CHAPTER – II

THE ISSUES IN THE PURUM DEBATE
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The intensification of the Purum debate can be traced back to the publication of the monograph "Structure and Sentiment, 1962" by Rodney Needham in which the author tries to explain social institutions in terms of structure and Purum were used as an illustration. The book is a critique of "Marriage, Authority and Final Causes: A Study of Unilateral Cross Cousin Marriage" by George C. Homan and David Schneider, which according to Needham was an attack on Claude Levi Strauss's "Les Structure Elementaires de la Parente". In his book - "Structure and Sentiment", Needham refutes Homans and Schneider's writing and says, ¹

"Homans and Schneider have misunderstood and misrepresented Levi-Strauss's views, and so far as their argument relates directly to these, it is wrong from beginning to end",

"They have preferred superficial statistical correlations in place of intensive analysis, forgetting that you cannot compare what you do not first understand; and"

"Their analysis is fundamentally not sociological at all but psychological, and inapt to the solution of sociological problem".

In the first chapter of the book the argument is on the terms "preferential" and "prescriptive" marriage and to which type of marriage rule does Levi-Strauss's argument apply?

According to Needham, Levi-Strauss's preferential type gives rise to "Complex Structure" and prescriptive type leads to "Elementary Structure". The term preferential means there is a choice between a number of persons whom one may marry; and prescriptive takes away the element of choice. It specifies a particular person standing in a certain relationship for marriage. If this person is not available then other persons standing in the same relationship real or classificatory can be married.

The term preferential, at times is very loosely used in Anthropological literature to designate both prescriptive and non-prescriptive rules of marriage. But Needham argues that Levi-Strauss used this word to designate marriage which are prescribed. In his book, Levi-Strauss made use of the word "Preferential Union" as "the obligation to marry within a group ..."; and
he says, "... these later are not preferential unions, because they cannot, in any group, constitute the exclusive or even preponderant rule of marriage, we would rather term them privileged unions, since they presuppose other modes of marriage, on to which they themselves grafted" - Needham rejoins Levi-Strauss and says that Levi-Strauss's use of 'preferential' shows without any possibility of doubt that he is dealing with "exclusive", i.e., prescriptive rules of marriage.

Homans and Schneider are of the opinion that Levi-Strauss's book is "... not on kinship behaviour in general but on preferential marriage", and they write that - "preferential marriage is the familiar fact that in many societies ego, besides being forbidden to marry certain women, is expected to marry one or more of a class of women standing in certain kin relationship to him"; and unilateral cross cousin marriage is said to exist "when, as between the two kinds of female cross-cousin-mother's brother's daughter and father's sister's daughter - the members of the society say that they prefer or expect ego to marry one of the two, but disapprove or at best tolerate his marriage with the other".

Needham argues that their position is quite ambiguous here and also in the opening words of their...
hypothesis - "Societies in which marriage is allowed or preferred with mother's brother's daughter but forbidden or disapproved with father's sister's daughter ...", which is a clear indication that they do not distinguish between preference and prescription although from their writings it is quite evident that the marriage rule under question is prescriptive. For instance, "... men of a certain lineage 'always' marrying women of another ..." is quite enough to show a prescriptive norm.

The second issue in the argument is with whom a marriage is prescribed. Levi-Strauss dealt with three types of cross-cousin marriage: (1) Bilateral; (2) Matrilateral, and (3) Patrilateral. Homans and Schneider's book is about the later two.

When Levi-Strauss discusses about marriage with "Mother's brother's daughter", he speaks about the ego's first-cousin as well as a member of a class otherwise defined which merely includes this ego. He maintains that the class of marriageable cross-cousins is determined by eliminating the class that is forbidden. If a first cousin is lacking than any other 'cousin' of the same category may substitute her. He says that relationship is established or perpetuated "between groups rather than individuals".
In this, Homans and Schneider seem to agree to some extent, particularly in defining the word 'cross-cousin'. Their hypothesis - "... deals with the immediate cross-cousins and has nothing to say about more distant ones, such as mother's brother's daughter's daughter". Again they write - "... the ideal system cannot be carried out, ... the men will marry classificatory cross-cousins". This implies that the cousin concerned in the societies under consideration is indeed the first cousin and that not to marry her is to "depart from the norm". But unlike Levi-Strauss they are interested in the sociological feature of linearity as a determinative factor in marriage preferences based on relations between individuals, not with corporate groups.

In the third phase the argument is on solidarity so as to show which type of marriage ensures better solidarity.
Fig. 1: Matrilateral System

Fig. 2: Patrilateral System
Figure 1 shows that women are exchanged in one direction. Line A gives its women to line B, line B gives to C, and line C gives to line A. This is cyclic exchange, and Levi-Strauss calls this mode of transfer of women "generalised exchange" or "indirect exchange".

In the figure 2, direction of transfer of women is reversed in each generation. Levi-Strauss calls "closed system" which leads to mechanical solidarity in which there is always a 'perpetual disequilibrium'. He concludes that patrilateral cross-cousin marriage is "not a system but a procedure". It is for this reason he argues that frequency of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is more than the other. It gives a better integration to the society.

Homans and Schneider construe Levi-Strauss's argument as far as "better integration" is concerned. But they put it rather in a lighter term as "because it is better for society". But Levi-Strauss's use of 'better' means - 'a greater organic solidarity'.

Needham argues that Homans and Schneider have failed to understand Levi-Strauss's conception of "Organic Solidarity" with regard to marriage.
The fourth point of argument is on linearity and according to Levi-Strauss, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is possible in either a patrilineal society or a matrilineal society, so long as the system is harmonic. By harmonic he visualises a situation like — matrilineal and matrilocal; or patrilineal and patrilocal. He also says that the structure of generalised exchange does not depend at all on descent — i.e., its structural feasibility is not contingent upon whether the descent system is patrilineal or matrilineal.

Homans and Schneider confront this argument and say — "what we do reject is the claim that matrilateral cross-cousin marriage has nothing to do with linearity; we predict, Levi-Strauss to the contrary that it will tend to occur in patrilineal societies".

Needham here defends Levi-Strauss and says that Levi-Strauss nowhere speaks or implies that linearity "has nothing to do" with rule of marriage. There is no necessary connection between them.

In the second chapter of the book "Structure and Sentiment" the theme of discussion is the distinction between final cause and efficient cause in sociological explanation.
Needham feels that Homans and Schneider characterize Levi-Strauss's theory as final cause and they present their understanding of his theory as - "An institution is what it is because it is good for the society in the sense of creating organic solidarity, and some institutions are, from this point of view, better than others".

They say that a final cause theory is not good enough, there should be an efficient cause theory and they ask for its existence in Levi-Strauss's Scheme. Since, Levi-Strauss does not explicitly speak of efficient cause, they assume that in Levi-Strauss's view - "... members of some societies chose matrilateral cross-cousin marriage because they could 'see', in much the same way that Levi-Strauss himself can 'see', that it is better than other forms. But it is doubtful whether the intelligent recognition of what would be good for society is ever a sufficient condition for its adoption".

Needham here defines a final cause as - "the purpose or end of the thing caused"; and an efficient cause as - "the producing agent". He adds that Levi-Strauss has allegiance to the early Annee Sociologique School of France and he does not anywhere in his book speak of purpose or end in relation to unilateral cross-cousin marriage. Thus, the pages in his book as referred to
by Romans and Schneider, so as to represent the aforesaid theory do not really justify their understanding of Levi-Strauss's theory as final cause theory. They argued with quoting Aristotelian paradigm that - "the house is there that men may live in it; but it is also there because the builders have laid one stone upon another". This certainly implies the factor of purpose but it is precisely this factor which is lacking in Levi-Strauss's argument (Needham, 1962).

Coming to efficient theory, Romans and Schneider are of the view that for Levi-Strauss efficient theory is human intelligence. Needham too agrees to some extent with them saying that Levi-Strauss did see the formation of institutions as the unconscious production of certain fundamental structures of human mind. He further says that the features to which Levi-Strauss alludes are simply universal grounds for the existence of social institutions and are not to be taken for interpreting either as final cause or efficient cause.

Needham claims that Romans and Schneider are specifically concerned to propound an efficient cause theory which they have derived from Radcliff Brown's paper, "The Mother's Brother in South Africa" (1524); and here they try to employ psychological behaviour as one of
the determinants in the selection of the type of marriage under question.

In a patrilineal complex the father exercises a jural authority; and on the other hand, mother and her son relationship is a warm and naturant which is by its nature extended to the mother's sister and mother's brother. Therefore, the same relationship is exhibited between the ego and his mother's brother.

Homans and Schneider write that in the patrilineal complex the mother's brother becomes a kind of 'male-mother' and the father's sister becomes a 'female father' in which the same "respect and constraint" formula operates between the ego and his father's sister.
Thus the mother's brothers have sentiments for his sister's son and by virtue of his closeness to his daughter, she too develops these sentiments for her cousin. This makes them say that mother's brother's daughter marriage is commonly found in patrilineal societies.

Homans and Schneider's argument is summed up in two propositions, - one, a special hypothesis and the other a more general theory from which the former is deduced.

Their hypothesis is - "Societies in which marriage is allowed or preferred with mother's brother's daughter but forbidden or disapproved with father's sister's daughter will be societies possessing patrilineal kin groups,"
and societies in which marriage is allowed or preferred with father's sisters daughter but forbidden or disapproved with mother's brother's daughter will be societies possessing matrilineal kin.

Their general theory is - "The form of unilateral cross-cousin marriage will be determined by the system of interpersonal relations precipitated by a social structure, especially by the locus of jural authority over ego". Needham does not see any necessary connection between the two. Either of them could be wrong.

Needham also tries to negate the psychological explanation of their theory by bringing in the criticism once made by Evans-Pritchard in which he said that the influence of the father should be taken into account in considering the formation of the sentiment towards the mother's brother because the maternal uncle is not only the mother's brother's of Ego, but also the wife's brother of Ego's father; and in a primitive society the wife brother is commonly a "pivotal relative" and the attitude of the husband and the wife are more pronounced towards him than to other relatives. Therefore, some evidence of "clash of sentiments" on the part of the parents will be found also in the attitude of Ego to his mother's brother (Evans-Pritchard, 1929).
Against the backdrop of all these theoretical arguments, the Purum makes its debut as an illustration to support Needham's argument against Homans and Schneider, where he refutes the 'Sentiment' theory to the MBD marriage (Mother's Brother's daughter) which they have put forward. Needham says that from the empirical data shown in T.C. Das's study, 26 out of 54 marriages are with women other than actual MBD, and in that case the ego has "... to be fond of roughly a third of all the men of his father's generation in the total society seems a promiscuous lavishing of sentiments...."

Then again the Purum reappears in "A Structural Analysis of Purum Society" where he divides Purum society into three "cyclically related" structural groups - Ego group; wife-giver and wife-taker, based on marriage with 'Mother's Brother's daughter'. He also says that "the basic scheme of Purum society is not tripartite but dualistic" (1958a: 97). The fundamental 'dyadic' relationship is between the superior wife-giving group and the inferior wife-taking group and this 'dyadic' relationship is best exhibited in the Purum society through certain symbolic

"structural principles underlying both social relations of the sorts and other aspects of Purum culture which are not obviously connected with them."³

In support of his argument, Needham gives the following illustrations from the original T.C. Das's work:

1. A Purum house can be visualised in two different compartments, each having a definite positional and functional role in the society. The two parts are the Phumlil marked by the conspicuous position of the hearth and a sacred post called Chatra; the other being Ningan with another sacred post called Senajumphi. The Phumlil is the living room of the head of the family with his unmarried sons and daughters while the Ningan is the place for the visiting married daughters; son-in-laws and the prospective son-in-law undergoing 'Yaun-gimba' (service paid as bride price).

In other words, Phumlil is superior to Ningan, or from the angle who occupies which part of the house, one can say that the wife-giver is superior to the wife-taker. The position of the family hearth is in the Phumlil

³. Ibid
part and the exit door on the side of the Ningan also shows the importance of the each side. Now, when a person enters a Purum house, to his right hand side is the Phumlil and to his left is the Ningan. So right and left has certain value based connotation in the Purum society and as such right is superior to left. This concept of right and left is also evident from certain ceremonies that the Purum performs.

2. To propitiate the sib-god 'Senamahi' a fowl is sacrificed and the position of the legs of the bird at the time of death indicates the future of the family. If the right leg be placed on the left one it augers well. But it forebodes evil if otherwise. So, here 'right' is auspicious and left is inauspicious or right is superior to left. There is a few more similar rituals where right has a higher value than the left. Say, for name giving ceremony, in the case of a boy, if the right leg is placed on the left it is regarded as a good omen. But in the case of a female child, a hen is strangled, and if the left leg of the sacrificed hen is placed on the right it augers good health. It suggests that 'left'

4. Ibid.
is attributed to feminine side and 'right' is to masculine side. Similarly, in the village council chamber (Ruishang), the senior sits on the right side and the junior on the left.

3. In a Purum marriage there is a conspicuous flow of material goods in one direction and the female (the bride) in the other. Right from the proposal of the marriage when the father of the prospective groom carries the 'Zu' (rice beer) to the father of the bride, and then, when the maksa (daughter's husband, sister's husband, and father's sister's husband) kills and prepares pork curry at the boy's house and carries it to the bride's place, leading to the transfer of the bride to the boy's house the flow of material goods is towards the bride's house and the flow of the bride is towards the boy's house (patrilocal).

4. Needham also tries to correlate this 'dyadic' relationship with the type of marriage they follow and says that the Purum kinship terminology also "conform with this type of marriage". Giving illustrations from the Purum he writes,

"A man addresses all women of the clan or group of clans of his mother or wife as 'U' (if older), this
being an abbreviation of the term translated as 'elder brother's wife' or Kanaunu, the term translated as "mother's brother's daughter".

"A man of a wife-giving clan is addressed as 'Apu' (if older) and by name, if younger, the term being translated as "mother's brother"; "wife's brother" or "wife's brother's son".

"On the wife-taking side all members of clans which may marry women from one's own clan or group of clans are addressed by terms applied individually to patrilateral relatives. Thus a woman older than ego is addressed as Katunu, translated as 'sister's daughter', and a man as 'Upa', translated as "elder sister's husband" or "father's sister's son".

"Katunu" are "those girls only whom he cannot marry owing to clan restrictions on marriage", while Kanaunu are "girls only who are his potential mates".

"Katunu is a term which may be translated as 'father's sister's daughter' or 'patrilateral cross-cousin', and Kanaunu as "mother's brother's daughter" or "matrilateral cross-cousin".
"Thus in the Purum kinship terminology the words Katunu and Kanaunu connote "prohibited woman" and "potential wife" and so the matrilateral prescription. Further, the word 'Apu' which we may conveniently render as 'mother's brother', applies to three generations. Similarly, the term Kanaunu, which we translate as 'mother's brother's daughter', applies to the wife's brother's daughter as well, i.e., to successive generations."

Thus, to quote Needham, "... This effectively makes the point that it is not an individual designation but a category, which includes men/women under one status regardless of their individual attributes of age, genealogical level, etc. - the status of 'wife-giver' or 'wife-taker'."  

5. This purported attribution to "the theory of prescriptive marriage systems" on the basis of Purum kinship organization has generated enormous heat and as such there has been a series of criticism and clarification in the American Anthropologist. C. Ackerman6 refutes Needham and writes that kinship terminology does not determine the matrilateral prescription. When Needham

5. Ibid.
distinguishes "wife-giving group" from "wife-taking group" he says that to an ego all the men of the 'wife-giving group' are 'pu' – to him and a 'wife-taking member' cannot be called as 'pu'. But there is a wife taker who is also addressed as 'Pu' – the Father's Father's Sister's Husband. Father's Father's Sister's Husband (FFZH) is as much 'wife-taker' as Father's Sister's Husband (FZH) or the Sister's Husband (ZH) or the Daughter's Husband (DH). Thus, Ackerman is of strong opinion that kinship terminology cannot make any clear cut distinction between "wife giving group" and "wife-taking group" and as such it does not conform with the type of marriage that one practices.

6. Ackerman also tries to stress his view by representing a few statistical argument against Needham. For instance, he argues that from T.C. Das's original monograph it is clear that 52% of the marriages are with women of the MB's sib and that 48% of the marriages are with women other than MB's sib. In such a case marriage rule cannot be attributed to as "prescriptive".

7. Ackerman also refutes Needham's analysis of Purum marriage pattern and charges Needham of being unable

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to distinguish between the two distinct social orders of 'actual' and 'normative' and says - "... Here two orders of social reality are presented and differentiated - the 'actual' and what may be termed the 'normative'. But there is considerable disagreement between these two orders; they agree in only 25 cases, disagreeing in 32. Adequate analysis of Purum marriage choices must take into account that these are two separate orders of reality and that they disagree: they cannot (or at least, should not be) lumped together into a single category, and Needham, in his version of the ethnographic data, presented in Table 6 and Table 7 of his 1958 analysis ignores the two different orders in both his presentation and analysis and he fails to distinguish actual marriage choices from normative ones - therefore the system which Needham presents as the Purum marriage system is in fact neither normative nor actual."

8. This refutation of Needham's "Structural Analysis of Purum Society" by C. Ackerman was not well received by many scholars. For instance, William H. Geoghegan writes that, "... however, the particular statistical

tests that Ackerman employs seem to us ill adapted to the hypothesis he wishes to verify. In fact, Ackerman's data support the hypothesis he rejects rather than the one he advances. He further adds that Ackerman's assertion that there is "... No tendency to avoid the direct exchange of women exists in the distribution of actual marriages .... Purum marriage choices are not ordered by a matrilateral connubium". "Contrary to this conclusion there is evidence in his own data both for avoidance of direct exchange and for the existence of asymmetric alliance, e.g. A — B — C — A states the cyclical exchange relationships among lineages when no lineage is both bride-giver and bride-taker in relation to any other lineage. When this criterion is met the matrilateral connubium exists".

George L. Cowgill\(^{10}\) charges Ackerman's analysis of Purum as an attempt to demolish some of Needham's major conclusions by means of statistical analysis. He says, "... but what I do claim, and most emphatically, is that the data given by Ackerman, taken at face value, do not mean what he says they mean ... it is easy to

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show that they overwhelmingly support two of Needham's assertions which Ackerman rejects.

William Wilder\textsuperscript{11} calls Ackerman's article "a distortion of Needham's analysis of Purum Society (1958, 1962) and of the Purum material itself (Das 1935, 1945)."

Ernst W. Muller\textsuperscript{12} writes that Ackerman's attempt to disprove Needham's assertion and his procedure is in more than one way unfit for the purpose. He further states that "... Ackerman failed to understand Needham's assertion that it is not the Purum marriage norm to marry and cross-cousin but a matrilateral one, and that it is not the true MBD but a woman of Ego's generation and of his mother's group".

9. \textit{Inference}

A. The main issue in the Purum debate is the unilateral cross-cousin marriage. As a rule the Purum marry their mother's brother's daughter (MBD). Now the point of argument has so far been that why do they practise matrilateral cross-cousin marriage and how does the social


system dictate this rule? Scholars like, Needham try to give a structural analysis of the Purum marriage system and say that the dyadic relationship that exists in a Purum society presents the structural categories like the "wife-giving group" and "wife-taking group; or potential-wife" and "prohibited women", supported by the kinship terminology that conforms with the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Homans and Schneider on the other hand give a psychological explanation to the marriage system in question.

A careful perusal of this debate would indicate despite some over-statement understanding of this process by which people organise their lives is greatly enhanced. If we take T.C. Das's data as empirical and its delimitation in the process of employment (for analysis) and their statistical representation, apparently each analysis has a point. But often it is noticed that the scholars have so chosen T.C. Das's data that they try to prove their own point, ignoring the data which would have challenged their assertion. For instance, C. Ackerman's assertion that both 'wife-giver' and 'wife-taker' cannot be addressed as 'pu'. By doing this Ackerman in the first place agrees to the existence of dyadic relationship in the Purum society, secondly, he has picked this particular instance to negate Needham's assertion that "kinship terminologies conform with the type of
marriage". But there are other terms which overlap both the groups, e.g. "Ka-terr" means both father's elder brother and his wife on one hand, and mother's elder sister and her husband on the other. The term 'Kanaunu' indicates both Younger sister (ZY) and Younger brother's wife (by W). Similarly 'Kapu' stands for all the mother's brothers (MB), Father's father (FF) and also Father's Father's Sister's husband (FFZH).

All these terms, from which Ackerman has picked up the term (Ka) 'pu' for both FFZH and MB, in Purum society are either terms of honour or endearment. They are not the usual kinship terminology in the strict sense of the term. Thus, it is not justifiable on his part to assert that the Purum kinship terminologies do not conform with the type of marriage they practice. The Purum terms of relationship are intimately connected with social conditions and the prevailing type of marriage often influences the nature and character of these terms (Das, 1948).

B. Both Needham and Ackerman were wrong in analysing the data on MBD's marriage. Ackerman's assertion that from T.C. Das's original monograph, 52% of MBD marriage

is not enough to justify "prescriptive" norm sounds dubious because Das himself in his book (p. 241) has said that the "Purum extensively practise cross-cousin marriage of one type, namely with the mother's brother's daughter". and ". . . thus, out of 85 unions recorded in 1936 in the three villages of the Purum, 63 (or 74.12%) happened to be brought about by union with mother's brother's daughters, in eleven (or 12.94 per cent) cases the bride was taken from the sib of the mother's brother."

C. Homans and Schneider's psychological explanation does hold some ground in Purum marriage type. We cannot totally dismiss the effect of emotion over marriage. The Purum society as it stands is a very compact society composed of five major exogamous sibs with fourteen sub-sibs. So with a total population of 303 (1936), distributed over four villages we can well feel how close a society can be. Under the given environment when it is customary to marry one's Mother's Brother's daughter and the practice of passing the night in the house of a man who has one or more grown up daughters may have the intention of providing an opportunity to the young people to cultivate premarital love which ultimately leads to happy union.14 Moreover, when every Purum village is

represented by almost all sibs, marriage alliances are mostly within the village. So, under such circumstances, to be fond of the mother's brother may not be "a very expansive affection" as observed by Needham (1962).

D. The Purum marriage system does represent a "circulating connubium" where women move in one direction only. For instance, a Parpa girl when moves towards Thao family; a Thao girl cannot move towards a Parpa family, she has to go to Marim family.

Marim —— Thao —— Parpa

This basic rule of marriage is still in practice among the Purums.

E. Needham asserted that Levi-Strauss used the word 'preference' to designate 'prescription'. For Levi-Strauss, the word 'preferential union' means 'the obligation to marry within a group ....'.

This assertion of Needham cannot be taken as it is. It should rather be examined in the light of Levi-Strauss's own statement, i.e. "The notions of prescriptive

15. Ibid.
and preferential marriage are relative: a preferential system is prescriptive when envisaged at the model level; a prescriptive system must be preferential when envisaged on the level of reality.  