

## SHORTER NOTES

### EX-COMMUNICATION AS A PROCESS LEADING TO THE FORMATION OF NEW GROUPS

**K. C. Malhotra, Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, India.**

In India there are some four thousand endogamous groups. An understanding of the processes leading to the existence of so many endogamous populations, or more precisely factors creating a split or fission in a group, are of great importance in interpreting the nature and extent of gene diversity in human populations.

Several processes resulting into fission within a group have been documented. Some of the well-known, among others, are : factionalism, demographic pressures, ecological pressures (particularly competition for food resources), migration (due to variety of reasons, but essentially due to pull and push factors), conversion to other religions or sects within a religion, and political situations like wars, invasions etc.

In this note will be demonstrated yet another process, hitherto undocumented, namely, excommunication leading to the formation of 6 endogamous groups from two parent populations among the non-pastoral nomadic Nandiwallas of Maharashtra.

#### THE PRACTICE OF EXCOMMUNICATION

Before we provide the actual instance where excommunication has led to the formation of new groups among the Nandiwallas, let us briefly touch upon the phenomenon of excommunication.

The practice of excommunication has been widely practiced by several human societies. This is essentially a mechanism to maintain law and order in a society and to exert pressure on the deviant individuals.

There are two types of excommunication : (1) Temporary or reversible and (2) Permanent or irreversible. Under type one a person or a family or a whole clan may be excommunicated for having committed certain offences. These individuals, however, are accepted back into the group after they have fulfilled the decree of the *panchayat* (council). The period of excommunication may vary from a few minutes to years. The excommunicated persons are denied privileges of equal participation in the socio-religious life of the community. Under type two, persons committing offences of a certain type are excommunicated once and for ever, never to be accepted back. It is this type of excommunication, i.e., irreversible type, which we shall consider in this note. It may be pointed out here that although several writers have written on this practice, to our knowledge none has ever before viewed it as a process leading to the formation of new groups.

#### THE TWO CASES

Described below are two examples among the Fulmali Nandiwallas (FN) and Tirumal Nandiwallas (TN), where excommunication has resulted in the formation of new groups.

##### *Case I : Fulmali Nandiwallas*

There are about 5,000 FN whose base villages are in the district of Ahmadnagar, Aurangabad, Bhir and Nasik in north-Western Maharashtra. They are a migrant group from Andhra Pradesh and are bilingual; among themselves they speak a dialect of Telugu and with others in local language—Marathi. While many of the FN are settled, a few are seminomads and majority of them are true nomads. The traditional occupation of the menfolk is to move in a specified territory with their sacred trained bull (*nandi*), the vehicle of Lord Shiva. In recent years, however, most of these people have given up *nandi* performance and instead have started to trade in buffaloes. These people assemble every year, during rainy months, in their base villages. Further details could be found in Malhotra et al. (1976; 1977) and Khomne (1977).

When these people migrated from Andhra Pradesh in the 17th Century A. D. they were only one endogamous group. However, since about 60 years they have two endogamous groups, the Fulmali Nandiwallas and the *Ranklods*. The English meaning of *Ranklod* is 'son of a prostitute' and/or 'bastard',

These *ranklods* are the individuals or families who have been ostracized from among the Fulmali Nandiwallas. There are some 20 families, numbering a little over 100 individuals, of the *ranklods*. Although detailed histories of several of these *ranklod* families could be found in Malhotra and Khomne (1977), we shall provide here only two examples.

(1) A person from *Awadedodu clan* married the widow of his brother and was ostracized.

(2) A person from *Awadedodu clan* had sexual relations with the daughter of his paternal uncle. The person confessed and was excommunicated.

Malhotra and Khomne (1977) summarized the types of offences which resulted into excommunication. They are of (1) incestuous type, (2) marrying relatives of certain categories but non-incestuous type, (3) sex relations with non-Nandiwallas, and (4) marrying a non-Nandiwalla.

#### *Case II : Tirumal Nandiwallas*

Tirumal Nandiwallas, numbering about 2,500, (as per 1972) comprise four endogamous groups : Patils (800), Chougules (1150), Komtis (460) and Daundiwallas (55). All of them have migrated from Andhra Pradesh and assemble, at present, once in three years at the outskirts of the village Wadapuri in the Indapur Taluk of Poona district.

These people, unlike the Fulmali Nandiwallas, are true nomads (with a few exceptions). Like the FN, the traditional occupation of these nomads is 'bull performance'. The territory of operation of TN and FN is clearly demarcated. Further information on these nomads is detailed in Malhotra (1974 : 63-102 ; 1970), Hayden and Malhotra (1977 : 111-130) and Thambidurai and Malhotra (1977).

Malhotra and Khomne (1977) have recently examined social stratification and caste ranking among these people. Their conclusions are : (i) Each of the four endogamous groups has a specific role to play within the Nandiwalla castes ; (ii) The four castes are ranked vertically ; the Patils are at the top of the hierarchy followed by Chougules and Komtis. The Daundiwallas are at the bottom of the hierarchy. (iii) The ranking is based on principles of ritual pollution rather than secular criterion. (iv) The four groups play dual roles in the local and regional hierarchies.

Although, unlike in the case of FN, here we do not have any direct example of permanent excommunication, a consideration of several situations suggests beyond doubt that originally the TN were only one endogamous group, and through the process of excommunication were formed the

Chougules. When the Chougules grew to reasonable size, they excommunicated some of the individuals who formed the third group, the Komtis, and likewise the Daundiwallas are the ones excommunicated from the Komtis. For more details see Malhotra and Khomne (1977).

#### DISCUSSION

We started our work among the Tirumal Nandiwallas in 1969, and followed through 1972 and 1975; we hope to continue our work in 1978, the next triennial year of their assembly. During all this period although we were able to see the existence of the four endogamous groups, we could not understand and interpret the social structure, more precisely the coming together of the four groups. We considered different waves of migrations as an explanation but that did not take us too far. The main hurdle in any analysis was common cultural practices, same profession, single regional identity etc. And consequently in all our earlier publications on the biological aspects of these nomads, we did know how to examine the data in terms of genetic differentiation among these four castes.

Then in July 1976 we opened up with the Fulmali Nandiwallas. And it was here that we got the clue and insight. Since most of the cases of *ranklods* occurred in the last 60 years, we could clearly see the mechanism by which this endogamous group has been formed. We reviewed our data collected on the Tirumal Nandiwallas and it became abundantly clear that the four groups have been formed by the same process, that is excommunication.

This understanding of the mechanism by which these groups have been formed, both among the Fulmali and Tirumal Nandiwallas, now provides us clear perspective in which to view the genetic composition of these endogamous groups.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper was originally presented at the seminar on Genetical Demography organized by the Anthropological Survey of India from January 16-18, 1978, at Calcutta.

## REFERENCES

- Hayden, R. M. and K. C. Malhotra  
 1977 "Dispute Processing among a Group of Non-pastoral Nomads: The Nandiwallas", *The Eastern Anthropologist*. 30.
- Malhotra, K. C.  
 1974 "Socio-biological Investigations among the Nandiwallas—A Nomadic Caste-cluster in Maharashtra", *International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research Bulletin* (Austria). 16.  
 1976 *Ram—Mamma Tatra among the Nandiwallas of Maharashtra: Its Origin and Social Significance*. I. S. I. Technical Report No. Anthrop. 1/76.
- Malhotra, K. C. S. K. Hulbe, S. B. Kolte and S. B. Khomne  
 1976 *A Preliminary Report on the Socio-biological Survey among the Nandiwallas and Deswallas of Maharashtra*. C. S. R. D. Tech. Report No. 1.
- Malhotra, K. C. S. B. Khomne and S. K. Hulbe  
 1977 "Communicants of Culture: The Non-pastoral Nandiwallas of Maharashtra". (Manuscript).
- Malhotra, K. C. and S. B. Khomne  
 1977 "Social Stratification and Caste Ranking among the Nandiwallas of Maharashtra". (Manuscript).
- Thambidorai, K. and K. C. Malhotra  
 1977 "Native Customs and Beliefs among the Nandiwallas of Maharashtra". (Manuscript).