Chapter IX - Gotra conceptions as moulded by popular beliefs
Section I - Gotradevis conceived as ruling deities of families:

1. The Skandapurana acquaints us with gotradevis who are female goddesses presiding over gotras, regarded as kulas. These female deities overshadow the male Rishi founders of gotras and indicate the influence of non-Aryan matriarchy remoulding the nature of gotra belief. They owe their origin to the Saktta cult containing latent traces of a matriarchal culture and pointing to non-Vedic sources.

1 - Skanda, Dharmaranyakhanda of the Brahmakhanda, IX. 106-107 — gotrān prati tathaikaikā sthāpitā yogini tadā. yasya gotrasya yā saktih rakṣaṇe pālane kṣamā sa tasya kuladevīti sāksāt tatra vabhūva ha.

2 - See pp. 11 - 14, The history of Aryan rule in India, E. B. Havell; R. P. Chanda holds that 'mother-kin was at one time universal among Indo-Aryans of the outer belt and led to the growth of Saktism among them', p. 156, The Indo-Aryan races, pt. I.

3 - Saktism has a non-Vedic appearance; Pārvati, the principal form of Sakti, is not known to the Rigveda; vide p. 132, Ghate's lectures on Rigveda; the conception of Durgā-Kāli has been traced to the primitive cult of Mother Earth; see p. 230, Pre-Aryan elements in Hinduism, Atul K. Sur, The Calcutta Review, May, 1931; though of non-Aryan origin, the cult of Mother Earth seems to be known to the early Indo-Aryans; see pp. 96-97, ch. V, The origin and development of religion in Vedic literature, P. S. Deshmukh.
The introduction of Devis in the gotra system may be well explained by the infiltration of Saktism in Aryan faith. That the cult of Sakti is foreign to the original religious beliefs of the Aryans is proved by the non-Aryan character of its followers, viz., the Kiratas, Pulindas and Savaras. The Gotra-devis appear to be the result of the merging of Aryan gotra tradition and non-Aryan Saktta faith.

1 - According to Payne, the origin of Saktism in Bengal is traceable to the Dravidian and Mongolian peoples; vide p. 125, ch. VI, sec. VIII, The religions of India, A. P. Karmarkar, vol. I; Sarat Chandra Ray has pointed out that the cult of Chandi may have originated from that of Chandi prevailing among the Oraons; vide p. 74, Bāṅgālīra itihāsa, Itihāsera gorāra kathā.

2 - Vide Viṣṇuparvan of the Khila-Harivaṃśa-parvan, 3. 7 --- Sāvaraih Varvaraih chaiva Pulindaiah cha supūjitā ...; also p. 122, ch. 39, Devipurāṇam --- Pulinda-Sāvarādiṣu ... vāmāchāreṇa siddhidā; in this connection see p. 467, ch. XIX, sec. on minor religious sects, The age of imperial unity; Durgā is called Vana-Durgā in the Visva-sāra tantra, see pp. 732 - 733, sl. 7, Tantrasārah; the connection of Vana-Durgā with aborigines may be guessed.
Some of the names of the Gotradevis are found to be the same as those of Durgā - Chandi, as mentioned by the Devipurāṇa. These are Chāmuṇḍa, Bhadrakāli, Bhadri (Bhadra), Mātaṅgi, Māhesi etc. The identity of names is a clear evidence of the fact that the Gotradevis are modifications of the goddess Durgā.

It is to be noticed that the Gotradevis are located in certain areas and connected with different gotra names. Their names differ according to localities, though the same gotra name may be attached to them. For examples:

(i) The inhabitants of Kanṭavādi village have affiliation to the Eusa gotra and their Gotradevi is Chachāyi, while Yaksini is the Gotradevi of the dwellers of Bodhani village, affiliated to the same gotra.

1 - Skanda, op. cit., IX. 108 - 111 ; XXI. 1 - 4.
2 - Devipurāṇam, ch. 16, p. 64.
3, 4 - Ibid.
5 - Ibid, ch. 17, p. 67.
6 - Ibid, ch. 37, p. 112.
7 - Skanda, op. cit., XXXIX. 90 - 91.
8 - This gotra may have its origin from Eusa of the Visvāmitra line; see Rām I. 32. 1 - 3 ; 34. 6.
9 - Skanda, op. cit., XXXIX. 226 - 228.
The residents of Anandiya village, who are affiliated to the Bhāradvāja gotra, owe allegiance to Chachāyī, but those of the Varaliya village having the same gotra affiliation pay homage to Yakṣini.

We may suppose that the Gotradevis are regional cult objects.

The same gotra may be associated with different Devis and the pravara may vary. If Chāmundā be the Gotradevi, the pravara of Kāśyapa gotra would be Kāśyapa Āvatsāra Naidhruva; but, when the Gotradevi is Jñānajā, the pravara of the same gotra would be Kāśyapa Āvatsāra Raibhya. The difference of localities may be responsible for the variation of the pravaras.

Like the Gotradevis, designated as Yoginis, the guardian-goddesses attached to kulas are called Kula-yoginis in the Sāktānandatarangini; the latter dwell in kula-vṛkṣas or trees deemed as auspicious for kulas. These Yoginis governing

1 - Skanda, op. cit., XXXIX. 194 - 195.
2 - Skanda, op. cit., XXXIX. 248 - 249.
3 - Skanda, op. cit., XXI. 20.
4 - Skanda, op. cit., XXI. 6.
5 - Skanda, op. cit., IX. 106.
7 - The Sākta mythology reports the existence of Yoginis as emanations of the female energy; the Kālikāpurāṇa speaks of eight Yoginis; see Kālikāpurāṇa, 61. 38 - 40.
gotras or kulas seem to be matriarchal cult objects, imported into the patriarchal gotra or kula tradition.

Section II - Gotradevi and ḍanāmva:

The epithet 'ḍanāmva', ascribed to a female deity, indicates 'the Mother-goddess, attached to the gaṇa'.

1 Durgā is known as 'ḍanāmvikā', i.e., the Mother-goddess who leads her gaṇa.

2 The Śivapurāṇa seems to be conversant with a class of female deities, called 'ḍanāmva'. They preside over gaṇas and bear much resemblance to the gotradevis.

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1 - Vide Kūrma I. 12. 158; Durgā is conceived as the Mother-goddess who guides her gaṇas; see p. 4, sūs. 53 - 54, Mārkaṇḍeẏā Chandī, Devī-māhātmye Mahiṣāsura-sainya-vadhah; also Saurapurāṇa, ch. 8, p. 19; the epithet 'Gaṇeśvarī' is given to Gangā; see Brp II. 12. 57 - 60.

2 - Śivapurāṇa, Vāyaviya Samhitā, Uttarabhāga, 23. 61 --- Jyesthā-ḍanāmva-yormadhye Mahāmoṭīṁ samarchhayet; 23. 62 --- ḍanāmva-Chandayormadhye devīṁ Durgāṁ prapūjayet.
The conception of Čanāmvā appears to be a symbolical representation of the matriarchal rule in a primitive social order and may be regarded as an instance of peculiar blending of the Vedic gāṇa tradition and popular Sākta beliefs.

Section III - The bearing of the gāṇa-gotra tradition upon the cult of Gaṅesā:

It is not very difficult to trace a connection between the popular cult of Gaṅesā and the gāṇa-gotra tradition going back to the Vedic age.

The Vedic clan organisation is implied by the words 'gāṇa' and 'gotra' and it is quite probable that the lords of clans are called gaṇapatis in Vedic literature. The celestial gāṇas are conceived after their earthly parallels and individual deities have obtained the epithet 'gaṇapati'. As the leader of heavenly bands, Brahmaṇaṇaspati is called 'gaṇapati' and

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1 - The matriarchal tradition is specially revealed by the Mātaras or the maternal manifestations of Sākti; the Mahānirvāṇatantra speaks of sixteen Mātaras, 13. 145; the Sivapurāṇa informs us of seven Mātaras, see Sivapurāṇa, op. cit., 24. 68 - 69.

2 - Rv II. 23. 1.
the gāṇapatya of Rudra is asserted. Somewhat later the epithet 'Ganesvara' is ascribed to Vināyaka Vighnesvara, the god of troubles.

In the Purāṇas any attendant of Mahēśvara Śiva is called 'ganesvara'. But, Vighnesvara, who leads a gana of his pārasadas and pārśadīs, is known by this epithet more than any other divinity.

The cult of Gāṇesa has won popularity with the passage of time. His origin is due to a synthesis of the Vedic gana tradition and popular beliefs relating to Vighnesvara.

Section IV - Gotras of popular origin:

Some of the gotras seem to be of popular origin. As the gotra affiliation is extended to all sections of people, they begin to remodel and reshape the gotras and pravaras of the Vedic tradition and import new names into the gotra system. Even names of Vedic deities or indigenous cult objects are adopted as gotras. We may mention a few of such instances.

1 - Vide VS 11. 15.
2 - Vide Bodhāyana Gṛihya-śeṣa Sūtra III. 10. 1-9; see also pp. xiii - xiv, Introduction, Selections from the Baudhāyana Gṛhyaparīśiṣṭa Sūtra.
3 - See Rūrma I. 15. 58 - 60.
4 - Vide Bodhāyana Gṛihya-śeṣa Sūtra III. 10. 6.
The Brahmārshi gotra of Bengali Kayasthas with 'Deva' surname is perhaps the name of Brahmā, conceived as a Rishi.

The Adi or Adya gotra of a section of Bengali Vaidyas with 'Sena' surname probably refers to the same divinity.

Another popular gotra of Bengal is Visnu. The pravara, assigned to it, contains the names of Visnu, Vridhhi and Kaurava. There is a probable relation between Visnu gotra and Visnu the deity.

The Gorakṣaśāmhitā states that the gotra of the varṇa-Yogi (Yoogi caste) is Śiva and the pravara, attached to it, consists of the names of Śiva, Sambhu and Hara. It is to be noted that according to a current belief all male members of the Yoogi caste are affiliated to the Śiva gotra and all females of this caste belong to the Kāśyapa gotra.

1 - Vide p. 250, Kāyastha Purāṇa.
3 - Ibid, p. 78.
4 - See pp. 3 - 4, ch. I, pt. I, Nātha Sampradāyera Itihāsa, Darśāna o Sādhanapraṇālī, Kalyani Mallik; the surname of the Yogi (Yoogi) caste is Nātha; the Yogis appear to be an instance of transformation of a religious sect into a caste.
5 - See p. 216, Samvandha-nirṇaya, op. cit.; like the Yogīs of Bengal, the Jats believe in their origin from Śiva; see p. 136, Mother right in India.
Kalki or Kalkisá or Kalviṣa (one of the incarnations of Viṣṇu?) is known to be the gotra of Bengali Kāyasthas with 'Guha' (Goha) surname. The pravara, attached to this gotra, consists of the names of Kalka, Kaśyapa and Nāidhrūva.

The Devarāja or Indrarāja gotra, found among certain Bengali castes, seems to be connected with the Vedic god Indra. The pravara of this gotra contains the names of Devarāja, Asvaththa (a tree totem?), Devala and Asita.

The gotra of a section of Bengali Kāyasthas with 'Sena' surname is Vāsuki. The pravara of this gotra consists of the names of Akṣobhya, Ananta and Vāsuki. The emergence of this gotra name may be traced to the Nāga god Vāsuki.

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1 - See p. 253, Kāyastha Purāṇa.
2 - See p. 56, Samvandha-nirṇaya, op. cit.
3 - A section of Kāṃsavaṇiks of Bengal is found to be affiliated to the Indrarāja gotra.
4 - See p. 249, Kāyastha Purāṇa.
5 - See p. 78, Samvandha-nirṇaya, op. cit.; the name of Akṣobhya seems to be of Buddhist origin, see p. 312, History of Indian literature, vol. II, sec. on Mahāyāna Sūtras.
6 - Ananta is the name of a Nāga god; see p. 473, sec. on Nāga or Serpent worship, ch. XIX, The age of imperial unity.
Sankalina, the gotra of a section of Bengali Kayasthas with 'Ghosa' surname, seems to have its origin from the Sukalin group of Pitaras, related to the Sudras.

Samkarṣaṇa (Valarāma) is the gotra of a section of Pāśchātya Vaidika Brāhmaṇas of Bengal. We are also informed of the Valarāma gotra of a section of Laukika Brāhmaṇas of Orissa, engaged in cultivation. Their affiliation to the gotra of Valarāma may be due to the connection between their occupation and the Purānic representation of Valarāma as one whose symbol is the plough.


2 - Vide Manu III. 197 — śūdrāṇāntu Sukālinah.

3 - See pp. 205 - 206, Gauḍe Brāhmaṇa, Mahima Chandra Mazumdar.


5 - Vide Nārma I. 24, 71 - 72.
Section V - Gotra and totemism

Some gotras of regional origin seem to be associated with totemic beliefs.

The totemic character of gotras of a few Bengali castes is apparent. We may take into notice such gotras as Hamsala or Hamsa Rishi, Aranya Rishi, Chandra Rishi, Vasuki etc. These refer to totems.

The transformation of Hamsa (swan), Aranya (thicket), Chandra (moon), Vasuki (a serpent god) into Rishis or gotras clearly sets before our vision the tactful way of Aryanising non-Vedic cult objects.

The totemic nature of such gotras as Saga Rishi (herb), Sukapaksi (parrot), held in belief by certain castes of the Bankura district is no less spectacular.

The gotra of Tentule Vagdis, a Bengali caste, is Tentulanandana (son of tamarind) and Harkata (crab) is the gotra of a section of Gopas of Bengal. These seem to be of totemic origin.

1 - See p. 255, Kāyastha Purāṇa.
2 - Ibid, p. 252.
3 - Ibid, p. 251.
4 - Ibid, p. 249.
6 - Ibid, p. 62.
7 - Ibid, p. 77.
8 - Ibid, p. 63.
It is to be marked that a totem emerges as a Riṣi or a Vedic Riṣi obtains a totemic character. For examples, Sāndilya is regarded as a 'pākṣi' (bird), and Hamsa (swan) is taken to be a Riṣi or a Devī (goddess).

The castes and tribes of Southern India supply us a large number of totems, regarded as gotras. Much interest is created by the Arisana gotram, to which is affiliated a sept of the Kuruvas. That Arisana (turmeric) is a totem name is apparent from the taboo upon its use, formerly prevailing among the same section of Kuruvas believing in its inviolability. The turmeric totem is elevated to the position of gotra and thus Aryanised.

1 = Ibid, p. 63.
2 = Govardhanera Kārikā, p. 121, sl. 318; also footnote, p.122.
3 = E. Thurston has borrowed the accounts of Arisana gotram from H.A. Stuart's report ; see p. 141, Castes and tribes of Southern India, vol. IV; J.G. Frazer depends upon Thurston in his accounts of the same ; see pp.245,269-270, Totemism and exogamy, vol. II, ch. X ; it is presumable that turmeric as a cult object has been introduced into Aryan society by the non-Aryan neighbours ; see p. 74, Bāngālīra Itiḥāsa, Itihāsera gorāra kathā.
The instances of totemic gotra as cited by us show their regional and non-Vedic character and origin from totems which are regarded as objects of veneration by different sections of people. Sometimes, totems are conceived as Riṣis and thus Aryanised in a very ingenious way. These point out the fact that totemistic groups are gradually brought under the gotra-Riṣi tradition.

Section VI – Totemic gotras in the list of Baudhāyana (?):

Some of the gotras of Baudhāyana's list have been recently interpreted as totemic in character by D. D. Kosambi, viz.,

1. Kusika, Kapinījala, Tittiri etc.

But, John Brough challenges this view and remarks that 'these names are no better evidence for totemism than English surnames such as Fox or Heron'.


2 - See p. 39, op. cit.; also Baudh VIII. 47 – Kāpiṇjalah.

3 - See p. 39, op. cit.; Baudhāyana mentions Taittiriya as a sept of Sūnaka gotra, see Baudh I. 9.

4 - See p. xvi, Preface, The early Brähmanical system of gotra and pravara.
What seems to be probable is that the Pravaraprāśa of Baudhāyana has preserved marks of non-Aryan influence upon the gotra system. A few gotra names rouse doubt regarding their Aryan character and appear to have non-Aryan sources. At least some of the gotra names indicate that non-Aryan totemism has influenced Aryan naming and given shape to Vedic clan-names.

We may mention the instances of Matsyagandha and Ajapāla. These gotras bear resemblance to the Rigvedic clan names 'Matsya' (fish) and 'Aja' (goat) and point to probable totemistic influence.

1 - Totemistic beliefs have been at present attributed to the proto-Australoid and Austro-Asiatic inhabitants of pre-Dravidian India; see p. 148, ch. VIII (S. K. Chatterji), book II, The history and culture of the Indian people, vol. I; J.G. Frazer says that 'exogamy, but not totemism, is practised by the Aryan race in India', see p. 330, Totemism and exogamy, op. cit., vol. II.

2 - See Baudh I. 9; also Rv VII. 18. 6 - Matsyāsah; see also p. 32, ch. IV, book I, Prehistoric ancient and Hindu India, R.D. Benerji.

3 - See Baudh VII. 44; also Rv VII.18. 19 - Ajāsah; see also p. 26, ch. III, book I, Prehistoric ancient and Hindu India.
Some gotra names, as enlisted by Baudhāyana, indicate a faint reference to what Pāṇini calls 'āṅka' or clan-mark.

We may point out those gotras which end with the word 'stambha' or 'tantu', suggesting their connection with some kind of 'āṅka' or clan-mark. The names of Agnistambha, Āpa-stambha, Chitratantu etc. may be due to some kind of clan-mark which is suggestive of totemic symbol (?)

It is interesting to note that the Atris and Parāśāras are classified as kṛiṣṇa (black), gaura (yellow), aruṇa (red), nīla (blue), śveta (white) and śyāma (dark-blue). The epithets signifying colours may obscurely indicate 'āṅka' or clan-mark of totemic (?) character. It is quite probable that these septs of gotras have been named according to the marks or symbols used by them.

1 - Pāṇ IV. 3. 127; the Kāśikā, commenting upon this Sūtra, gives illustrations of 'āṅka'; —— Vaidah āṅkah .. Gārgah āṅkah; the 'āṅka' of the Vidas and Gargas, regarded as gotras by Baudhāyana (I. 4; III. 19), may imply some kind of mark; thus, according to the Kāśikā, a gotra may bear 'āṅka' or some sort of mark; Kālidāsa mentions 'gotrāṅka' in connection with a song; see Meghadūtam II. 91; K.P. Jayaswal interprets 'āṅka' as the mark of a saṅgha government; see pp. 42 - 43, ch. V, pt. I, Hindu polity.
2 - Vide Baudh III. 17.
3 - Ibid VI. 31.
4 - Ibid V. 27.
5 - Ibid VIII. 48.
We may guess that totemistic beliefs are faintly traceable in some gotra names of Baudhāyana's list. But, totemism as a general feature of gotra-grouping is not detectable in the Pravaraprasāna.

Section VII - Popular interpretation of gotra and pravara:

As the Aryan gotra tradition holds sway over the masses, the archaic meanings of gotra and pravara are altered in course of time and these terms are interpreted in various ways.

A distinction between pravara and anupravara is made in certain epigraphic records. The term 'anupravara' is used to denote the R̄ṣi names, ending in the suffix 'vat', which, according to the Sūtra rule, are to be recited by the Adhvaryu priest; the term 'pravara' is used to signify the R̄ṣi names to be recited by the Hotri priest.

Sometimes, the first name of a three-R̄ṣi pravara is regarded as the gotra, the second as the pravara and the third as the anupravara.

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1 - See p. xvii, Preface, The early Brāhmanical system of gotra and pravara.
We are informed that a donee is affiliated to the Ranhita (Lohita) gotra of which the pravara consists of the names of Rohita (Lohita), (A)stäka and Visvāmitra and the anupravara contains the same names ending in the suffix 'vat' and arranged in the reverse order.

Another donee's gotra is Gautuma (Gautama), pravara is Autathya (Auchathya), and anupravara is Aṅgirasa. According to Āpastamva, the pravara of Auchathya Gautama gotra consists of the names of Aṅgirasa, Auchathya and Gautama. Inverting the order of names, the first, second and third names are respectively regarded in the copper plate inscription as the gotra, pravara and anupravara.

In a third instance, the donee's gotra is Vachohha (Vatsa), pravara is Aṅgirasa and anupravara is Bhargava (Bhārgava). The association of the names of Bhrigu and Aṅgiras with the same gotra contradicts the Sūtra rule.

These examples show how much the popular representations of gotra and pravara have deviated from the archaic forms of the same.

1 - See p. 297, EI XVIII, No. 29, Four Bhanja copper plate grants, J. 2 nd. plate, 1 st. side; see also Baudh VI. 32.
2 - See p. 175, EI XXIV, No. 23, Komanda copper plates of Nettabhanja, 2 nd. plate, 2 nd. side; see also Āp. Sr. S. 24. 6. 12 - 13.
3 - See p. 295, EI XVIII, op. cit., I. 2 nd. plate.
The Purānic accounts of gotra and prayara bear testimony to the popular deviations.

1. According to the Skandapurana, the prayara of Kusika gotra contains the names of Visvāmitra, Devarāta and Uddālaka, and that of the Kausika gotra contains the names of Visvāmitra, Atharvā and Bhāradvāja.

2. But, Baudhāyana holds that the prayara of Kusika gotra consists of the names of Vaisāvamitra, Daivarata and Audala. He makes no differentiation between the Kusika and Kausika gotras. The introduction of the names of Atharvan and Bhāradvāja in the prayara of the Kausika gotra is contradictory to the Sūtra rule.

The prayaras, ascribed to the gotras of certain Bengali castes, exhibit huge difference from their archaic forms.

3. The prayara of Gotama gotra, to which are affiliated some Bengali caste-groups, consists of the names of Gotama, Vasīṣṭha and Bārhaspatya. But, according to Baudhāyana, the second of the three names forms the prayara of the Vasīṣṭha gotra and the third is included in the prayara of the Bhāradvāja gotra.

1 - Skanda, Brahmākhaṇḍa, Dharmāranyakaḥaṇḍa, XXI.8 and XXI.24.
2 - Baudh VI. 31.
3 - See p. 77, Samvandha-nirṇaya, op. cit.
4 - Baudh VIII. 45.
5 - Ibid III. 17.
The pravara of Kāṇva gotra, as known to the Bengali priests, consists of the names of Kāṇva, Āśvattha and Devala. The second name of this three-Rishi pravara refers to a tree-totem and the third is included in the pravara of Saṇḍila gotra of Baudhāyana's list.

Analysing the pravaras, attached to the gotras of many Bengali subcastes, we detect that these are in most cases arbitrarily constructed according to the whims of the priestly sections. The pravara-Rishi, attached to one gotra, are often transferred to another and totem names find entrance into the pravaras.

1 - See p. 77, Samvandha-nirṇaya, op. cit.

2 - Baudh VII. 43.