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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

Caste	In Dhoria		Outside Dhoria		Total		Households taken for analysis (HH)
	HH	PP	HH	PP	HH	PP	
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

