

A STUDY OF SOME ASPECTS OF HOUSEHOLD TYPES AND
FAMILY ORGANIZATION IN RURAL BENGAL, 1946-47¹

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1. The Indian Statistical Institute carried out a socio-economic survey in Bengal in 1947 to enquire into the economic condition of the rural population of Bengal. The sample unit in this survey was the Household and the survey gave data on 16,000 families from the various villages of Bengal, both the villages and the Households being selected at random. An attempt has been made on the basis of a part of these data to classify the family units in terms of their kinship structures.

2. Before presenting the results of our analysis it is necessary to draw attention to certain shortcomings in the data. From the randomly selected 16,000 households of Bengal, unfortunately a portion of the total schedules of the enquiry had been misplaced and were not available at the time of analysis.

3. Accordingly, our findings are based on only a portion of the data originally collected. As the data which were made available to me, cover a total of 6061 family units, it was thought, however, that we had somewhat sufficient material to give at least a general and impressionistic idea of the family structures of rural Bengal for the period of 1946-47.

4. A systematic classification of the data at hand, has been made in relation to kinship ties binding together constituents of the family units. It is with this particular objective in mind I have attempted to proceed with the classificatory analysis of the data. In doing so, I further considered other factors for the convenience of my analysis and which are as follows : 1) Whether or not all the units that come only under the Non-extended group were genealogically as well as structurally complete. Keeping this very criterion of completeness in view, I have been able to arrive at two distinct categories, namely, a) incomplete non-familial units and b) complete family units.

All incomplete units have in this study been described as household units (biological & social units) to differentiate them from all familial units.

5. After carefully examining the existence of the nature of kinship ties which testify to the criterion of parent-child relationship among the constituents of the units concerned, all non-extended complete structures showing such nature of kinship, have been isolated from the rest. This nature of kinship was found to exist either

between the parents and their unmarried offsprings or between one of the parents and his/her unmarried children.

Those non-extended units which present us with the existence of parent-child relationship between the parents and unmarried children in the units concerned, have been treated as complete familial units in contrast to those incomplete familial units in which the parent-child relationship was found to exist only between one of the parents and unmarried children. Thus, the units comprising parents and their unmarried issues have for the purpose of our study been dichotomised into two distinct halves.

6. Further attempts have been made to classify all the incomplete units on the basis of the criterion of parent-child relationship. Those incomplete units in which the said relationship was not manifested, have been divided into two separate Types.

7. We know that our rural families are patronymic and accordingly, for each household and family structure the husband, his sons and their male descendants through males together with wives and unmarried daughters have been isolated as household or family members from the remainder of their kins. The kins who do not maintain the patronymic affiliation to the "head" (or Ego) of the family or household structure in question, have been treated for the purpose of the study in two broad denotative groups, namely, (1) Female Patrikins (FPK) which shall mean, in terms of the Ego, all married and/or widowed female agnates and affines related only through them; and (2) Matri-kins (MTK) which shall, on the other hand, mean, in terms of the Ego, all individuals, male or female, with whom genealogical relationship can be traced through some female who has married into the family.

Thus, on isolating and classifying the kins of the "head" (or Ego) of the household (economic and social units) in this manner the remaining individuals of the household, who maintain only a metamorphical relationship with the Ego of the household or family structure concerned, have been left out, as non-kin, of any consideration from the scope of our study.

8. In the schedules, information regarding the marital status of certain constituent agnate members, male and female, was not enumerated and as such we had obviously to face the difficulty in indentifying the Types of the family units as well as the kin-type (FPK). To avoid this difficulty, I have considered all male agnates whose ages were recorded to be 18 years or more, but at the same time their marital status was not given, as married persons; similarly, all female agnates whose ages were noted to be 15 years or more, but at the same time their marital status was not given, as married ones. It is these married female agnates who have been termed as the kin-type of FPK.

9. Classified from the point of view of 'inclusiveness of membership', besides the question of completeness of the structures, the larger kinship groupings, namely, the extended (joint) families fall into two distinct Types : (i) Collateral and (ii) Lineal. In this particular classification the criterion of collaterality in terms of the "heads" (or Ego) of the household and family structures has been uniformly applied to have the relevant dichotomy of the extended families.

10. For the purpose of my study all the available schedules have been sorted out into two aggregates, namely, (a) schedules related *only* to the rural areas of the present day West Bengal, and (b) the schedules related *only* to the rural areas of the present day East Pakistan (former East Bengal). All together a total number of 1944 and 4117 schedules have been analysed separately to present the proportional occurrences of the different Types of household and family organization, as they were in the rural society of West and East Bengal for the period of 1946-47.

11. The importance of the relevant findings that have been incorporated in the Tables 1, 2, 3 & 4 is obviously true for the given data only and from these findings, how far we may draw conclusion for the whole of Bengal for the period of 1946-47 has, of course, to be judged with an awareness of the fact that the data comprise only a part of the original sample. In spite of these shortcomings in our data, I have proceeded with my analysis with the assumption that there might exist an apparent difference in the organization of kinship ties among the constituent members of the households of families of East and West Bengal. The subsequent analyses have helped me to focus on these differences in the proportional occurrences of the different Types in West and East Bengal rural society. Although we cannot say anything categorically in quantitative terms, we can, nevertheless, give a broad impressionistic view of the differences referred to above.

12. This, in itself, is something which may be considered of interest in view of the fact that detailed classification of the family as done by me, hardly exists with reference to the rural people of Bengal (undivided).

In the existing classifications the place of kin-types as analysed by me, is also hardly found to occur and to this extent my analyses may be considered as a point of departure for further studies.

13. From our analysis of the total number of incomplete (non-familial) as well as complete (familial) units in relation to the total number of households and family units (8061) surveyed in West Bengal and East Bengal respectively, the following comparative characteristics can be presented : 1) *single member households* appeared relatively in greater proportion in the rural areas of West

Bengal than that of East Bengal ; 2) *married but childless couple households* existed more or less in the same proportion in both areas, but in West Bengal the proportion was slightly higher than that in East Bengal ; 3) *nuclear (I) type*, that is, widowed parent with only one unmarried child, was proportionately higher in West Bengal villages than East Bengal : 3.1) *nuclear (I) type*, that is, widowed parent with more than one unmarried child, occurred more or less in the same proportion ; 4) *nuclear (II) type*, that is, parents with only one unmarried child (complete nuclear family) was in higher proportion in East Bengal than West Bengal ; 4.1) *nuclear (II) type*, that is, parents with more than one unmarried child occurred definitely in a higher proportion in East Bengal rural society than in West Bengal ; 5) combined proportion of nuclear (I) types, that is, all *incomplete* family units consisting of widowed parent with one or more than one unmarried children, was somewhat proportionately higher in the peasant society of West Bengal ; 5.1) combined proportion of nuclear (II) type, that is, all *complete* family units consisting of parents with one or more unmarried children, was, on the other hand proportionately higher in the rural society of East Bengal ; 6) in West Bengal the proportion of all *incomplete* familial units (household) was proportionately greater than what we find for East Bengal ; 6.1) in East Bengal the proportion of all *complete* familial units happened to be higher than what we get for West Bengal.

Considering further the proportion of various Types falling within the total number of Non-extended types *only*, we find the following differences in proportions :

i) Household Organization :	West Bengal	East Bengal
a) single member	12.58%	6.74%
b) married		
couple	16.03%	13.64%
c) nuclear (I)	10.13%	8.69%
ii) Family Organization :		
d) nuclear (II)	61.26%	70.93%
	<hr/> Total : 100.00%	100.00%

From the above one significant fact is revealed : that in rural parts of West Bengal the non-extended household organization was relatively dominant than what we find in East Bengal. Again, in East Bengal rural society it was the non-extended family organization which was relatively prominent in contrast to what we witness for West Bengal.

Further, if we consider the proportion of all the incomplete family (household)—Types within the non-extended group of house-

holds only the following differences between West and East Bengal rural society can be pointed out :

Incomplete household Types	West Bengal	East Bengal
a) single member	32.49%	23.21%
b) married couple	41.37%	46.90%
c) nuclear (I)	26.14%	29.89%
Total :	100.00%	100.00%

From the above it is evident that single member households occurred proportionately more in the rural areas of West Bengal. The proportions of married couple households as well as nuclear (I) households were comparatively lower in the rural areas of West Bengal than East Bengal.

From the analysis of the proportions of the extended families to the total number of households and family units (6061) surveyed, the following characteristics can be noted for the rural society of East and West Bengal separately : (1) In East Bengal the extended families in which the collateral relationship is genealogically accountable among the family members with reference to the "head" (or Ego), was proportionately higher ; (2) but, in East Bengal the proportion of the extended family in which the lineal relationship can genealogically be determined among the family members with reference to the "head" (or Ego), was proportionately lower than what we find for West Bengal.

Again, considering the relative proportional occurrences of these extended family units to the total number of extended families only, we find the following differences :

Extended Types	East Bengal	West Bengal
a) collateral	39.94%	35.93%
b) lineal	60.06%	64.07%
Total :	100.00%	100.00%

Thus, from the above we can state that in the rural society of East Bengal the extended (joint) families in which the *collateral relationship* in terms of the "head" (or Ego) was dominant, occurred more, while in West Bengal peasant society the extended families in which the *lineal relationship* in terms of the "head" (or Ego) was dominant, were conspicuous in existence.

Further, examining the extended families from the viewpoint of what Prof. Murdock has stated with regard to "Fraternal Type", the Tables 3 and 4 would readily show that in West Bengal the cases in which the basis of affiliation of the constituent nuclear families was the parent-child relationship (as in the *usual* extended (joint) family) accounted for, 86.41%, while the rest 13.59% indicated the presence of the 'Fraternal Type' where it was only the

siblings' (brother-brother) relationship that maintained the consanguineal bond between two or more brothers and unmarried sisters. For East Bengal the proportions of the *usual* extended (joint) type and the fraternal type were 84.59% and 15.41% respectively. Thus, we find, the Fraternal type of extended families occurred in higher proportion in the rural area of East Bengal.

14. Now, if we consider another social phenomenon, that is linked up with the fact of the inclusion of any kin — either a FPK or a MTK or FPK + MTK — household and family unit, we are at once liable to get a more comprehensive classificatory distribution of the Types. In *West Bengal*, out of the total 1944 households and family units, 369 units showed the articulation of some kin. To express this fact in percentage, 18.98% of the total households and family units showed the presence of kins who were living together with the "head" (or Ego), and his family members, while in *East Bengal*, out of the total 4117 households and family units, 542 units exhibited the articulation of some kins with the family members of the "head". In percentage it was only 13.16% of the total households and family units surveyed in East Bengal.

In both West and East Bengal the proportions (18.98% and 13.16%) of the households and family units showing the articulation of kins — FPK, MTK or FPK + MTK — were actually shared by the respective *kin types* in the following proportions :

Proportion of kin-type	West Bengal	East Bengal
a) proportion of FPK	14.15%	9.08%
b) proportion of MTK	4.37%	3.79%
c) proportion of FPK + MTK	0.46%	0.29%

Thus, for the above it is clear that in the West Bengal rural households and family units the proportions of the kin type of FPK was proportionately higher than what we find for East Bengal, whereas the proportions of the kin-type of MTK were more or less of the same order in both the areas.

15. What I have presented in this paper is, indeed, one facet of our research on the *family as a societal unit* that is being conducted in our Department. Further analyses showing the relations of the different household and family Types to the other aspects of the social system will have to be carried out to gain a proper understanding of the nature and functions of the family as a societal unit.

16. All the four Tables referred to the above have been furnished in the Appendix.

APPENDIX

Table 1.

Distribution of the Types of household and family organization as classified by the criterion of "articulation of kins", together with their percentages to the total number of households surveyed and also their percentage-distribution (i) within non-extended|extended groups and (ii) within incomplete|complete types for the non-extended group only : (West Bengal, 1946).

I. *Non-Extended*A. *Incomplete*

Type :

	frequ- ency	%	%	%
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1.0 single member	104	5.35	10.22	26.40
1.1 single member plus kins	24	1.23	2.36	6.09
2.0 married couple (without children)	134	6.89	13.18	34.01
2.1 married couple plus kins	29	1.49	2.85	7.36
3.0 nuclear (I) (widowed parent with 1 child)	44	2.26	4.33	11.17
3.0.1 nuclear plus kins	6	0.31	0.59	1.52
3.1 nuclear (I) (widowed parent with 1 + children)	40	2.06	3.93	10.15
3.1.1 nuclear plus kins	13	0.67	1.28	3.30
All incomplete types : Sub-total :	394	20.26	38.74	100.00

B. *Complete*

Type :

4.0 nuclear (II) (parents with 1 child)	150	7.72	14.75	24.08
4.0.1 nuclear plus kins	31	1.60	3.05	4.98
4.1 nuclear (II) (parents with 1 + children)	379	19.49	37.27	60.83
4.1.1 nuclear plus kins	63	3.24	6.19	10.11
All complete types : Sub-total :	623	32.05	61.26	100.00
TOTAL Non-extended types :	1017	52.31	100.00	—

II. *Extended**Incomplete and
complete types :*

5.0 collateral	269	13.84	29.02	
5.0.1 collateral plus kins	64	3.29	6.91	
6.0 lineal	455	23.41	49.08	
6.0.1 lineal plus kins	139	7.15	14.99	
Total extended types :	927	47.69	100.00	
GRAND TOTAL of All Types :	1944	100.00	—	

Table 2.

Distribution of the types of household and family organization as classified by the criterion of "articulation of kins", together with their percentages to the total number of households surveyed and also their percentage-distribution (i) within non-extended/extended groups and (ii) within incomplete/complete types for the non-extended group only: (East Bengal, 1946).

V. Non-Extended	frequ-	%	%	%
	ency	(1)	(2)	(3)
A. Incomplete				
<i>Types :</i>				
1.0 single member	123	2.99	5.68	19.55
1.1 single member plus kins	23	0.56	1.06	3.86
2.0 married couple (without children)	239	5.81	11.05	38.00
2.1 married couple plus kins	56	1.36	2.59	8.90
3.0 nuclear (I) (widowed parent with 1 child)	72	1.75	3.33	11.45
3.0.1 nuclear plus kins	10	0.24	0.46	1.59
3.1 nuclear (I) (widowed parent with 1 + children)	96	2.33	4.44	15.26
3.1.1 nuclear plus kins	10	0.24	0.46	1.59
All incomplete types : Sub-total :	629	15.28	29.07	100.00
B. Complete				
<i>Types :</i>				
4.0 nuclear (II) (parents with 1 child)	370	8.99	17.10	24.11
4.0.1 nuclear plus kins	51	1.24	2.26	3.32
4.1 nuclear (II) (parents with 1 + children)	1015	24.85	46.90	66.12
4.1.1 nuclear plus kins	99	2.40	4.57	6.45
All complete types : Sub-total :	1535	37.28	70.83	100.00
TOTAL Non-extended Types :	2164	52.56	100.00	—
II. Extended				
C. Incomplete and Complete Types :				
5.0 collateral	662	16.08	33.90	
5.0.1 collateral plus kins	118	2.87	6.04	
6.0 lineal	998	24.24	51.10	
6.0.1 lineal plus kins	175	4.25	8.98	
Total extended types :	1953	47.44	100.00	
GRAND TOTAL of All Types :	4117	100.00		

Table 3.

Classification of extended (joint) families by the criterion of affiliation-basis and percentage distribution of the Types to the total number of extended families : (West Bengal, 1946).

Extended Group	frequency	percentage
(1)	(2)	(3)
usual extended type	801	86.41
fraternal extended type	126	13.59
Total :	927	100.00

Table 4.

Classification of extended (joint) families by the criterion of affiliation-basis and percentage-distribution of the Types to the total number of extended families : (East Bengal, 1946).

Extended Group	frequency	percentage
(1)	(2)	(3)
usual extended type	1637	84.59
fraternal extended type	316	15.41
Total :	1953	100.00

1. This paper was presented to the fourth All-India Sociological Conference held at Calcutta in January-February, 1959.