CHAPTER 1

*Kula, Kutumba and Jati*  
*(Family, Kinship and Caste)*

The importance of the family as a unit of the society and the role of the family in framing the different social standards is universally accepted. The Indian ethical ideals have always insisted *grahastha* as fundamental of life in society. Family has been regarded as the chief agency of organized social being and society is a broader social context in which individuals and families are located. All the sources have always depicted the family in India as the one of patriarchal joint family system. Inspite of political transformations and transitions in different spheres the structure of the patriarchal family still constitutes the core of our culture. *Reeti Kal* poetry, like all other accounts, shows that the patriarchal family was preponderant among the north Indian communities during the period under review. The poetry enables us to adopt a "society from inside out" approach to the study of family as it describes intimate social relations.\(^1\) We thus analyse not only the structure of the family but also the relationships between different members of the family and society.

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As we go around the verses with reflections on family in Reeti poetry, our poets often look like analysing and exemplifying the vignettes of relationship between the individual, the family on the one hand and the society on the other. The Reeti text also asks if the individual's behaviour, mind and personality was equally shaped by the society. Do we have evidence to accept or reject the notion of society as separate and static entity?

**Kula and Kutumba**

It emerges that the society in the Reeti poetry confronted a fixed and given set of doctrines. The poets generally talked of the social norms and learnt the ways of behaving, feeling and thinking from the social patterns. The frequent references to *lok ki laj, kulkani kula ki reet* or *log* added with mythological concepts and beliefs are clear examples of social constraints imposed upon the individual behaviour. The following verse indicates such imposition:

> लोक की लाज और सोच प्रलोक को वारिए प्रीत के ऊपर दोऊ।

(Let the social decorum and thought of the next world be renounced for love.)

The term *Lok* here implied the society and the *kula* might be understood as a social group comprising of a number of households co-existing through common descent. There have been differing notions about kinship

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3. Bodha, *Ishqnama*, V. 14, Section 1 and See also *Thakur Thasak*, V. 60 and 79, *Saneh-Sagar* of Bakshi Hansraj, V. 7, Section 3.
terminologies and the translation and interpretation of term *kula* and *lok* deserve classification. The historians and indologists generally stress the conflict and opposition in defining consanguines and affines.\(^5\) The kingroup could either be consanguine or affine consisting either members related through a common ancestral male or through rules of residence i.e. affinity.

Our poetry, *Saneh-Sagar* of Bakshi Hansraj, in particular, suggests no opposition between the two. Bakshi Hansraj listed the names of many relatives of a common descent living in the same locality.\(^6\) In still another verse, he clearly defines the kingroup as follows:

**गाँव बसत के नाते सुनिये लागत मैया मेरो**

(He is seemingly my brother for he lives in my village.)

The affinal relationship existing due to rule of residence was also one mode of defining kingroup. It leads us to accept the views of Morton Klass, as we shall discuss later in detail, that the kinship, overtime as the lineage group grows large, breaks away into sublineages. It may then happen that the local group may not trace their relationship genealogically but still preserves a sense of kinship.\(^8\) The notion of *kula* then embraces entire kingroup both consanguine and affine though the affinity could be due to stipulated descent. The broad definition in context of our poetic terminology justifies our understanding of *kula* as clan. The *Lok* or society in this way would imply a larger grouping of many *kulas* following similar behavioural patterns and standard of morality.


\(^6\) Bakshi Hansraj, *Saneh-Sagar*, V. 24-30, Section 7.

\(^7\) Ibid, V. 37 Section 9.

\(^8\) Morton Klass, *The Emergence of South Asian Social System*, p. 153.
The rules and regulations carried the force of law as it was the source of solidarity; it compelled the individuals to take into account of the people around them. One had to fear the society and social criticism:

नाप्ने के अपवाद का डर करिए दिन रैन०
(Fear the criticism of people day and night.)

Another poet, Padmakar also legitimized the social constraints over an individual for maintaining social solidarity and also as means of satisfaction. Those who did not act in accordance with the social norms could not lead a happy life:

जो कुड़त कुल आपनी, ते पावत बहु खेद।

The norms and criteria of morality established by the society had thus to be followed. The moral rules were invested with a special authority by virtue of which they were obeyed simply because they commended. They were desirable as they presented the ideal which the individuals aspired to. The constituents of morality as a unified system of beliefs and practices will be discussed elsewhere. At the moment we restrict the discussion to see if the individual action was determined by social forces in the world of Reeti poets. We will also see the extent to which the individuals followed their own choices and purposes.

Our poets generally prescribed the individuals not to be treated separately. The dignity of the individual to them was a relative term which came not from his personal characteristics but from his links with the society. The social process influenced his behaviour right from the beginning.

and shaped his feelings, thoughts and actions. Individual’s choices were not independent; they were determined by the experiences common in a social set up.

However, it is not in all the cases that society dominated the individuals infinitely. We have the references where the Reeti poets highlighted the individual actions intermeshing to form and change the existing social patterns. In a number of cases an individual refused to receive in totality the beliefs and social practices, and when he accepted them he modified them accordingly and put on them his own stamp. The following verse shows how an individual overlooked the social norms and the social beliefs and practices:

जाके लिए गृहकाज तज्जों न सिखी साखियान की सीख सिखाई।
बैर कियो सिगरे ब्रज ग्राम तों जाके लिए कुलकाँचि गेंवाई।
जाके लिए घर बारहू मंत्राम रहे हैंसि लोग लुगाई।
(For whom I neglected the domestic affairs and avoided the advise of my friends, coated enmity with the entire Brajagaon and renounced the clan identity; for whom the people within and outside laugh at me.)

11. In this connection it is interesting to note the views some modern scholars. Ruth Benedict for example, holds that the behaviour of the individual born in any society is dictated by that society. He feels that the individuals obey the social norms not because they present universal sanity or the ultimate ideal. The reason, why great mass of individuals accept the constraints is that the society moulds their behaviour right from their childhood. See, Ruth Benedict, Patterns of Culture, p. 183.

12. Mati Ram Granthavali, Rasraj, V. 140. A.L. Basham also considers that the family rather than the individual was a unit of social system. Though the sense of family solidarity gave a measure of security, it was not free from many abuses. See, The wonder that was India, p. 155-56. It was perhaps for these abuses, the individuals in the poetry tended to resist the constraints.
These lines from Mati Ram's poetry indicate the individuals' endeavour for her autonomy. The individual overpowered all the constraints imposed upon her by family, friends and village. We will see later that the social norms in certain cases were also transgressed by an individual questioning their legitimacy. We also come across the instances when these social norms were violated by the individual and the society deliberately left these violations unnoticed.

This departure from the social conventions might be interpreted as a kind of recognition of the individual's rights to refashion the social norms. This is illustrated further in the poetry of Vrind. Vrind considered an individual capable enough to adopt his own way of life independent of social beliefs and customs. He made a plea to create, in a measure, his own code of morality, religious practices and social ethics. He suggested that the individual should manoeuvre and adopt calculated devices to live with comfort.¹³ His treatment of virtues and wisdom exhibits the difference between the action constrained by the society and the real behaviour of the individual. Vrind manipulated the social morals, dominated and transcended the norms and beliefs held in common. The

¹³ Numerous verses in Vrind Satsai exhibit a pragmatic treatment of ethics. G.S. Ghurye in his book Culture and Society, p. 21-22, has discussed intense individualism as distinguishing characteristic of European literature. In reference to the English poetry of the period concerned, he writes that the English individual tended to become law unto himself. Instead of disciplining his emotions so as to produce conformity to a system, he embraced new tendency of the age. In the wake of these ideas, the 'individual' was linked to progress hence to modernisation by a lobby of historians and sociologists. India during the nineteenth century was modernised due to the influence of this western ideology. For this discussion, see Rajat Kant Ray (ed.) Mind, Body and Society, Life and Mentality in colonial Bengal. could we then say that Vrind, writing during the seventeenth century seems in no way different than the intellectuals of colonial India?
poet advocated an individual to follow his own course of ethics and actions, values and ideals:

शुभ ही तक मनाइये जो जीवन सुख भीन।

(Consider those acts, as virtues which bring pleasure in life).

Still, the autonomy of the 'individual' vis-a-vis 'social' was limited. The individual's freedom of not conforming to prevailing social values was restricted by the control which the society exerted through numerous agencies for instance, panchayat. Individual could rarely cross the boundaries defined by the society in open. The violations of norms were generally hidden. Even when in public were deliberately ignored with an objective of maintaining the order and solidarity. It is within this framework of the relationship between the 'individual' and the society that we will examine the concept of family.

(In Reeti poetry we have evidence of an extended joint family in northern India. Here the consanguineous unit consisted of the father, mother, sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and the grand children. The poets have used the term 'Kutumb' and kula to depict the patriarchal family headed by the father. The power and authority was vested in the senior most male member

15. In all the writings on social life during the medieval period we have references to joint family system though differences in the opinion concerning the reason for the development of joint family system are apparent. B.N.S. Yadav, for instance, finds dharam sastras as the basis for the system whereas K.M. Ashraf relates it to the life and conditions of Indian villages. See, B.N.S. Yadav, Society and Culture in Northern India in the Twelfth Century, p. 62 and K.M. Ashraf, Life and Condition of the People of Hindustan, p. 165. The Reeti poets, however, did not show any concern about why and how this institution came into being. They rather focused on the need to maintain the tradition.
of the family and he was represented as the undisputed head and guardian. The authority of the father was thus depicted in a verse of Bihari:

कन देखो साँथ दुसर बुढ़ शुरु जान।
(The father-in-law appointed the daughter-in-law to distribute grains.)

The verse indicates that even the most insignificant matter of the household was controlled and commanded by the father.

He worked in all the possible ways to strengthen the family unit. The lineage and descent acquired meaning in terms of the relative position of the family in the society. Bakshi Hansraj refers to this aspect in his poetry. The identity of an individual was linked to his family background and it was considered prestigious to belong to a noted family in the society. An individual’s personality was assessed in terms of his lineage.

सब जे बिकट कुल कुल जँचे।
(The family is spotless and lineage is high.)

This is how an individual was introduced. Further, to be noted are the adjectives ‘spotless’ and ‘high lineage’. Such values were often mentioned as basic qualities of a good family to determine a family’s position in society.

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17. It is interesting to note that this kind of authoritarian structure of patriarchal joint family has been considered as a peculiar feature of the Hindu society. See, Patricia Uberoi (ed), Family, Kinship and Marriage in India, Introduction; B.N.S. Yadav, Society and Culture in Northern India, p. 61-75;
18. Bakshi Hansraj, Saneh-Sagar, p. 39, V. 21 P.N. Chopra, Society and Culture During the Mughal Age, P. 101-07. K.M. Ashraf in this context clarifies that ‘the Muslims brought with them their different laws.... and an entirely different conception of family life’ (p. 165). Abdul Rashid has also described Hindu and Muslim Societies separately. See, Society and Culture in Medieval India, p. 126-135. Reeti poets, though did not distinguish as such, their poetry indubitably reflects the customs and traditions of the Hindu Society.
The father being the eldest member of the family was expected to inculcate among his children all such moral traits which distinguished his family. The father was expected to preserve the tradition and conventions of his family by transmitting them to his children:

कुल आचार आपने घर को सिखवे नहीं जो कोई 19

बालक होइ सीख नहीं माने महा पातकी होई।

ताते तात आपने घर को हमको धर्म सिखइये।

(The one who does not learn the customs of one's family; being child ignores the teaching is sinful; Therefore, oh father! teach me the Dharma of your family.)

The father was thus responsible for conditioning his children to the norms and patterns of the family.20 The dharma of the family and that of the society might have differed to some extent but society did influence the traditions of the family.

The image of the father was that of a just, skillful, self-reliant and prudent man. The specially determined strength of the father lent identity to his children:

बड़े बाप के पुत्र होय कैं कहा करन यह लागे 21

(Being the son of a great father, what have you done?)

19. Ibid; p. 5, V. 21
20. B.N.S. Yadav also mentions, in context of the twelfth century, that in the pluralistic socio-political set up a great sanctity was attached to kula-dharma or law of family. Family as an ideal unit nurtured virtues and strengthened the kinship ties. See his book, Society and Culture in Northern India, p. 64-65 and p. 75.) The notion of family did not change even after six centuries. However, the definition of kula dharma might have acquired new elements over the period of time. Gavin Flood also suggests that the notion of dharma differs at different stages and also according to caste, family and region. See Gavin Flood, An Introduction To Hinduism, p. 57-58. It, therefore, substantiates our understanding of kuldharma.
In this way, the father had to play the most important role in the family. The authoritarian structure of the traditional household has received much controversy in recent times. Some modern scholars believe that the laws of inheritance leading to fragmentation and emphasis upon the hereditary occupation being deleterious to economic development discouraged progress in pre-colonial India. Moreover, the absolute authority of the patriarch has been viewed as obstruction to individualism. Also, the patriarch was thought of being guided by the traditions in decision-making. Hence initiative, innovation and rationale was missing. There is however sharp reaction of some historians and sociologists to this hypothesis. As for our poetry, a careful reading reveals that the absolute authority of the father was simply a cultural ideal whereas the decision-making in the household was a matter of consultations and compromises amongst not only the male members, but also women, directly or indirectly through their husbands and sons. Numerous verses indicating joint discussions and meetings which were attended even by the daughters-in-law extend support to this idea. The poets in the manner of modern sociologists like T.N. Madan also argued for the absence of dichotomy between the traditional and the rational. Individual progress generally indicated the welfare of the total family and so also the decisions taken by the head implied shared responsibility.

22. Nilkantha Sastri and G. Srinivasachari (eds), Life and Culture of the People of India, p. 64-66; K.M. Ashraf, Life and Condition of the people of Hindustan, p. 165-66; T.N. Madan, 'The Hindu family and Economic Development' in Patricia Uberoi (ed) Family, Kinship and Marriage in India. Madan as well as Patricia Uberoi in her introduction to the book condemn all the arguments linking progress and nuclear family. They believe that industrialization and progress may result in breaking the joint family system for various reasons but it is certainly not an obstacle.

The second important place in the family was that of the mother. Among the female members in the family, it was the mother who enjoyed a distinct superior position. It is not clear in the poetry whether the mother exercised any power in any family affair like selection of the bride for her son, but there is no doubt about her authority to treat the bride according to her own wish. The daughters-in-law were expected to abide by the rules defined in the family by their mothers-in-law:

नितु सापु का सासन मानि हिठिएं हित सों अति सीततता को लहिएं
(The daughter-in-law should solemnly follow the discipline imposed by the mother-in-law.)

The daughters-in-law had neither rights nor any means within the family structure to protest against the authority of the mother-in-law. The extended families were generally authoritarian institutions which expected unquestioned obedience from the subordinates, therefore, the daughters-in-law were also bound to accept their authority:

सासु बड़ी है कही सु कही, औरनि के कहा हों मरि जाओगी
(The mother-in-law is elder so she can say something, I will die if others say anything.)

The priority of generation or age differentiation was thus an important factor in deciding one's superiority in the family. The mother-in-law could dictate the daughter-in-law not only in her capacity of mother-in-law but also as an elderly member of the family.

In the popular opinion, the mother-in-law's treatment of her daughters-in-law has been likely to be domineering. She has been considered

to be harsh, vindictive and unjust. It may be due to her sharp reaction to
the entrance of the bride who would be sharing the son’s affection. In Reeti
poetry, too, we find instances where mother-in-law has been depicted as
fault-finding:

राजु उसुआसिनी उसासि ले सकति हैं ॥२६॥
(The mother-in-law is fault-finding; I can not even breathe freely.)

Mati Ram describes conflict and clash as a routine feature of the
relationship between the two. There are verses of other poets also which
reflect the tense and unhappy state of affairs between these two key figures
in the family. How was then family intact if conflict between the two was its
routine? Despite their ambivalent attitude we have the reference to those
mothers-in-law who had intense affection and positive thinking for their
sons’ wives. They used to take care of their daughters-in-law and showed
concern about their health:

बहू होत क्यों दूररी यीं जब बूढी सास ॥२७॥
(Why are you becoming thin; the mother-in-law asked the daughter-in-
law.)

Reeti poetry does not provide us sufficient evidence to conclude the
relationship in a definite way. Though we are not in a position to suggest
that the relationship between the two was always cordial and there existed
no conflict about the question of authority or of rights, it is reasonable to
say that the mothers-in-law generally maintained amicable relationship
with their daughters-in-law. They acted as the guides for them in the observance of religious rites and rituals:

(The mother-in-law told the daughter-in-law that to fulfill the desires of her heart, she should worship the image of Gauri; it is tradition for the day.)

The mothers-in-law also appreciated the personal difficulties of their daughters-in-law. They were sensitive to their moods and emotions and showed concern to the cause of their worries and sadness:

(All others are delighted and they sing enthusiastically. It is only you seem to be displeased in the marriage of your brother-in-law.)

It may, however be contended that the mother-in-law as the senior most female member of the extended joint family enjoyed the power to control the household affairs. Like her husband, she had to act wisely as the pacemaker between the different members of the family so that the integrity and dignity of the family could be maintained. Barring a few references to the conflict and misunderstanding between the daughter-in-law and the mother-in-law, there is hardly any reflection of tyranny, harsh treatment or cruelty on part of the mother-in-law. She is nowhere described as causing suffering to the daughter-in-law. Being elderly, she was to be respected and her instructions were to be followed. It was not merely the

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economic factor, as we will discuss later, but something more than that which decided the internal cohesion of the family. By acting as the guide for the observance of religious rites and also austerity performed for the fulfilment of specific family objective, the mother-in-law ensured the time honoured traditions to continue. She encouraged and promoted conditions for these rituals to thrive in the inner apartments of the household.

Family as a cohesive group did not include relatives living elsewhere. The brothers, their wives and children used to stay permanently under the guardianship of a head who usually happened to be the father. Frequent references to jetha (husband's elder brother) and dewar (husband's younger brother) and to their wives suggest the living of all of them together in the family. Nanad or husband's sister was one of the family members who stayed there till she got married:

देवरानी ननद सुबाई एक ठीर दियो दीपक घटायः

(She made her sisters-in-law (husband's sister and his younger brother's wife) sleep in one corner and put off the lamp.)

The daughters were supposed to leave the parental home after marriage and had to live with their in-laws. They were occasionally invited to stay in their parental home and were respectfully escorted by their brothers:

आयो भात लिबाड़े निरखि जठि हरखाइः

(Seeing the brother who had come to take her along she felt overjoyed.)

30. Somnath Granthavali, p. 95 and see also Bihari Ratnakar, V. 85, 246, 602 and Thakur Thasak, p. 65.
32. Padmakar Granthavali, Padma Bharan, V. 299.
Their husbands also visited their (girls') parental homes sometimes. They were treated as honoured guests. The long stay of the daughters' husbands in the family was not appreciated. And if for some reasons he stayed there as a permanent member, he generally lost his dignity and respect:

आवत जात न जानियतु तेजहि तजि सियरानु ।
गरहि जबाई सी घटरी खरी पूस दिन भानु।

(The moon during the month of Paush has become cool and it is no more bright; therefore, people do not bother about its rise and eclipse. Its significance/respect has been reduced like that of the son-in-law staying at wife’s home.)

A remarkable feature of the joint family was the existence of co-wives in a family. The idea that most of the households were polygamous is derived by the fact that every poet of the period concerned mentions the presence of many wives married to one man, without any objections raised by the family members. Polygamy seems to be generally acceptable. The second bride seems to have been warmly received by the family:

सौलिन मुख निसि कमल भए पिय चख भए चकोर।
गुरुजन मन सारंग मर लख दुलही मुख और।

(The faces of the co-wives became like the lotus of the night; husband’s eyes became partridge; the hearts of elderly people were full of joy seeing the fact of the bride.)

33. Bihari-Ratnakar, V. 121.
34. B.N.S. Yadav, writing about eleventh-twelfth centuries, considers polygamy as a luxury that few could afford. See, Society and Culture in North India, p. 68. P.N. Chopra and P.N. Ojha believe that polygamy was popular among the Muslims and the elites only and Hindu families were generally monogamous. Reeti poets, however, describe it as a common practice among the common Hindu masses.
35. Rasleen Granthaavali, V. 98.
The new bride was offered gifts by all the family members, including the senior co-wives whose duty was also to welcome her and give some gift.

The obvious explanation of polygamous family seems to be the male domination. Men realised that polygamy gave them much greater power over their wives by refusing their favours to one or the other of them. Once a person had a second wife, he could easily control the other by being discriminatory and ruthless to her. Wealth and affluence must have encouraged the practice. Further, the first wife's failure to produce children also provided justification for polygamy:

गुरुजन इसे ब्याह को प्रतिदिन कहत रिसाई। 36
पति की पति राखे बूह आपनु बौझ कहाई।
(The elders being displeased asks for the second marriage; She bears the blame of being barren and protects the honour of her husband.)

The verse contains irony; though the wife was not barren and she could procreate, yet she allowed for the second marriage of her husband, who was infact, responsible for the cause. The idea which we derive from the verse is that second marriage could be justified for procreation. 37

Sex-ratio may also be surmised to be a possible reason of polygamy. However, it is well nigh impossible to have a firm information regarding the sex-ratio. In addition, unbalanced sex-ratio can not be taken as a permanent feature of any society. What seems to be more reasonable is that a small segment of elites had the privilege to have more than one wife. The Reeti

36. Mati Ram Granthavali, (Satsai), V. 602.
37. Badaoni, a chronicler of the Mughal Emperor Akbar's age also recorded that second marriage was socially sanctioned when a couple had no child. A man could acquire a second wife when the first wife had passed the time of expecting. See Badaoni, Muntakhab-u Tawarikh, Volume II, Tr. Lowe, p. 367.
poets, generally living and composing their poetry under the patronage of one or the other ruler described the practice as if it had prevailed in the entire society.

Whatever the reason, the system threatened to rupture the cohesion of the family. Since the co-wives were the contenders for their husband's favours both material and emotional, they always tended to be jealous of one another. The other co-wives felt jealous when the husband paid more attention towards any one of them. Reasons for such feelings are obvious and justified. A wife could never accept a co-wife in her heart and, therefore, applied all her tacts and energy to win her husband's favours. In the beginning, the expression was in form of requests to her husband for not mixing up with the sautin:

मैं दिया निरी भयो, रहतु जु मिल साथ | 39
सो मन बंधिन न सौपिय, दिय सौतिहि के साथ |
(You gave me, it became mine; it is mixed up with my heart, so do not give it to the co-wife.)

The arrival of the new wife in itself implied obvious threat to the senior wife for the former's youth enchanted and fascinated the husband. The intended display of the gifts given by the husband to one of his wives was a strong reason of dissatisfaction among other co-wives.

38. The problem of personal adjustment arising under polygamy have been realized by the sociologists. They offer a number of solutions, e.g. separate dwelling for each in context of American and western societies. See, George P. Murdock, Social Structure p. 26-31. Any attempt to resolve the conflict is not visible in the poetry and we understand the rivalry amongst the co-wives as an inherent feature of our society during the period concerned.

The urge of competing wives to displace the others as center of attraction required of them to make efforts to maintain their charm and beauty. Apart from the fact that co-wives resorted to various methods, fair and unfair, in an attempt to gain first place with their husbands, we find the instances of firm determination of maintaining their status. It is not clear from the available descriptions if a husband considered it essential to take his wife's consent for bringing another wife, but there is no doubt that the wife always disapproved polygamy. It is probably through the strict adherence to cultural norms and expectations that governed the behaviour of wives that such tensions and jealousies were presented from being public. Polygamy appears to have operated rather smoothly; it was regarded as part of the norms. The reasons for suppressing such feelings by the co-wives might have been their fear of breaking of their marriage and thus an insecure future and loss of social status. Polygamy also implied reduction of work load for wives in the household and in the agricultural farms. But this would have been true only when the practice, we assume, to be widespread. Rivalries between the co-wives might have resulted sometime in irreconcilable quarrels and troubles in the family. But it cannot be ascertained if these tensions ever exploded into open accusations leading to divorce. The historians of our period also do not suggest divorces as a practice of Hindu society though it was prevailing in the Muslim communities.\textsuperscript{40} The \textit{Dharma sastras} codifying rights and duties on marriage did not make any provision for dissolution of

\textsuperscript{40} A.L. Basham, \textit{The Wonder that was India}, p. 172. He treats marriage as sacred law which even if not consummated, could not be annulled. Abdul Rashid also compares the marriage bonds between the Hindu and the Muslim Communities and concludes that 'The practice of divorce prevailed among the Muslims with whom marriage was a social contract rather than a sacrament of divine origin as amongst the Hindus'. See, \textit{Society and Culture in Medieval India}, p. 134.
this sacred bond.\textsuperscript{41} It is interesting that the \textit{Reeti} poets who were promptly adopting to the changed circumstances followed the marriage bond so rigidly.

This extended joint family set-up also included the unmarried sons, daughters and, the grand children. All these young members were bound to show respect and submission to their elders. They had to abide by the decisions being taken by the elders even if they were wrong:

\begin{quote}
भले बुरे गरुजन वचन कबहूँ न लोपत धीरे।\textsuperscript{42}.
\end{quote}

(Enduring persons never evade the decisions of their elders.)

Various instances are available wherein we find the youngsters behaving respectfully in front of their \textit{gurujans} or elders. As a matter of respect the young couples used certain gestures and postures for communicating with each other in front of the elders.

An obvious reason for this attitude of obedience and submission of the youngsters, could at first instance be taken their economic dependence on the family. The power of the father over the members of the family was based on necessity. The emotions, attitudes and beliefs rooted in family account for coherent patriarchal family. The families in villages depended to a great extent on cultivation. The economic prosperity of the family was a product of the combined efforts of the parents and the children and the fortune of the family depended on the hard work of all the members of the family, both males and females. Moreover, the uncertainties and risk factors

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{41} P.V. Kane, \textit{History of Dharma Sastras}, Vol. II, part 2, p. 571; Kane’s critical assessment of Brahmanical and other Law Books of ancient India also infers the conclusion that even for adultery, the husband could not abandon her. The abandonment in extreme offenses could consist her seclusion from her husband and other members of the family.
\item \textsuperscript{42} \textit{Vrind Satsai}, V. 637 and for similar references, see also, \textit{Bihari Ratnakar}, V. 34; \textit{Mati Ram Granthavali}, V. 129; \textit{Dev Granthavali}, V. 209; \textit{Rasteen Granthavali}, V. 225.
\end{itemize}
attached to agriculture, perhaps, also required solidarity not only within the family but also in the society. The family as an essential economic unit demanded co-operation and submission from the family members. Therefore, the parents inculcated in their children the attitude of submission, respect and obedience in order to ensure economic security and thus solidarity of the family. Since the ownership of land inherited from the elders, the faithful obedience guaranted the inheritance of the family property. It was the behaviour of youngers in their everyday life which determined the extent of their submission and respect for elders. The communication of the younger couples in front of the elders, as we noticed earlier, was taken as an act of defiance:

जेट दुपहरें में बडू तजि गुरुजन की लाज
सीरे तहखाने गई सुनि सोए यदुराज

(The daughter-in-law, in the hot afternoon of Jetha month, renouncing the shame of the elders went to the cold godown where her husband was sleeping.)

The attitude of devotion and dedication towards elderly people in the family must have acted as integrating factor in the complex family structures. Father-son and brother-brother relationship might have been based on mutual understanding thereby maintaining the fraternal solidarity. Still, one should not ignore the potentialities of competitiveness among the brothers, many forces tend to break the joint family into separate parts, in particular after the death of the father. The quarrels among their wives about the children, about the question of authority and of property allocation

and economic cooperation might have caused division of the family. Girdhar's poetry highlighted such problems between the father and the son which resulted in separation of the family:

\[
\text{बेटा बगरे बाप सों करि लिरियन को नेहू}^{44}
\]
\[
\text{मोहि जुदा करिदेह करिहों फजिहत तेरी।}
\]
\[
\text{तैहों घर और बार घरी मै माया तेरी।}
\]
(The son fought with the father due to affection for wife; allow the separation within no time; I will behave disgracefully and will take house and wealth.)

It could be presumed that misunderstanding between the different members of the family was more with the change and transformation. When mobility increased and means of earning other than cultivation became accessible, the sons turned less obedient.\(^45\)

The joint family, however, did not lose grounds. The families still represented a corporate living and mutual assistance and still provided considerable social and emotional security. With people going to distant places for months together, to earn money, the families did not experience radical change. Their wives and children, as we shall see later in the section on women, suffered pains of separation but they were expected to live in the patriarchal joint family. The conjugal relations were still determined by the tradition.

**Conjugal Relationship**

The husband-wife relationship in the family was regulated by certain norms. Ideally, they were not supposed to express affection and sentiments

44. *Girdhar Kavirai Granthavali*, V. 4, p. 4 and also V. 6, p. 4.
45. C. Vaudeville in *Barahmasa Literature* cites *Viraha* as the dominant theme of the *barahmasa* songs. The beloved in these songs was supposedly absent as he had gone to a distant place for earning. The concept of *bidesia* was also popular amongst *Reeti* poets which also suggested a high degree of mobility.
for each other in open. Since the elderly female members of the family were virtually always around, the young couple could communicate with great difficulty:

परि हुरि पिय पास ताहि गई सासु बहु आई।
सरपटाई सकुचाई तिय भाजी भवन दुराई।

(The lady was lying with her husband, just then the mother-in-law came in; the lady became restless, felt ashamed and ran inside to hide herself.)

There were limited opportunities for the husband and wife to be alone together. The marriage was a bond made in public to facilitate the physical union of the couple, yet it was not achieved in full due to the presence of the senior members. The couple had to take notice of the presence of these members. Poet Thakur has thus depicted the sense of deprivation of a dissatisfied and frustrated wife:

नाहर सी ननदी निगार्दी फिरे आहट को हट कोक की तुम्हें बाए जो न अटकोः
पासऊ परेश दिवरानी ओ जितानी तेऊ अहूं की तहाँ गैल लोग भटकेः
चटके न पाटी पांव घरीए पलंग ऐसे हे हरि हरा के मेरी जेरह न खटकेः

(The sister-in-law like a lioness, is in search of sounds and you are insisting upon sexual companionship; other sisters-in-law are also around and people are roaming here and there. Keep your foot slowly on the cot so that it does not produce cracking sound and see to it that my anklets do not make any noise.)

The rationale for such restrictions and regulated conjugality apart, they certainly affected the intimacy between husband and wife. The

46. Kripam Granthavali, V. 171 and see also Sanbudha Chakravari 'Changing Notions of Conjugal Relations in Nineteenth century Bengal' in Rajat Kant Ray (ed.), Mind Body and Society, p. 299-300. The author also finds similar obstacles in the development of conjugal relationship during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Bengali literature.

47. Thakur Granthavali, p. 65.
emotional ties of husband-wife in such a family could not be strong since
the relation between the two remained primarily physical. It was only the
urge for physical and bodily relationship that sustained the minimal affection
between husband and wife. The absence of emotional ties between the two
to some extent might have also reinforced the conditions for the practice of
polygamy. The long periods of suppression of marital bonds diverted the
attention of husband and wife in other directions and in order to fulfill their
desires, they developed extra-marital relations either within the family or
outside. Some details of such relations we will see elsewhere in this chapter.

The family in this framework acquired meaning through the need for
affirming lineage cohesion, genealogical status and solidarity based on
kinship. The family was to provide the first ethical foundation of the society
and the solidarity of the family implied a fully developed society fostering not
the individual interests but the social and cultural ethics. The family being
the smallest unit of the society, the stability and integrity of the society
depended on the stability of the family. Any individual in a family who violated
the traditions of the family faced dishonour and disgrace not only within the
family but in the society as well the welfare of the family and that of the
society were so closely interconnected that the panchayats intervened in the
family matters whenever the dignity of a family was pet at stake:

(Dev Granthavali, Part I, Vairagya-Shatak, V. 16, p. 44 and for similar references of
Jati, see also. 'Bakshi Hansraj, Sneh-Sagar, Section 4, V. 48.)
This singular verse revealed many dimensions of the social order and, caste, being governed by the social agencies, lay at its root.

**Caste**

The term *jati*, as we understand in the light of recent sociological and indological researches, identifies a smaller group of people in particular region. Caste has been distinguished from *Varna* which represented a relatively broad grouping as suggested by Vedic scriptures. The subjects of *Reeti-Kal* poets were probably concerned with a particular section of society which they addressed as *jati*.

Moreover, among various explanations of the evolution of caste and caste-like groups, the idea of ethnic difference and occupational hypothesis is largely focused. Mortan Klass after analysing the views of different indologists like Hutton, Senart, Kirchhoff and Levi-Strauss concludes that

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49. M.N. Srinivas writes that 'the concept of *varna* has deeply influenced the interpretation of ethnographic reality of caste *varna* has been the model to which the observed facts have been fitted.' See his article 'Varna and caste' in Deepakar (ed.) *Social Stratification* p. 28-34. Susan Bayly in her book *Caste, Society and Politics in India from Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age* also suggests the similar interpretation and accepts *jati* as identifying people in a very minute and precise way whereas *varna* covers broad and general categories. See her introduction to the book and p. 9; Survira Jaiswal, though concentrating on ancient Indian traditions, traces the development of this institution till colonial period. She, too, maintains that *jati* operates at local level but *varna* model remains the same all over India. See, *Caste: Origin, function and Dimension of change* p. 32-45. In this sense, *varna* in context of our period concerned, was perhaps arbitrary and theoretical division while *jati* or caste was active in determining or guiding the individual action.
occupational separation is the root cause of caste system. He further defines the concept of kinship as common descent groups which over longer span of time assumes class or clan status and finally establishes itself as caste. This notion of caste is reflected in the Reeti poetry as the term Kula included people from a common descent whether stipulated on immediate. It is in this view of caste we better understand the terms lok ki laj, maryada or kulkani. The rules of endogamy that governed the castes or jati were reflected in the above verses of Dev and other Reeti poets.

The historians of medieval India and indologists, in context of medieval India, in general, accept occupational division of caste. A.L. Bashan asserts that it is not being a vaisya or sudra but being as ahir, kayastha or sonar which matters and corporate feeling is centered around this caste group whether based on region, race, profession or religion’. Ramesh Chandra Sharma extends this argument in explaining a more vivid social stratification in medieval Hindi literature. He traces the existence of different jatis in

50. Mortan Klass, The Emergence of South Asian Social System, p. 64-86. Declan Quigley in Interpretation of Caste also feels that the differences of opinions about the ideological underpinnings of caste apart, the proposition that links caste to kinship or common descent group was largely accepted. See p. 87-113. The relationship between these castes were influenced by rules of endogamy, food and behavioural patterns and craft exclusiveness. These rules were not always strictly maintained and A.L. Basham, therefore, feels that remarkable proliferation of castes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a result of hypergeamy. See, The Wonder That was India, P. 147-48.

51. A.L. Basham, The Wonder That was India, p. 150.

52. R.C. Sharma, 'Literature and society in northern India during the medieval period: A Study of the caste system with particular reference to occupational castes,' India, Past and Present, 1985 Part II, 2, p. 197-227. He has formulated three appendices, each showing the caste groups based either on varna system, occupational divisions or tribal structure. His sources include the literature composed during thirteenth and eighteenth centuries. It is interesting that his general remarks are drawn from distinct variety of poetry like Prithviraj Rasau, Padmavat, Mrigavati of Kutuban, Ramacharit Manas, Keshav-Granthavali, Bhushan Granthavali or Nanddas Granthavali etc.
the medieval period which could be distinguished due to their origin from \textit{varna} system, occupations and tribes, each of these following a separate tradition of occupation and rules of endogamy. He also finds that these castes and sub-castes were organized on the basis of hierarchy.

We also find a similar pattern of caste organizations in our sources. As we have seen earlier in this chapter and we will also see in the chapter on Radha and Krishna, each \textit{jati} attempted to maintain its identity by imposing social and moral constraints. The rules of craft-exclusiveness and endogamy were so ingrained in the medieval caste groups that Bernier formulated a static notion of the society.\footnote{Francoise Bernier, \textit{Travels in the Moghul Empire 1658-1668}, Tr. Constable, p. 259. He writes that there were different caste groups as embroider, goldsmith or physician. None was 'aspiring after improvement in the conditions of life wherein he happens to be born. No one marries but in his own trade and profession.'} Declan Quigley, however, refutes these notions about caste rigidities and believes that the castes were subject to infiltration from outside through the mechanism of hypergamy and thinks endogamy as a rule of caste as false belief.\footnote{Declan Quigley, \textit{The Interpretation of caste}, p. 87-99.} We though accept hypergamy as a common practice in our poetry, do not condemn the idea of rules of endogamy as a mark of distinction between different castes. These laws might have been the preached principles which were to be preserved through the intervention of different agencies like \textit{panchayats}. The decision of \textit{panchayat} in cases of attempting exogamy were socially approved and the individual for such offense was dissociated or expelled from the caste.\footnote{Compare, Declan Quigley, \textit{The Interpretation of Caste}, p. 105 and Dev Granthavali, part I, \textit{Vairagya-Shatak}, v. 16 for such punishments. O'Mailley in his book \textit{Indian Caste Customs} (p. 31) also views \textit{Panchayat} as government of caste society.}

Inspite of these regulations, the individuals were depicted in the verses of
many poets as transgressing these caste barriers. We can not thus support
the views of an unhanging caste structure during the medieval period.56

The unchanging notions of the caste groups may further be discredited
not only in terms of its stratification through exogamous relations and
interchangeable professions but feminization of of caste groups also indicate
a change. The different caste groups were no more represented as
occupationally male centered; significance of women in occupations came
to be recognized during our period concerned. In addition to the references
cited by Ramesh Chandra Sharma about various occupational castes, we
have numerous examples depicting a caste as sonarin, darjin, kumharin or
nati.57 With the exception of Dev in his Sukh-Sagar Tarang who described
these crafts-women as wives of the crafts-men, we may interpret these
references as changing relationship between caste and gender. The dress
code of a particular crafts-woman, her occupational skills, her gestures
and postures acting as advertising agents in attracting the clients as
described by Reeti poets at great length established her caste identity as
indispensable unit of production independent of men.

56. E.A.H. Blunt, like Bernier, demonstrates the stable caste society during the medieval
period. He considers 650 as the saturation point in the growth of caste system.
After the death of Harsha Vardhana till 1803, the Indian society experienced chaos
and, Akbar's relatively peaceful age could hardly inflict any changes. As a result,
the caste laws remained fixed for more than six or seven centuries. See E.A.H.

57. Bhikaridas Granthavali, Ras-Saransh, V. 204-31; Keshavdas, Rasik-Priya, V. 1 to
29, section-12 and Dev-Granthavali, Sukh-Sagar Tarang, V. 261-307. The long list
of occupations being carried on by females included not only the household
profession in which the workload was shared by the females along with their
domestic responsibilities. The exclusive professionalism was visible in their services
as royal guards when Dev calls duarapalika, see Dev-Granthavali, Part I, V. 262; and
also in the professions which demanded specialized training (Bhikharidas, Ras-
Saransh, V. 221) like physician or Vaidya.
The reasons as to why women in the society were involved in these occupations are not discernible in the poetry. To some extent and in some professions, it was possibly due to the prolonged absence of the male members of a family; the females of the family continued their familial occupations.\(^{58}\) The increasing social mobility with opening up the other avenues of earning during the period concerned may confirm this argument.\(^{59}\) Still, all the occupations enlisted by the poets did not allow feminization simply for this reason. *Nat* and *nati*, for example, were not substitutes and were essentially complementary. The professions of goldsmith or that of physician could also not be undertaken without specialized skills. Further, many of these professions were not so ritually low in the social hierarchy that men abandoned them and women continued these occupations. What seems to be more probable is that the women's work in different occupations was socially and culturally recognized and they were, perhaps engaged in the professions of their own choice.

Moreover, each of these professions was considered as significant by the *Reeti* poets and we do not find any social hierarchy as was established by the *varna* system. A *Kanjarini* selling minor articles in the streets was equally praised for her marketing skills as was appreciated a *jaularini* for dealing in precious stones.\(^{60}\) It was not purity/pollution aspect that decided

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58. Leela Dube, 'Caste and Women', M.N. Srinivas (ed.) in *Caste : Its Twentieth Century Autar* also sees the significance of women's work in the continuity of caste-based occupations which otherwise might have disappeared after their husbands abandoned their families occupation for some reasons.

59. For increasing social mobility during the period, see, Kolff, *Naukar, Rajput and Sipahi*, p. 75-83 C. Vaudeville, The *Barahmasa literature* and the article by I.A. Khan, 'The Middle classes in the Mughal Empire', P.I.H.C, 1975, p. 113-141. The concept of *Bidesia* was also frequently exhibited by our poets. Some verses clearly suggest that the husband had gone to a distant place for earning money.

60. Compare V. 263 and V. 274 in *Sukh-Sagar Tarang* in *Dev. Granthavali*, Part I.
her status in the society but her skills vis-a-vis body language that assigned her individuality. More significant was a change in caste and gender relations. The Dharmashastras and the Hindu law books had suggested a discriminating attitude towards women not only in relation to man but also in terms of varna hierarchy. The Reeti poets, while describing different crafts-women, treated them equally irrespective of their occupation or jati.

Even as we have ample evidence concerning regulations of caste, promiscuity and exogenous relations were not unusual. The poets narrated the incidents of intercaste marriage, pre-marital and extra-marital relations with men outside the caste wherein women escaped any punishment even for sexual offences. These instances represented on one hand the autonomy of women and possibilities of social stratification on the other through exogamy. The society, the kinship system and family and women as a part of entire social order found expression in our poetry not as static entities but as system of long continuities which witnessed desired modifications called forth by changing material conditions. The continuities

61. Our poetry contradicts the views of many historians, who believe that in social hierarchy, the jatis indicated not only status of different castes but also emphasized purity/impurity relations amongst them. The rules of endogamy and commensality of a caste were based on pure/polluted ideology. For this discussion, See, Suvira Jaiswal, Caste : Origin, Function and Dimensions of Change, p. 45, Susan Bayly, Caste and Society p. 15-16, A.L. Basham, The Wonder That was India, p. 147-48.

62. P.V. Kane, History of Dharamsasstras, Vol. II, part I, P. 559-60. He writes if a man had wives of different varnas, the preference was to be given to a wife of same varna and a wife of the varna next to his own should enjoy a secondary place. The sudra woman was assigned the lowest place.

63. Apart from occupational caste-structure, we have the references to Varna-originated castes like brahmani, Kshetriyani, Khatrani (valsyani) or Kaithini but no reference is available to sudra woman. It could be presumed that the sudra women might have adopted some occupations and they were identified in terms of their profession.
in the tradition however should not be interpreted as static paradigm because, tradition, inspite of its unchanging notions, permitted and suggested different ways of transgressing the predetermined and immediate order of social and cultural values. We will see in the following chapter how the individuals and, women in particular, confronted, accepted, resisted or transgressed these norms.