

Indian Kinship Systems

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Kinship Organisation in India by Irawati Karve, Second revised edition; Asia Publishing House, 1965; pp 389 Rs 30.

WHEN in 1953 the first edition of Irawati Karve's book on Indian kinship systems was published as a volume of the Bulletin of the Deccan College Postgraduate and Research Institute it did not arouse as much interest as it deserved. Anthropologists and sociologists certainly realized its importance as the first systematic comparative study of the numerous aspects of kinship behaviour in India, but the very fact that it appeared in a small edition as one of a series of learned monographs limited its impact on intellectual circles inside and outside India. Since then Karve has addressed herself through various channels to a growing public interested in the functioning and recent development of Indian society, and there can be no doubt that the new revised and enlarged edition will meet with a very different and far more lively response. Some parts of the book have been rewritten, many have been improved by minor corrections and an entire chapter on Ownership of Property, Succession and Inheritance has been added.

Command of Sanskrit Sources

Karve began her analysis of Indian kinship systems as early as 1938, when she investigated the kinship organization of the various castes of the Marathi-speaking culture-zone. She then discovered a discrepancy between the kinship terminology which, like that of Northern India, is of purely Sanskrit origin, and the marriage—and kinship—rules which link the people of Maharashtra with the Dravidian populations of Southern India. Over the years the author extended her study of kinship terms as well as of the conduct between kinsmen to many parts of India, travelling widely in her search for data, and while doing so comparing the usages of each area with those of many other regions. Her comparisons, however, were not limited to a synchronic plane. An excellent command of Sanskrit sources enabled her to extend her investigations diachronically to the earliest periods of recorded Indian history. In this way she demonstrated the extraordinary

continuity of Indian family organization and kinship behaviour throughout the subcontinent's long and varied history. Situations now depicted in popular literature and even the plots of cine-films have close parallels in stories and legends of the Vedic age. Attitudes then formed persist even nowadays in the villages of Northern India, and our understanding of contemporary conditions can be greatly deepened by reference to the early Sanskrit literature. Yet, Karve is not content with emphasizing the remarkable continuity of the Indian social tradition, but she traces above all the changes in kinship terms and explains how they reflect changes in practices and finally even ideals.

Similarities and Contrasts

Starting with the kinship organization of the Northern zone, which resembles closely the pattern known from the classical Sanskrit literature, the author investigates the kinship systems of all the main cultural and linguistic zones of India. Besides some similarities she finds contrasts in fundamental attitudes as well as a blending and dovetailing of the individual systems. The continuity of Indian traditions is probably unique, and there is no other part of the world where ideals and attitudes evolved as much as three millennia ago have determined social behaviour so powerfully and lastingly. On the other hand, there are greater and far more basic regional differences in kinship systems than there are in other subcontinents dominated by a single leading civilization. Whereas in European countries the family and marriage system rooted in Christian ideals evinces certainly some considerable local differences, there are within the European culture sphere no such drastic and fundamental contrasts as that between the patrilineal family of Northern India based in its structure and ramifications on strictly enforced local exogamy and, on the other hand, the matrilineal family pattern of some South Indian societies, where cross-cousin marriage favours the concentration of kinship ties in small

clusters.

The effects of the attempts of present Indian legislatures to impose from above a uniformity which conflicts with the diversity of traditional regional patterns can be judged only by those who have a full appreciation of the many-sided implications of old established local usages. A scholarly and detached book such as the work by Karve should therefore be of the greatest interest and value to all those concerned with the implementation of acts likely to revolutionize the structure of the Indian family. It should also counteract the all too common assumption that certain forms of family organization are intrinsically better and more "progressive" than others. At present patrilineal succession and inheritance are being more favoured than the matrilineal system of such regions as Kerala, but value judgements of this type are usually based on considerations other than an objective analysis of the positive and negative attributes of the two conflicting systems.

Illuminating Hypothesis

Karve's book is so rich in factual information as well as intuitive insight that a review cannot do more than outline the main trend of her arguments. Interspersed with the detailed description and interpretation of kinship usages are illuminating, even though partly rather tentative, hypotheses regarding problems of Indian prehistory. Thus Karve believes that the speakers of Munda languages represent the oldest still traceable ethnic group, and tends to support the theory of an expansion of Dravidian languages from a centre in South India discounting the hypothesis of the gradual displacement of Dravidians from Northern India and their slow retreat to the southern part of the peninsula.

The many additions to this work which has already become a classic of Indian anthropological literature show that Karve continues to be active in research. Her's is not a temperament to be easily satisfied with an

achievement, and there is little doubt that when a third edition of this book is due, she will again add some new

discoveries and interpretations drawn from her comprehensive and deep knowledge of Indian social systems.

A Congress Stalwart

S Joseph

Rafi Ahmad Kidwai: A Memoir of His Life and Times by Ajit Prasad Jain; Asia Publishing House, 1965; pp X + 130, Rs 14.

THIS is a short memoir of Rafi Ahmed Kidwai written by a friend, colleague and admirer. In this book Ajit Prasad Jain has chosen the happy technique of presenting a number of anecdotes and incidents from Kidwai's life and letting the events, on the whole, speak for themselves. For instance the chapter called 'Some Rafian Episodes' consists of the juxtaposition, without much explanatory comment, of a number of terse anecdotes which show up different and sometimes startling aspects of his character. It appears from these that Kidwai had a taste for fast driving, was extremely gregarious, outspoken sometimes to the point of rudeness,openhanded in his generosity and a lover of practical jokes. In addition to that he did not hesitate to use his office to help those who appealed to him and publicly announced (as a joke) shortly before his death that he could, if necessary, successfully replace Nehru as Prime Minister. Fortunately no attempt is made to trim Kidwai down into consistency by omission or explanation.

A few important events in the history of the Congress Party and government in which Kidwai played a part are also described. They are the U P Agrarian Reform Movement, the gradual alienation of Muslims and the Muslim League from Congress, and the manouvres which took place within the Congress party after Independence and which culminated in the resignation of Kidwai from the party and eventually the replacement of Tandon by Nehru as President of the Party. The analysis of events is generally fair but one must question the statement that the Congress alliance with the Khilafat movement was "the finest hour of the nationalist struggle" because Hindus and Muslims were for once united. Gandhiji, he says, would go to any length to create confidence among minorities. But even in the Congress there were people like Motilal Nehru who were doubtful about the Congress support for such "a moribund institution. . . . even the Turks were sick of it" (Nanda). It was the

Moulvis and Ulemas who dominated the Khilafat movement, not the middle class Muslims who eventually came to power in the Muslim League. At any rate this Hindu-Muslim Unity lasted only until the Khilafat was dissolved by the new Turkish government.

In another chapter Jain defends the Congress decision to refuse to accept the Muslim League as sole representative of Indian Muslims for the purpose of division of seats in the U P cabinet of 1937. Maulana Azad has pointed to the decision as being largely responsible for the demand for a separate Muslim State. Jain says that the formation of Pakistan could only have been the result of certain deep-seated and long-term causes; it could not be due to one isolated incident. But even long-term causes can be intensified and latent fears brought to the surface by more immediate events and unfortunately the UP incident seems to have given Muslim League leaders the opportunity to demonstrate to their followers the potential dangers of Congress ride.

Another episode described in some detail is the series of events leading to the resignation of Kidwai and the author from the Congress in 1951. Kidwai had long been associated with the left of the Congress and with socialist groups outside consisting mainly of defected Congressmen. His aim we are told, was to persuade Nehru to leave Congress and become the leader of a new Socialist Party. It is fascinating to speculate what might have occurred if he had succeeded. But without Nehru, Kidwai was unwilling to leave Congress; whether this was due to his emotions which would not let him leave an old friend as Jain says, or due to his reason which must have told him that he could never succeed without Nehru is not clear.

A quaint touch is added to the book by Jain's choice of verse for his chapter headings. The split between Muslim League and Congress is headed by

*"Two lovely berries moulded on one stem,
So with two serving bodies but one heart"*

and the U P Agrarian Reform struggle with

*"Ring in the nobler modes of life,
With sweeter manners, purer life".*

Only the chapter entitled 'Father of Civil Aviation' is left verseless; perhaps even the Oxford Book of Quotations could not rise to the occasion.

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