the case with a man who addresses his father-in-law (*sasura*) and mother-in-law (*sasu*) as *pita* or *buwa* and *mata/ama* or *ma*. In turn, he is referred to as *jowai*.
Father, father’s younger brother and father’s elder brother are addressed by descriptive terms such as pita, buwa, baba, or bao, kaka or kakabao and thulo buwa or barrabao, respectively. Correspondingly, father’s younger brother’s wife is referred to as kaki ama and father’s elder brother’s wife as barri ama.

But father’s younger and elder sisters are addressed by the same term as phupu and their spouses are denoted by the term phupa. Again mother’s younger sister is addressed as sanima or saniama or mother’s elder sister is addressed as thuliama and their spouses are addressed as sanabuwa or sanao and thulobuwa or thulao, respectively.

There is a reciprocal relationship between a man’s parents and his wife’s parents. These affinal kins of the first ascending generation are classed together and addressed by classificatory terms, samdhi and samdhini, distinction being made on the basis of sex.

Kinship terms are not only same for siblings and cousins but also for the spouses of the cousins. Thus, a person would terminologically class the children of the siblings of either parent with his or her own siblings. Thus, daju or dai are the terms used to designate elder or older male sibling or elder parallel or cross cousin of the ego. An elder or older female sibling or elder female
parallel or cross cousin of the ego is designated as didi. Boini is used to designate younger female sibling or younger parallel or cross cousin of the ego. Correspondingly, the spouses of the daju, bhai, didi and boini are referred to as bhauju, bhaibowari, bhinaju and boini jowai, respectively.

A distinction is made in the ego’s first descending generation, on the basis of the concerned relative’s sex. One’s own son is called chhoro or chhora and daughter is called chhori. Again, son of one’s own elder brother and younger brother is referred to as bhatijo and daughter is referred to as bhatiji. The term bhaniij is used to denote the sons of one’s own or relative sister and bhanji is used to denote daughters of one’s own or relative sister. The term mama is used to denote ego’s mother’s brother and maiju is used to denote mama’s wife.

After the birth of a child, it becomes possible to address one’s wife or husband as ‘so and so’s mother’ and ‘so and so’s father’, respectively. Thus, teknonymy is resorted to in the three villages as a reciprocal form of address.

The term bangsha refers to all consanguineal relations on the father’s side covering seven generations with whom genealogical relationship can be traced from a known ancestor. Among the Assamese Nepali’s, the paternal uncles with their
children, together form a bigger kinship group and are referred to by a broad term called *bangsha*. Ritual pollution during deaths or births of a kin member pervades the whole *bangsha* group, irrespective of spatial proximity or remoteness. Marriage puts an end to a *bangsha* relationship with a married daughter.

**KINSHIP AND THE VILLAGE COMMUNITY**

Family is the smallest kin based unit among the Assamese Nepalis of all the three study villages. The other kin based groups are lineage (*kul*) and clan (*gotra*). All the members address one another with different kinship terms. Many of the families of the villages are related to one another through blood or through marriage. They think that they are the descendants of different ancestors who happened to be patrilineally related to one another in addition to this established kin links among some of the households of the villages. In any event or occasion such as marriage, death, funeral, they help one another. They also extend help to those who are not their kinsmen. Behaviour pattern and interpersonal relations among them take place within a framework of kinship structure. Their behaviour pattern and interpersonal relationship is frank, intimate and informal. They visit other’s household during any time for chatting, gossiping, etc.
Most of the villagers feel about every household of the villages as their own house. The children of the respective villages move freely from one house to another without any permission or restriction. The women also move other's houses at any time for gossiping or to help in different feminine activities like transplanting paddy seedlings, husking, etc. Likewise, different kinds of informal inter-household relationship are observed among them.

They also help one another in various economic activities, especially in agricultural works. They help one another in ploughing, reaping, threshing, etc. Borrowing of agricultural implements such as plough, yoke, leveller, etc. is a common feature among them.

Some events such as marriage, death, etc. are the best opportunity to observe the role of kinship among the Assamese Nepalis. When marriage is held in a family, the villagers extend help to that family.

When a person suffers from illness, all villagers come to his house and extend all possible help if necessary. When a person dies, all the villagers irrespective of their kin come to the deceased's house and take part in the funeral rites. The whole community of the respective villages do not take meal on that day. They come to participate in the post funeral rituals and feast. The villagers come to such feast even without being invited.
MARRIAGE

The Assamese Nepalis regard marriage as a religious sacrament. A married couple is the union of a male and a female sanctified by sacred ceremony comprising of some other rituals, the *hom* (sacrificial fire) in the presence of which the rituals sanctification is performed. Usually an Assamese Nepali marries between the age of 18 and 20 years. Of course, earlier child marriage was also practised in the study villages. But now they do not practise child marriage due to some causes such as spread of education, constitutional laws, etc. An Assamese Nepali girl is married off in her teens. Table 22 shows that nearly 22.22 per cent of the married men of Hirabari and 20.00 per cent of Kiringbori village were married between the age groups of 22-27 and 28-33 years, respectively. Again, in Tekeliakur Grant 16.35 per cent of men were married in the age group of 22-27 years. The age at marriage in Kiringbori is slightly higher than the other two villages. In the case of women, 18.37 per cent in Hirabari, 28.93 per cent in Kiringbori and 23.84 per cent in Tekeliakur Grant were married between 22 and 27 years. Thus, more than 24.86 per cent were married in their appropriate age.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Total No. of Person</th>
<th>No. of Persons</th>
<th>Age at Marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hirabari</td>
<td>45 49</td>
<td>(46.67%)</td>
<td>(42.86%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiringbori</td>
<td>150 159</td>
<td>(52.0%)</td>
<td>(49.05%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TK Grant</td>
<td>367 323</td>
<td>(37.87%)</td>
<td>(43.03%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>562 531</td>
<td>(42.33%)</td>
<td>(44.82%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 22: AGE AT MARRIAGE AMONG THE VILLAGERS OF THE STUDY VILLAGES
The informants opine that the age of marriage of both the sexes is gradually increasing in all the three study villages. The main causes are the spread of education, improvement of socio-economic condition and influence of other non-Nepali communities.

Ethically, the wife should be always younger than the husband. Due to the complete ignorance of age, no definite differences or demarcation of age could be ascertained. However, it seems that the difference has been normally between three and fifteen years.

Marriages are either arranged by the parties (magi bihe or bibah) themselves or by the elders. Marriage by elopement or love marriage (chori bihe or prem bibah) is higher in Kiringbori than in Hirabari and Tekeliakur Grant. About 80 per cent of the marriages in the study villages have arranged by elders and 20 per cent of the marriages have arranged by the parties themselves.

According to Lok Bahadur Bhattarai (aged 50 years) of Kiringbori, his marriage was arranged by his father and uncle. They went to Udalguri (a small township) and after thorough search finally found out a bride named Bhubaneswari Devi for
him. When they found the horoscopes of both of them matching, they fixed a date with the girl’s father. Then they arranged the dates of *janai supari dharne*³, *patra puraune*⁴ and marriage. In this case, Bhubaneswari Devi was not given the chance to give her consent. Her parents arranged the marriage. Marriages are generally arranged between parties of equal economic condition⁵.

Premarital sex relations are strongly disapproved in the community; caste endogamy is the general rule of contracting marriage in the Assamese Nepali society. However, rigid adherence to caste endogamy has become flexible nowadays.

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³. On an auspicious day, the guardians of the bride come to the bridegroom’s house and offer sacred thread and areca nut and betel leaf giving word not to break the promise. It is an engagement of the first step of arranged marriage.
⁴. It is a ring-ceremony and second step of marriage ceremony.
⁵. The details of Assamese Nepali marriage ceremony and associate beliefs and practices have been discussed in Chapter VI.
Table 23 shows the number of women from the study villages married to men from other villages and areas and women brought to the study villages from other villages and areas through marriage. This table also shows the number of villages and areas linked through marriage to the study villages. The Assamese Nepalis of the study villages prefer to establish marital ties with closely situated villages because that makes possible to keep close and frequent contact with their affinal relations. It is to be noted here that in the case of all the study villages, some marriages have been established within the village itself. It is evident from the table that 1 (4.35%) in Hirabari, 8 (8.08%) in Kiringbitori and 7 (4.14%) marriages in Tekeliakur Grant have been performed between men and women belonging to the same village.

To the Assamese Nepalis of the study villages their own village people are their 'effective kin'\(^6\). The strength of ties, which are maintained with extra local kin varies according to the nature of the situation and from person to person. There is a fair amount of choice with regard to interactions with extra-local kin excepting for 'priority kin'\(^7\) such as wife's parents, wife's brothers or mother's brothers.

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7. “Members of the individual family and kinsfolk closely related to it, particularly parents of the spouses” (Piddington 1961: 15).
### TABLE 23: ASSAMESE NEPALI WOMEN MARRIED AWAY TO OTHER VILLAGES AND WOMEN BROUGHT THROUGH MARRIAGE TO THE STUDY VILLAGES.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance from the study Vill. (in kms)</th>
<th>Number of villages linked through marriage</th>
<th>No. of women married away from the study village</th>
<th>No. of women brought from other villages to the std. village</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hirabari</td>
<td>Kiringburi TK</td>
<td>Hirabari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4 (16.67%)</td>
<td>5 (9.43%)</td>
<td>6 (9.37%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-16</td>
<td>2 (8.33%)</td>
<td>2 (3.77%)</td>
<td>4 (6.25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>2 (8.33%)</td>
<td>6 (3.77%)</td>
<td>1 (1.56%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>4 (16.67%)</td>
<td>5 (9.43%)</td>
<td>10 (15.62%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21+</td>
<td>12 (50.00%)</td>
<td>35 (66.04%)</td>
<td>43 (67.19%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within the Village</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>24 (100.00%)</td>
<td>543 (100.00%)</td>
<td>64 (100.00%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE

As the Assamese Nepalis consider marriage to be a religious sacrament, dissolution of marriage is not easy. Only a case of divorce has been found in one of the three study villages.

Shri Om Prashad Sirpali (aged 30 years) of village Kiringbori, married Anju Devi (aged 22 years) from Lanka of Karbi – Anglong District in 2004. Om Prakash has widow mother and two younger brothers. After one year of his marriage, his widow mother began to torture his wife. A severe conflict took place between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law on the ground that the latter is inauspicious i.e. she has no good qualities and is infertile. Later on, Om Prakash lived separately with his wife. Still, his widow mother did not stop quarrelling with her daughter-in-law. Finally, she went to her parents’ house. She refused to come back to her husband’s house and at last dissolution of the marriage has taken place in 2008 finding no way to settle the dispute between them. Om Prakash has submitted a divorce paper (chhor patra) to his parents-in-law.

It may be mentioned here that he has not paid any compensation to her because the village elders settled the case according to the consent of both sides.

Generally, incompatibility between husband and wife, conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, conflicts between sisters-in-law and between married brothers lead to the dissolution of marriage.