CHAPTER VI
Cultural Background of Kin Relationship

Each Culture has philosophy of its own, which forms the core of that respective culture. Prof. N.K. Bose states it as "Beneath the outer frame work of each culture there lies a body of beliefs and sentiments which is responsible for the particular manifestation of culture. They do no form part of any specific trait but working beneath many traits they give to each culture a character of its own. Such a body of ideas and sentiments grow out of life's philosophy and it is consequently conditioned by the needs and aspiration of each particular age".¹

The idea expressed in this chapter is the expected norms and values, i.e. cultural aspect of Hindu way of life. The norms and values expressed through inter-relationship and interaction of each human behaviour. "The 'tatwa' (Theory) of Hindu Darsan (Philosophy) forms the core of Hindu Social cultural way of life".²

There is a cycle of human life i.e. Jibanchakra. Jiba means creature with life. The Hindu philosophy suggests that 'manush' (Man) is the supreme creation. It also says that atma (Soul) for the first time appears in the form of any lowly creature and then after 84 lakhs (84 hundred thousand)

¹ Bose, N.K. 1929, Cultural Anthropology, PP. 32-33.
gets the 'manush janma' (human life). Each Jibah is thought to be originated from Brahma (Centre of creation), so also the 'manush' (human being). The human being is subjected to Samskar (refinement) through Karma (performance) and achieves 'moksha' (salvation). According to Hindu concept the sharir (body) consists of two parts sthula (gross) and suksma (subtle). At the time of death, the gross part is burnt and subtle one of the person is released from the gross part. The subtle body contains the atma (soul). This atma after release from the gross body is thought to join another suitable gross body and it is reborn. This is punorjanma (re-birth/reincarnation). The moksha is the return of the atma (soul) to the Brahma (Centre of origin). Thus, karma, Samskar and punorjanam are very much interrelated. The performing of Samskar is the dharm (principle) not only for the Hindu but, for a 'manush' (Man). Here dharm does not mean religion but principles of life. This structure is the frame work for a particular individual for that particular birth.

However, the philosophy behind the birth of an individual i.e. a kin in the family is a concept and is contextually gathered by prolonged stay among the people under study. The domestic bond such as the family is the smallest unit where the above mentioned entire ideology operated and a kin is born. The family exists on the bond of kinship. The basis of kinship among the Hindus is therefore related to family members (only kin).

In anthropology the different rites associated to marriage, birth and death are expressed by the term 'rites of passage'.

Among the Hindus the rites of passage is divided in two parts.
1. Those related to this world - Eyyik
2. Those related to other world - Paroloukik
This worldly rites are ten in number and known as Dasakarma. The other worldly rite is one i.e. Sradha. The Dashakarma and Sradha are known as Samskar. These are performed for the refinement of body and soul. Samskar means refinement, performance of which finally promotes the soul to the hierarchic order in the next birth. These samskar have been discussed in detail in chapter-V. Here only those samskar are dealt which portrays the cultural aspect of the kin relationship.

According to Manu "the ritual of Sradha (funeral rite) goes the unity of four generation and in the choice of mate is the unity of three". In the rule of Sapinda exogamy the paternal and maternal kin are equally valued. The paternal kin, Jnatis perform all the ritual attached to marriage, birth and death since they belong to Sagotra, Skulya, akie bongsa. Regarding the maternal kin, the mama (mother's brother) plays a great role in performing ritual associated to birth and death of sister's son and daughter. The Anna-prasan. (rice feeding ceremony) of the child is performed by the mama (mother's brother). Similarly when mama dies his bhagne and bhagni (sister's son and daughter) has to perform some ritual during the Sradha or on the fourth day of the mourning period. So also when bhagni (sister) and bhognipati (sister's husband) dies; on the tenth day after bathing and shaving, her (sister's) children are supposed to wear the new cloth (dhoti) received from their mama. This norms are seen in case of a Brahman. Among the Bagdi. the mama holds a very important position during the Sradh. When mama or mani (mother's brother/ wife) dies his bhagne and bhagni (sister's son and daughter) offer annajal (rice and water) to them and observe Chunch (pollutary restriction) for three days. They also perform rituals associated to Sradha after 7(F)/9(M) days. So also when bhagne and bhagni (sister's son and daughter) dies mama (mother's brother) observe Chunch for 7(F)/9(M) days. These are some example of paternal and maternal kin associated with activities to Sradha (death rite). This shows the cultural values of respective kin.
There are different reasons for performing various samskars. The Brahman cannot offer water to the god unless the Upānayan (holy thread) ceremony is performed. Secondly, without Upānayan a Brahman cannot marry. Nowadays some Brahmins cannot afford to perform different samskar at different times hence during Biye (marriage); Upānayan ceremony is performed. The Brahman think that the rite Sadh added by Panchamrita is performed to fulfill the desire for delicious food of the pregnant woman. It is believed that by fulfilling this desire, a male child would be born. The worship of goddess Sasthi is done for the well-being of the child. A Brahman purohit (priest) cannot perform puja unless Chudakaran and Karna-vedh ceremony is performed. Unless a Brahman is given Hāte khādi he is unable to start his education. This ceremony is also known as Vidyarambha. This is to worship goddess Saraswati (God of learning) and to seek her blessing. Likewise without Annaprasan a child is not supposed to have solid food.

Many of these above mentioned samskars are not performed by lower Bagdi caste. They do not perform Panchamrita, Namakaran, Vidyarambha, Upānayan, Simantonnayan, Jata Karma and Niskraman. The Bagdi at the time of pregnancy except the Sadh rite do not perform any samskar. The Sadh is done only for the first issue. This ceremony is performed for the normal delivery of the child and to make all the deījī known about the arrival of one additional member in the family. They perform the Karna-vedh ceremony only among the male child. They pierce only one ear. But now-a-days all the Bagdi boys are not seen to perform Karna-vedh. This is becoming obsolete. The Annaprasan ceremony is performed by the Bagdi. It is not necessary to call all the deījī. The number of gathering of people depends on economic status. Most are seen to offer rice in front of goddess Kali or Lord Siva and put prasad (food offered to god) into the child's mouth. All this above mentioned samskars are associated with the living body.
The Samskar linked with death are:

Sradha, Bathsarik, Parba Sradha (Tarpan) and bidhi-Sradha.

The Sradha is performed by the eldest son of a person. But in absence of eldest son it is the right of youngest son. However, if the person does not have a son, it is the right of any nearest jnati like bhai (brother) bhai-po (brother's son) to perform the Sradha rite. It is thought that if the person performing the rite makes a series of offering in Sradha rituals then the subtle body of the deceased person is free and would be able to rejoin with the body of the purba-purush (ancestor). This is also believed by the lower Bagdi castes. Further, on the completion of one year the Batsarik Sradha is performed, on the same tithi (day according to almanac) of the previous Sradha. This rite is for the peace and satiety of the deceased soul. Tarpan is another associated rite performed on the Mahalaya (the new moon day, prior to Durgapuja, based on almanac). It is to offer water to all the nearest dead relatives. They may be attiya, jnati and kutus. The bidhi-sradha is performed on auspicious rites like Annaprasan (rice feeding ceremony) Biye (marriage) and Paite or Upanayan (sacred thread). Here the ancestors are once again worshipped and remembered. The above mentioned rites are not found among the Bagdi except Sradha. They believe that after the Sradha ceremony, the atma (soul) is released and rejoin the purba purush (ancestor). However, the Samskars are less performed by the Bagdi. This may be due to low economic status which do not allow them to perform such elaborate and expensive ceremonies secondly it may be due to their ignorance of Hindu Sastra.

However, Hindu philosophy also suggests some more reasons for discrimination in the performance of Samskar between the Brahman and the lower Bagdi caste. The Hindu community is broadly divided into four varna: Sudra, Vaisya, Kshatriya and Brahman. As per the properties different varnas are assigned with particular type of job as;
Sudra to work as manual labourer, Vaisya - to do business, Kshatriya - to achieve power i.e. kingship and Brahman - to lay the step to Brahma or Moksha. These properties entitle different community to perform the Samskar based on knowledge, need and above all the economic status. These all narrate and explain the indigenous account of cultural aspect of kinship relationship expressed through Samskar.

However, this few mentioned belief and custom portrays the structure of the society and the cultural aspect of the people under study. Moreover, these are followed by the individuals. These individuals are no less than 'Kin'. Hence kinship relationship forms an important aspect in the family system.

Then again scriptual meaning of some kinship terms of the people under study designate the behavioural aspect of the person concerned, his position and function in the family and finally portrays the cultural aspect of the community to which he belongs. Ultimately the cultural background of the kinship term may be analysed from their usages and meaning specially from those terms used in sadhu bhasa (Genteel language) as these are mostly of Sanskritic origin. They depict the cultural background of the people under study. The terms also represent the authority, duty and nature of the person.

The baba (father) is referred as pita, tata and janaka. Janaka means, giver of birth. He is also referred as annadata, giver of food, vidyadata-giver of knowledge. Ma (mother) is also referred as mata, Jnanadatri, prasuti, Prasabini, garbhodharini, she is the giver of birth, so called garbhodharini and janani. Thakurdada (father's father) is also pitamah, indicating pita, i.e. father and maha is
great, hence a compound term pitamaha. Similarly, mother's father is matamaha. Father's mother is pitamahi and mother's mother is matamahi. All these are of Sanskrit origin. Moreover, the prefix of pita/mata indicates the pitrikul (father's clan)/matrikul (mother's clan). The word maha/mahi depicts the sex of the individual as well as the generation he/she belongs. Therefore, the meaning of each term represents the quantum of respect and love. If one knows the meaning, the term itself depicts the relations of the person.

The son is meant as putra he who saves one from hell; dayada, he who receives the father's wealth, dhan bahak-carrier of the wealth. The daughter is kanya, means she who desires a husband. The son is also called atmaja and daughter as atmaaja, means born from one's own self. Her husband is jamata and son's wife is badhu. The husband is said to be karta which means master, pati also master, priya – one who is beloved. swami master or lord or respected and loved same as the god. The wife is also the priyaa, jaya – child bearer, patni and stri. Therefore, from these a person and his expected behaviour, can be analyzed.

The brothers and sisters are said as sagarbha-born of the same womb. All the brothers are referred as Sahodar and sisters as sahodara as they are born of the same udar i.e. womb. This demarkates them from cousin brothers and sisters.

Again some term denotes not only one particular person but the whole lot. Stri is not only used for one's wife but also all the female members who have attained adulthood; similarly, purush for all the male. Putra, Kanya denotes son and daughter, but colloquial term chele, meye not only depicts one's own son or daughter but represent in general any boy or girl. Therefore, all these sanskrit terms express the identity, behaviour and function of an individual i.e. of a kin.
However, among the Bagdi the sanskritic terms are not used. The cultural background of the term depicting the behavioural aspect amongst the Bagdi is analysed from the respective role analysis of the people under study, which has been discussed in chapter IV. The Bagdi say that they have adopted the term from the higher caste surrounding them. They often do not know the scriptural meaning of term they use. But some of the terms such as mag (wife), bap (father), bonai (sister’s husband), are used by the Bagdi only, and is absent among the Brahman. This addition of the term express their recognition and identity as a separate caste altogether. Moreover, the Bagdi now a days are exposed to the higher caste and few of their children going to school are seen to use some sanskritic, term as pita, mata, bhogini; and also bhognipati to refer sister’s husband instead of bonai. They actually do not know whether they are Sanskrit terms or Bengali, and their proper meaning. They use only by hearing from the other castes. This shows the adapting nature and steps towards modernization.

Therefore, the above discussion portrays the cultural background of kinship relationship. This cultural background can be depicted from the various Hindu Samskar, customs and the meaning and usages of the kinship terms. Each and every samskar to be performed has a reason and explanation, showing the cultural and behavioural pattern of the community under study. Performance of these samskar shows the function of the respective kin. Moreover, each and every samskar possesses logic behind the Hindu Sastra. The structure of the society can also be understood from the cultural analysis of the samskar. The cultural background of the meaning of the terms depicts the rights, duties and identity of each and every member in the family. Therefore, the cultural background of kin relationship can be understood from the scriptural Hindu Philosophy of way of life, norms and values expressed through interaction and inter relationship of each human behaviour, various samskar associates to life cycle rites, and some kinship terms which designate the positional, functional and behavioural aspect of the people under study.
It has been seen that the above mentioned facts of life is performed less frequently by the Bagdi than the Brahman. This is due to their ignorance to Hindu Sastra, and the economic instability which forces them to be left behind even if some are aware of. The cultural background gives the structure of the society in picture.