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Household and Family among Thakors in a North Gujarat Village*

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The institution of household mediates between the individual and society. Most people in most societies at most times live in households. The household provides a primary context in which the members construct their experience and knowledge of society and its basic principles. The household largely makes an individual fit for society. In a way it is a forge, wherein members are socialized to live in society. It is the next largest unit on the social map after the individual.

The household needs to be defined carefully, taking into consideration its structural, relational, behavioural and ethnographic characteristics. Empirical analysis of household composition shows structural variations, on which depends the web of obligations and rights, division of labour and, consequently, the texture of life. The composition of the household is likely to have a bearing on its procreative, productive, distributive and ritual functions.

This article examines household composition and family types, mainly among Thakors in a north Gujarat village. It deals with 'linked' and 'independent' emigrant households, and simple and complex households. It discusses the concept of family and examines the developmental process of households and family types. The data for this article was collected

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over 1982–83 for my Ph.D dissertation (see Lobo 1987, and for an account of fieldwork, see Lobo 1990).

The Village

Dhoria is a nucleated village situated in Kadi taluka of Mehesana district in north Gujarat, western India. Within the village site almost every caste has its own street, known as *vas*. Dhoria has 1,255 people, divided into 208 households and 11 castes. Thakor and Patel households constitute 46 and 33 per cent respectively of all the households, and the remaining 21 per cent are distributed among nine other castes. Table 13.2 shows the number of households, population, and the traditional occupation of the various castes in Dhoria. The approximate social ranking of these castes is given in Table 13.1.

Table 13.1
Approximate Social Ranking of Castes in Dhoria

<i>Upper castes</i>	<i>Intermediate castes</i>	<i>Lower castes</i>	<i>Harijans</i>
Brahmin	Sadhu	Thakor, Rabari	Wankar
Patel	Valand, Kumbhar	Bawa, Ravalia	Nadia

Table 13.2
Households, Population and Traditional Occupation of Dhoria Castes

<i>Caste name</i>	<i>Traditional occupation</i>	<i>Households</i>		<i>Population</i>	
		<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Brahmin	Ritual service	2	1.0	8	0.6
Patel	Agriculture	68	32.7	448	35.7
Sadhu	Rama priest	1	0.5	3	0.2
Valand	Barber	1	0.5	4	0.3
Kumbhar	Potter	12	5.7	47	3.8
Thakor	Agriculture	95	45.6	556	44.3
Rabari	Herder	2	1.0	14	1.1
Bawa	Shiva priest	1	0.4	4	0.3
Ravalia	Drummer	7	3.4	36	2.9
Wankar	Weaver	17	8.2	121	9.7
Nadia	Scavenger	2	1.0	14	1.1
		208	100.0	1,255	100.0

Source: Household Census of Dhoria, 1983.

The Thakor and Rabari castes share more or less equal status. The Sadhu and Bawa are sectarian castes. The Bawa ranks lower not only to the Sadhu but also to the service castes. The Thakor caste, though ritually inferior, is higher than the barber and the potter castes in economic and political status. The Ravalia is an example of a caste with an ambiguous status between the clean and untouchable castes.

The Household Dimension of the Family

The household is one of the several dimensions of the family. It is defined as a residential and domestic unit composed of one or more persons living under the same roof and eating food cooked in a single kitchen (Shah 1973: 8). As in Shah's village, Radhvanaj in central Gujarat, in Dhoria too a household is called both *ghar* (house) and *chulo* (hearth).

The number of members in a household in Dhoria ranges from 1–18. The mode is five and the arithmetic mean is six. The mean is higher in comparison to the mean for rural Gujarat (5.8) and for rural India (5.6) in the Census of 1981. The mean for Dhoria is 'high' because of the analytical procedure by which 30 'linked' households living outside Dhoria are incorporated into their corresponding households in the village. The analytical procedure will be explained shortly. If these 'linked' households are excluded, the arithmetic mean comes down to 5.35.

Households: Immigrant and Emigrant

Dhoria has five immigrant households. Of these, four belong to the Patel teachers of the village school who live in rented rooms. They include an unmarried woman, two women living with their children while their husbands are employed and residing elsewhere, and a man living with his wife and children. The fifth immigrant household belongs to a Wankar, who is the village health worker for Dhoria and two of its neighbouring villages. He lives with his wife and children in a rented room in the Harijan street. For all practical purposes, these immigrants are marginal to the traditional social organization of the village, but they show the prevalence of inter-village migration and the factors leading to it.

Table 13.3 shows the caste, place of residence, and population of households in Dhoria. Forty-six households are domiciles of Dhoria who have migrated to towns. Of these, 29 are Patel, 12 are Harijan and five are Thakor.

Table 13.3
Caste, Place of Residence and
Population of Dhoria Households

<i>Caste</i>	<i>In Dhoria</i>		<i>Outside Dhoria</i>		<i>Total</i>		<i>Households taken for analysis (HH)</i>
	<i>HH</i>	<i>PP</i>	<i>HH</i>	<i>PP</i>	<i>HH</i>	<i>PP</i>	
Thakor	94	544	5	12	99	556	95
Patel	59	302	29	146	88	448	68
Others	39	182	12	70	51	252	45
Total	192	1,028	46	228	238	1,256	208

Notes: HH=Household; PP=Population.

Their total population is 228, of which 64 per cent are Patel, 31 per cent Harijan and 5 per cent Thakor. These figures show that the tendency of townward migration is minimal among Thakors.

The 46 emigrant households consist of 16 independent emigrant households and 30 linked households. The former have their permanent homes in towns such as Kadi, Mehesana, Ahmedabad and Rajkot. Among them the Patel households have a wider geographical spread and greater occupational diversification. Their members are employed in the professions, in business, and as workers in textile mills. Most members of the six Wankar households are employed as workers in textile mills in Ahmedabad. The members of the lone Thakor household in Mehesana earn their livelihood through casual labour.

'Linked' and 'independent' emigrant households highlight the process of urbanization. In the beginning the married male commutes between the village and the city. He then begins to reside in the city seasonally. Later he takes his wife and children with him to the city. However, his situation corresponds to that of a person with one foot in the village and the other in the city. His attachment to the village increasingly diminishes as his household reaches the stage of an independent emigrant household.

The male heads of nearly all 'independent' emigrant households have their brother's household in Dhoria. All except three households also own land in Dhoria. With the exception of two households, which have retained a portion of their land for self-cultivation, all have rented their lands to sharecroppers. Fourteen of the independent households have their own houses in Dhoria, one has rented a house, and one neither owns a house nor rents one. Members of the households visit the village from time to time, especially on social occasions like weddings. Their houses are

generally used for storing agricultural produce and residues. They reside in their houses when they visit Dhorja, and keep them locked when they go to the town. Considering the limited number of visits and their relative lack of participation in village activities, these 16 households seem to be drifting away from the village, and prospects of their eventual return are dim.

Table 13.4 shows the distribution of the 30 linked emigrant households and their population, classified according to six different types of familial links with Dhorja. The 'linked' emigrant households have more intimate connections with Dhorja than do the independent emigrants.

Table 13.4
'Linked' Emigrant Households of Dhorja

Category of emigrant household	Thakor		Patel		Other		Total	
	HH	PP	HH	PP	HH	PP	HH	PP
Emigrant husbands with wife and children in the village	2	2	1	1			3	3
Emigrant man with only parents in the village			3	19	1	5	4	24
A man forming part of a joint unit of parents and unmarried siblings	1	2	8	25	2	6	11	33
A man forming part of a joint unit of parents and unmarried brother	1	4	2	5	1	8	4	17
A man forming part of a joint unit of parents and more than one married brother			5	40	2	23	7	63
A man forming part of a joint unit of a married brother			1	5			1	5
Total	4	8	20	95	6	42	30	145

The frequency of their visits to Dhorja, for rest and relaxation, to savour the feeling of being 'at home', and to participate in the rites of passage of their respective lineage units, is greater in the case of members of linked households than in the case of independent emigrant households. Their emotional attachment to their folk and to the village as a whole, and their sense of identity with the village are stronger compared to members of independent households. For our analysis, the 16 independent emigrant households have been treated as if they were not resident in the village. It will be shown that this has a bearing on the household size and on the

composition of simple and complex households in Dhorja. The 30 linked emigrant households have been incorporated into their corresponding Dhorja households. Thus, for our analysis we have a total of 208 households.

Households: Simple and Complex

The principal norms governing household formation among the Hindus in Gujarat are the following: marriages are virilocal, i.e., the bride migrates from her parental to her conjugal home; a man starts his married life in his parental home and lives there on a permanent basis; and brothers and their wives should live together in the same household not only during the lifetime of their parents but also after their death. These norms are subsumed under the principle of the residential unity of patrikin and their wives (for an explanation of this principle, see Shah 1973: 15–16).

Shah identifies two major types of household composition: simple and complex. A simple household consists of a whole or a part of the parental family, meaning a unit of man, his wife, and their unmarried children (i.e., nuclear or elementary family). The households composed of more than one parental family, or of parts of more than one parental family, or of one or more other parental families are considered 'complex'. The parental family is not to be confused with the 'parental unit', which covers the three possibilities of father, mother, and father and mother (see *ibid.*: 14). Table 13.5 shows the number and percentage of simple and complex households among the major castes in Dhorja.

One can observe that there are six more simple households than the number of complex households; indeed a negligible difference. If the 16 independent emigrant households are also included, the difference would be greater. The Thakors have more simple than complex households, the difference being 16 per cent. One may quote in this context the popular

Table 13.5
Distribution and Percentage of Simple and Complex Households by Caste

Caste	Simple		Complex		Total	
	HH	%	HH	%	HH	%
Thakor	53 (51.4%)	57.9	40 (39.6%)	42.1	95 (45.7%)	100
Patel	25 (23.4%)	36.8	43 (42.6%)	63.2	68 (32.7%)	100
Others	27 (25.2%)	60.0	18 (17.8%)	40.0	45 (21.6%)	100
Total	107 (100%)	51.4	101 (100%)	48.6	208 (100%)	100

saying among Thakors, '*Hun ane mari vahu, eman aave badhan sau*' (I and my wife, between the two of us are included all the rest). This saying captures the tendency of Thakors to live in simple households.

There are six major types of simple households. Their distribution according to the major castes is given in Table 13.6. The household Type VI—husband, wife, unmarried children—is obviously the most common: 90 out of a total of 107. Among the Thakors, 46 out of 55 simple households are of this type. These include four cases of remarriage after the first wife's death. In three of these cases, the first wife did not leave behind a child. In the fourth case, the first wife's children live with the father and the stepmother, who hails from another caste in a neighbouring village. The man, a contract labourer (*sathi*) at her father's house, had an affair with her and finally married her, which became a big scandal. He is yet to beget children by her.

Three Thakor households are each composed of husband and wife (Type V). Two of these couples are issueless, while the third couple's male child died at a young age. There are two Thakor households each consisting of father and unmarried children (Type IV), two each with mother and unmarried children (Type III) and two of Type I, in each of which a widow lives alone because her daughters are married and she has no son.

Table 13.6
Composition and Distribution of Simple Dhoria Households by Caste

Type	Composition of the household	Thakor	Patel	Others	Total
I	Single man or woman	2		1	3
II	Unmarried brother and sister		1		1
III	Mother, unmarried children	2	1	1	4
IV	Father, unmarried children	2		1	3
V	Husband, wife	3	2	1	6
VI	Husband, wife, unmarried children	46	21	23	90
Total		55	25	27	107

The complex households are classified into five types, varying in degree of complexity of kinship composition (see Table 13.7). Of the 40 complex Thakor households, three are atypical in some respects (see Type I). In two cases, married brothers, their wives and the children of one of the brothers live together. In the third case, a man, his wife and children plus the man's father's brother's widow live together. This atypicality bears on interpersonal relations in the household.

Table 13.7
Caste-wise Composition and Distribution of Complex Households in Dhoria

Type	Composition of the household	Thakor	Patel	Others	Total
I	Atypical composition	3	3		6
II	One married man, his unmarried sibling/s	1	1		2
III	Parental unit, one married son	19	10	6	35
IV	Parental unit, one married man, and his unmarried siblings	11	16	7	34
V	Parental unit with two or more married sons	6	13	5	24
Total		40	43	18	101

Among Thakors there is only one household consisting of a married man and one or more unmarried siblings (Type II). Nineteen complex households among Thakors are each composed of parents and one married son (Type III). Of them, two are composed of both the parents, son and his wife; four are composed of both the parents, son, wife and their children; two are composed of widower father, son, his wife and their children; one is composed of widowed mother, son and his wife; four are composed of widowed mother, son, wife and their children.

Eleven Thakor households (Type IV) are composed of parents, a son and his wife, and other unmarried children. Of these, three are composed of both the parents, unmarried children, and a son and his wife. Seven are composed of both the parents, unmarried children, married son, his wife and their children. The eleventh household has a widowed mother, unmarried children, married son, his wife and their children. Six Thakor households (Type V) comprise of parents and two or more married sons. Two of them are composed of both the parents, two married sons, their wives and children. In the first case, the elder son is childless. In the second case, the elder son works in Gandhinagar town, leaving his wife and children in Dhoria. The second son has just married. The remaining four households have both the parents, unmarried children, two or more married sons and their wives, but only one of the married sons has children.

Households of Types III, IV and V account for 36 out of 40 of the complex Thakor households. In 19 households, parents live with a married son and have no other unmarried children; in 11 households the parents live with one married son and other unmarried children; and in six households the parents live with two or more married sons and other unmarried children. Among the 36 filial households, 19 are of Type III, composed of parental unit and only one married son, making it the most dominant

type of complex household. In 12 of the 19 households of Type III, the married son is the only son of the parents. In seven cases, the parents have other married sons living separately. These seven cases therefore indicate a stage in the developmental process of the household in which all married sons except one have left their parents to establish independent households.

In the 11 households of Type IV, the parents live with one married son and other unmarried children. In the six households of Type V, the parents live with two or more married sons. In the case of Type IV, only one son is married, while in Type V two or more sons are married. Thus, the latter case (with two or more married sons) is indicative of a slightly more advanced situation in the developmental process. By and large these complex households partially conform to the principle of residential unity of patrikin and their wives, which is desired in the Hindu value system.

The degree of acceptance of the norm of joint living can be an index of sanskritization (Shah 1973). Hence, the next question is: to what degree are the Thakors of Dhorja sanskritized? To answer this question, we must examine the situation of the other castes in Dhorja. There is greater incidence of complex households among Dhorja Patels than among Thakors. Twenty-nine of the Patel complex households are composed of a parental unit with two or more married sons. This situation can be regarded as an indicator of the preference for the principle of joint living and, indirectly, for sanskritization. Thakors easily fit the 'low caste' syndrome noted by Shah (1988: 40):

The ideal of joint living is not as strong among the lower castes as among the high. There is in this regard what may be called a 'low caste' syndrome due to the occurrence among them of (a) divorce and remarriage of divorced women, (b) bride price—returnable at divorce—rather than bridegroom price or dowry, (c) little, if any, landed property, (d) flimsy, easily constructable houses, and very few household effects, and (e) frequent migration in search of livelihood.

In the complex households of the Thakors analysed above, there is no case of the reversal of the virilocal principle; i.e., there is no household in which a married daughter and her husband and children live with her parents or brothers in her natal village. There are two cases of widowed daughters returning to their natal village at an advanced age with children. They have set-up independent households and are not living with parents

or brothers. In one case the widow passed away, and the other is living with her son who has remained unmarried, though he is eligible for marriage. The male children of both the widowed daughters are called *gamna bhaniya* (nephews of the village).

The Developmental Process of Thakor Households

Every household belongs to one of the phases in the developmental process, along the line set by the principle of residential unity of patrikin and their wives. It is either moving towards or retreating from the norm of co-residence of parents and married sons. Let us see the simple households among Thakors in this perspective. Table 13.8 classifies simple households among Thakors according to the principal phases of the developmental process to which they belong. In 17 of the 55 cases, the simple household is a result of the partition of the households of one or both parents and one or more married sons (A-i, A-ii, A-iii and B-i). These households represent a violation of the dominant norm of co-residence of parents and married sons. The remaining 33 men (A-iv) have lost their parents and have no married sons of their own. Similarly, none of the remaining five widows (B-ii) has a married son. Thus, in 38 cases there is no question of the simple household living in violation of the dominant norm of co-residence of patrikin and their wives at the present moment. The high incidence of such households among Thakors is clearly a result of a high rate of mortality and low average lifespan among them. Most of the men in these households must have married during the lifetime of their parents and live with them in complex households for shorter or longer durations. It is also probable that some of them had separated from their parents. Most of these simple households will also become complex when the sons are married, though in a few cases the sons may be separated from them. As Shah has pointed out, the phenomena of birth, death, marriage and partition occur simultaneously in the society as a whole, and therefore there are always some men belonging to a phase in which their parents are dead, brothers (if any) are separated, sisters (if any) are married away, and sons (if any) have not yet married. Similarly, there are always widows who cannot reside with their parents-in-law or brothers-in-law (if alive), and whose sons (if any) are not yet married (Shah 1973: 78).

Table 13.8

Simple Households of Thakors Classified by Phases in the Developmental Process

Phase	Households
A. Simple household either composed of one man or headed by a man	
i. Man's parents are alive but reside in a separate household, and he has no married son	47
ii. Man's parents are dead, and he has married sons residing in separate households	13
iii. Man has parents as well as married sons residing in separate households	1
iv. Man's parents are dead, and he has no married son	33
B. Simple household either composed of a widow or headed by a widow	8
i. Widow has married sons residing in separate households	3
ii. Widow has no married son	5
Total	55

Table 13.9 shows the number of parental units (i.e., father or mother, or father and mother) living jointly with or separately from their married sons. In 19 of the 22 cases in which the parental unit has only one married son, the parental unit and the married son form a single household, while in three cases the parental unit and the married son live in separate households. On the other hand, of the 18 cases in which the parental unit has two or more married sons, in only four cases do all the married sons live with the parental unit in a single household, while in 14 cases all or some of the married sons live separately from the parental unit. Among the 19 households in which parents live with only one son who is married, there are 12 in which the married son happens to be the only son of his parents. The demographic accident of having only one son narrows down the parents' option of living separately from the son. Society frowns upon the only son who does not reside with and look after the parents. The parents, being at the receiving end, cannot but decide to live with least friction and tension with the son and his wife. For instance, Shakaji Thakor and his wife live with their only son, who is married. This arrangement is less than satisfactory to Shakaji Thakor as well as his son. Of the remaining seven households, the parents as well as the married son will have several options open to them when the other sons in the family get married.

The norm of co-residence of parental unit and the only married son is violated in three cases. These are atypical cases; the parents and the married son compose a joint family but not a joint household. There is no stepson or adopted son in these three cases. Of 18 cases in which the

parental unit has two or more married sons, only in four cases do the parental unit and all the married sons form a single unified household. Let us consider Thakor Nanaji's case. He is the elder son and has a younger brother, Manuji. The parents and the two sons and their wives live in a joint household. Nanaji has no children of his own, while Manuji has two children.

Table 13.9
Relations between Parental Unit and Married Sons among Thakors

<i>Category of relation</i>	<i>Parental units</i>	<i>Married sons</i>
1. Parental units with only one married son	22	22
i. Parental unit and the married son live in a single household	19	19
ii. Parental unit and the married son live in separate households	3	3
2. Parental units with two or more married sons	18	41
i. Parental unit and all the married sons form a single household	4	8
ii. Parental unit and one married son form a single household; other married sons reside in separate households	11	25
iii. Parental unit and two or more married sons form a single household; other married sons reside in separate households	2	6
iv. All the married sons live in separate households	1	2

Manuji works as a contract labourer for six months a year in a neighbouring village and cultivates family land during the remaining part of the year. Nanaji only hires out his bullocks and takes land for share-cropping. He is the decision-maker and controls the finances of the household. He decides matters relating to economic and ritual interaction with other people. His aged father presides over the household. In these four cases the joint family and the joint household are coterminous, and the ideal of the joint family is fully realized. In the 11 cases in which one married son continues to live with the parents while the other married sons have established separate households, the ideal of joint living is partially realized. Let us take the case of Pakaji, who has four sons, of whom two are married and two unmarried. One of the married sons has established a separate household, though no partition of land has taken place so far. He does not get anything significant from the family produce because he does not contribute his labour to cultivate the family land. He and his wife live on the income of their labour.

There are many alternatives in a situation such as that of Pakaji's. If the son who has established a separate hearth contributes his labour, he will get a share of the family produce. He will get a share even if he merely contributes his earnings to the parental unit. The land has not been partitioned because there are still two unmarried sons and daughters, whose marriage expenses have to be met from the income from the land. Generally, until all the children are married, land or other immoveable property is not partitioned. If partitioned, the share will not be equal, because of the presence of unmarried children and aged parents. If the landed property is equally partitioned, it is done on the condition that all the brothers equally contribute to the family expenses: mortuary rites of the parents, marriage of unmarried siblings, presentations and exchanges that take place for their sister's children, and so on. Therefore, the married son with a separate hearth is not expected to contribute to *mamerun* (gifts given by a brother to his sister's children on the occasion of their wedding). However, he is expected to voluntarily contribute to his obligations to his own wife's relatives.

The recognized unit for addressing the *kankotri* (wedding invitation) is the family. The head of the family receives the invitation. Married sons who have established separate hearths are not eligible to receive wedding invitations. They become eligible only if they have completely independent households, i.e., after the actual division of property has taken place. Even after establishing independent households, if the eldest male in the family receives a wedding invitation that needs to be reciprocated with cash gifts, he gives it to one of the related households. Obviously, the invitations from a man's affines need to be responded to only by himself.

There are two cases in which the parental unit and two or more married sons form a single household while other married sons reside in separate households. In these cases the ideal of joint family living is partially realized. Finally, in one case all the married sons live in separate households from the parents. This is an extreme violation of the norm of co-residence between parents and married sons. The point is that even though the parents have several sons, none of them is prepared to stay with the parents. People look upon this as a tragic situation. In this situation there is not even a partial joint household, though there is a joint family.

Among the Thakors there are several reasons for the weak application of the norm of joint household formation. The Thakors are generally poor and, because they are marginal landholders, they derive their livelihood from agricultural labour. There is a popular saying among them, '*Ame raliye ane ame khaiye*' (we eat what we earn). Usually, a Thakor sets

up a separate household within a couple of years of his marriage. In contrast, the landed castes such as the Patels have a greater incidence of joint living. Land ownership often fosters joint living for social as well as economic reasons. Second, as mentioned earlier, a higher mortality rate and a shorter life span, as in the case of the Thakors, inhibit joint household formation. If a person dies before his son or sons get married, then the chances of joint living are eliminated. The personality formation of the young is affected when they are deprived of the benefits of joint residence with grandparents. The interaction between grandparents and grandchildren goes a long way towards the internalization of the norm of joint living. If the young have not internalized this norm, there is less possibility of their perpetuating it in their turn. Third, a greater occurrence of divorce and remarriage also contributes to separation of households. On account of less joint living among the Thakors, they are also less subjected to the daily tensions resulting from joint living. However contradictory it may sound, by living separately a family can live unitedly.

The Concept of Family

In sociology as well as in ordinary usage, the term 'family' is used in the sense of a household as well as of a wider kinship unit whose members may live in more than one household. A simple household may be composed of a complete or an incomplete elementary family. A joint family may or may not be a joint household. In other words, while all joint households are joint families, not all joint families are joint households. The concept of family is thus fuzzy. Shah (1973: 3) has noted:

The term 'family' refers on the one hand to genealogical models, without any definite indication of the activities or functions of the persons composing a model (as in 'nuclear family' and 'extended family') and on the other hand to social groups having certain activities or functions without any definite indication of the persons composing the group (as in 'family' in the sense of 'household' and in 'joint family' in the sense of a kind of property group).

Defining the family in terms of activities or functions also creates problems (see *ibid.*: 111–14). Is the family a household group, a property-holding group, or a ritual and ceremonial group? What happens when

many functions are combined? One of the ways of identifying the family reality is by observing the nature of activities and relations. First, delineate the property-owning unit, then the ritual unit, and then superimpose one on the other. Next, examine the mutual help given and taken by members therein.

The lowest denominator in our discussion on the family is the household. The first step towards establishing an independent household is setting up a separate hearth. The process of establishment of an independent household is complete on its becoming an independent property-owning unit, i.e., with the partition of the moveable and immoveable property of the parents. The independent unit does not, or need not, sever all its relations with the parents or the main unit from which it branched off. The reality of division, separation and partition has been subsumed under the phase of 'dispersal' in the developmental process of the Indian family (Shah 1988).

The words used for 'family' among the Dhoria Thakors are *katam* (*kutumb*) and *parivar*. These are interchangeably used to signify the family reality, though the more commonly used word is *katam*. This word encompasses more than a household and, in some contexts, a lineage segment. The dispersed households of a joint family generally occupy houses adjacent to each other, have a common courtyard and a common entry-exit gate, own fields adjacent to each other, share a common well, possess a common shrine, constitute a primary group for rites of passage, and have a regular flow of inter-household ritual gifts. Agnates within the family unit are reversionary coparceners. The eldest male may possess ceremonial leadership during ritual occasions.

I shall now attempt to identify the number of joint families among Thakors. One may distinguish two types of joint families: (i) filial joint families, which may or may not be joint households, and (ii) fraternal joint families, which are rarely joint households. As mentioned earlier, joint families cannot be identified without first isolating the demographic data from the social. Though my attempt is not exhaustive, I suggest three situations in our effort to identify filial joint families.

Situation 1: Table 13.8 shows that in 33 cases a man's parents are dead and he has no married son (A-iv) and in five cases the man is dead and his widow has no married son (B-ii). Hence, in these 38 cases there is no demographic possibility of having a filial joint family at all.

Situation 2: Table 13.9 shows joint families of the father and one or more married sons, which may or may not be joint households. Of the 22 parental units with only one married son, 19 consist of parents and the

married son living in a single household. Of 18 parental units with two or more married sons, four consist of parents and all the married sons forming a single household, 11 consist of parental units with one married son forming a single household and other married sons living in separate households; two consist of parents and two or more married sons forming a single household and other married sons living separately. Thus, there are in total 36 ($19 + 4 + 11 + 2$) units of father and son(s) constituting joint families as well as joint households (complete or partial).

Situation 3: Table 13.9 shows the extreme violation of the norm of joint living in four cases. In three cases the parents and the only married son live in separate households, and in one case parents have two or more sons who are married, but all the married sons live in separate households which do not include their parents. In these four cases there is the filial joint family but no joint household.

Fraternal Joint Family

Though the developmental process of the Thakor household reaches its maximum limit in the poorly observed norm of father-son joint living, there are a couple of cases of fraternal joint living. The death of parents is a decisive event, leading to the establishment of separate households among married brothers. Even if one of the parents is alive, it is sufficient to prolong the bonds within the family. But once both the parents are dead, two married brothers may or may not attempt to uphold the norm of fraternal unity. Among 95 households of Dhorja Thakors there are only two joint households of brothers, their wives and children surviving after the death of their parents. In the first household, the elder brother has no child while the younger brother has one child. The former is the head of the household. In the second household, three married brothers live together. The eldest has only daughters and is the head of the family. The two younger brothers, who were married a year ago, are yet to have children. In both the cases, the fact that one of the brothers does not have a male child contributes to some extent to the continuation of the fraternal joint household. Generally, such joint households have the potential to get divided at any moment due to bitter disputes among the members of the household (particularly the women) and the absence of parents (Srinivas 1952). But when one of the brothers does not have a child and the possibility of begetting one is doubtful, there are chances of two married brothers living together. Common economic interests also may foster fraternal joint living.

At least among Thakors, the existence of a joint family beyond the filial level is an exception. However, there may be residual rights and obligations. For example, in one case a man's dead father's brother's widow resides in his household. The widow has no support whatsoever and is looked after by her dead husband's dead brother's household.

Internal Segmentation of the Thakor Lineage

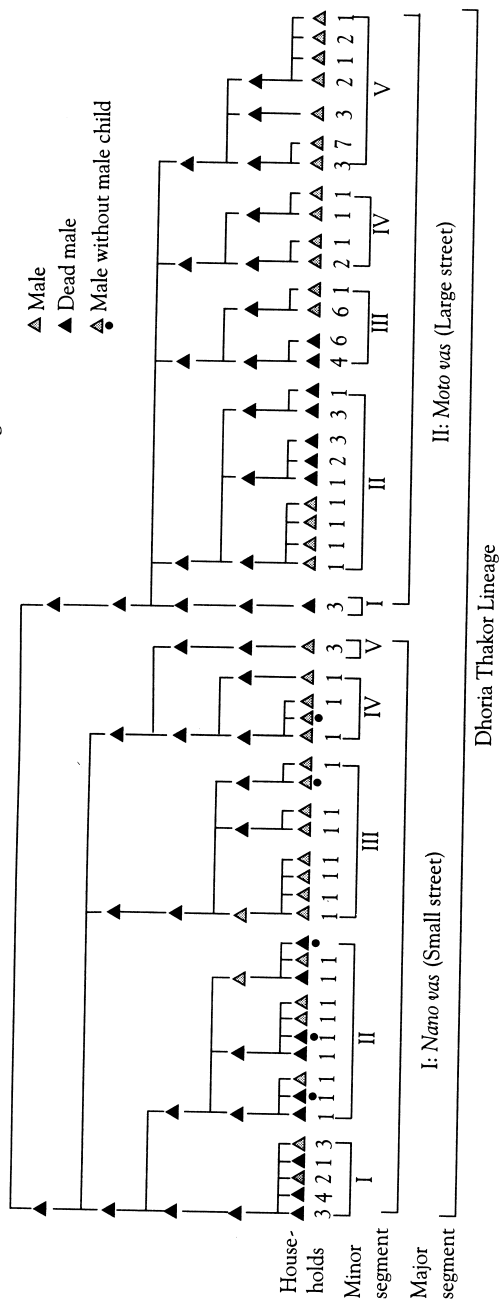
Unlike Thakors in many other villages in north Gujarat, the Thakors in Dhorja have only one patrilineage group among them. In the sociological literature on kinship one comes across several terms used to identify descent groups (such as clan and lineage) and the internal segments of a lineage (such as maximal and minimal lineage, and major and minor lineage). There is no satisfactory equivalent for any of these terms in the local words used in the context of lineages: *khandan* (family), *kutumb* (family), *khunt* (literally, boundary stone), *shakh* (literally, branch), *pankh* (literally, wing) *thadun* (literally, tree trunk), *kula* (lineage) and *vamsha* (lineage). Often these local words have overlapping meanings, consisting of all descendants through the patriline from a known male ancestor. The Thakors often refer to it as *kula* or *vamsha*. It is exogamous, functions as a ritual unit, has a lineage goddess, and occasionally functions as political unit.

The Dhorja Thakor lineage has two major segments: 'Small Street' (*nano vas*) and 'Large Street' (*moto vas*). Each is also called *thadun* (literally, tree trunk). About the relationship between the two, the Thakors say, 'Ame ek magni be faad' (we are two halves of one bean of green gram). Small Street and Large Street segments each have five minor segments, which in turn consist of a varying number of households, as shown in the genealogical chart. The local terms used for minor segments are *pankh*, *shakh* and *khunt*. Members of a minor segment generally occupy a single ward, own fields adjacent to each other, share assets such as a common well, have reciprocal exchange of gifts at ceremonial occasions, and are reversionary coparceners.

Interaction between Minor Segments

To understand the nature of intra-lineage relations we should understand the local terms used for various kinds of interactions. *Vyavahar* means

Figure 13.1
Internal Segmentation of Dhorja Thakor Lineage



transactions, dealings, and socially expected behaviour. *Aal mel* means giving and receiving, lending and borrowing; *ooth-bes* (literally, sitting and standing) means coming and going to each other's house; *bola-chali* means speaking to and walking with each other; *sara-sari* indicates having good relations; and *rag nathi* or *mel nathi* means not seeing eye to eye. The expression '*gamni reete bolvun*' means that though ill-will may exist between two close kinsmen in the village, each should, as a resident of the village, observe minimal courtesy towards the other. The term *sagun* stands for 'relative'. The *sambandh* or *sabandhi* indicates a relationship of any kind, even an acquaintance or friend.

Not every adult Thakor knows the precise genealogical links within the lineage, and yet in his perception kinship space is clear. They have no problem in isolating relations into categories of 'mine', 'ours' and 'theirs'. Rites of passage within the lineage continually maintain the clarity of these categories. In the life-cycle events of birth, marriage and death, every adult Thakor more or less knows which categories of relatives are expected to be invited and in what manner. In case of doubt there are always specialists in kinship who can be consulted.

Conclusion

The study of family in India has been making steady advances. In addition to the ritualistic and legalistic approaches of studying family, the scope of analysis has widened in the areas of production, reproduction, socialization and the care of the elderly. In the developmental cycle of the family a number of variables—demography, norms of household formation, rules of inheritance, kinship and social stratification—have been studied. What has come to light now is the importance of various contexts and situations in which a household or family is placed during developmental processes in various sections of society.

This article has delineated household and family in the developmental process in the lower social stratum of a rural north Gujarat village. It has highlighted that the household is an easily identifiable entity, while family is not. Contextually and situationally, the concept of family changes. The local people themselves use different terms for family in different contexts. Hence, the definition of family unit is bound to remain somewhat diffused. The family in the lower social stratum also has a ceiling on its developmental

process, viz., filial joint living. Fraternal joint living is an exception rather than a rule. However, the upper social stratum has a greater incidence of filial as well as fraternal joint living than the lower.

Note

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