

The Thakali Household and Inheritance System

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This article¹ describes and analyses the household among the Thakālis.² It examines firstly the economics of the household and the inheritance system. Next, the frequency of different household types is analysed in relation to residence pattern and the developmental cycle of the household.

The ideal norm among the Hindus is the joint family household.³ One of the aims of this article is to show that there are in Nepal, which according to her constitution is a Hindu state, groups such as the Thakalis, where the ideal norm is not the joint family household, but the nuclear family household. Another aim is to show that the traditional preference among the Thakālis for the nuclear family household is primarily a product of social considerations rather than a function of ecological and economic considerations.

The literature on the Thakālis includes only fragmentary references to the topics discussed here, and the material on which this discussion is based is entirely primary data. Research was carried out in Thak Kholā in 1972 and from 1975 to 1978 and pertains most directly to the Thakalis of that valley. These Thakālis consist of three subgroups the Tamāngs, the Mawātans, and the Yhūlkāsummis. This article analyzes and compares data from all three groups.

The Economics of the Thakali Household

The most important socio-economic group of the Thakali society is the mohme⁴ (th.), or household. It consists of a group of relatives, who place their labour and property into a common fund and satisfy their material needs from the turn-over of this fund. Moreover, members live together and use the same hearth for cooking when staying in the home village of Thak Khola.

The members of a household usually reside, work, and eat together and thus the household is the basic group of production and consumption, as well as the basic group of socialization. Furthermore, the household is the most important property holding group in Thakali society. Almost all the means of production - land, animals, capital, and labour - are controlled by the household. Only a small proportion of cultivated land and capital is in other hands: religious organizations such as monasteries and temples; kinship groups such as patrilineal descent groups and nī māh syāng (th.);⁵ and villages and village groups such as the five original

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villages of Panch Gaun and the thirteen original villages of Thaksatsae. All pastures and forests are owned by the villages and the village groups.

When a new household is established the husband places into the common fund his labour and the property he has received from his parents. This property may be his full share of the ancestral property, but is usually only a minor share known as mānā thi chuwā (th.) or pho cho bo cho (yh.). As mānā thi chuwā each son usually receives one or two fields, tools for farming, utensils for cooking, a few hundred rupees, and perhaps a house and a few animals. Richer parents generally give their sons more than poorer parents. There have been cases of parents being so poor that they were unable to give their sons anything. Information on sons' claim to the paternal property is ambiguous. For instance some informants state that sons can claim a reasonable part of the ancestral property as mānā thi chuwā, while others state that such a claim cannot be made.

Parents try to give each son the same amount as mānā thi chuwā. There are, however, cases where younger sons have received less than their elder brothers, because their parents' financial situation had been reduced by the time the younger sons claimed their shares. The amount given as mānā thi chuwā is recorded and inequities are made up when the ancestral property is finally divided.

The amount parents give their sons may depend on the age of the son when he leaves the household. If a younger son resides in the natal household longer than elder siblings, contributing to the welfare of the household and perhaps supporting elderly parents, he can receive a larger share. Examples have been cited where sons received as much as two hundred rupees for each extra year. It is, however, entirely up to the parents to decide if such an extra payment should take place and how much should be given.

The most important contribution a wife makes to the household is as a source of labour which, from an economical point of view, is at least as valuable as the labour of her husband. Women seldom bring land to the household, as they rarely inherit this form of property in the patrilineal system.

Most wives bring into their new households dāijo (th.) (dāisa, yh.), or presents they have received from their parents at the time of their wedding. Traditionally parents give a small amount of grain, a few agricultural implements and cooking utensils as dāijo. Daughters of the rich may receive a field, but usually only if the marriage is within the natal village. In some cases the amount given as dāijo has increased significantly in the last decades due to the Hindu influence in Thakali society, especially among migrants and their descendants.⁶

The property a woman owned before her wedding and brings with her when she leaves her natal household is known as pewā (th.).⁷ It includes especially money made through su nar sāwa (th.), a custom found among all the Thakalis, but more commonly practiced among the Mawatan and the Yhulkasummi.⁸ Under this arrangement parents allow their unmarried daughters to receive the profit made on certain property. For example, a daughter may receive the harvest of barley from a certain field, while the harvest of the second sowing of sweet buckwheat from the same field is used to cover the expenses of crop production. In another instance, a daughter may get the milk products and kids of a particular goat.

A married woman has the right to keep the pewā for herself, but can also place it into the common fund. Some women place their pewā into the common fund when they have given birth to children, especially sons, which makes them more confident that their husband will not divorce them.⁹ Most women, however, prefer to keep their pewā for themselves even after many years of marriage. This capital can be, and has been, used to save a household, or for the education of children, when the common fund in one way or another has been depleted.

Brides traditionally receive small presents from the guests invited to the wedding. These presents are known as gor dhuwā.¹⁰ The bride may keep her gor dhuwā for herself or place it into the common fund.

Finally, during the wedding, the bride receives presents from her husband and his parents including jewelry and clothes. These presents properly belong to the husband, and the bride has only usufruct rights.

Property placed into the common fund is, according to informants, still in the legal possession of those individuals who place it into the fund. Their rights are, however, limited. Income from the property is shared and enjoyed in common with the other members. Management is in the hands of the head of the household. Most important, property can usually only be disposed of with the consent of other adult members of the household, as the following example illustrates.

A Thakali man sold the house he had inherited from his father, in which he and his family were living. His wife was informed about the transaction only after it had been concluded. The wife got very angry since she thought that her husband should have informed her prior to the act and since in her opinion he had received too little for the property. Therefore she went to the buyer and informed him of her intention to place the case before the village headman and the village mediators (mechin, th.) in

order to annual the agreement. She would however, not do so, if the buyer would pay her husband another one thousand rupees in addition to the eight thousand rupees the husband had already received for the house. The buyer thought the case over and agreed to pay the additional one thousand rupees.

The informant, who recalled this case, added that most Thakali men only want to conclude major deals when they are sure that the opposite party has discussed the transaction with the other adult members of the household.

Dividing the Common Fund: Thakali Inheritance System

The common fund of a household is divided if a husband and wife divorce. The wife usually receives the same amount of property as she had placed into the fund. She receives no compensation for her labour, because she has received food and clothes since the fund was established. The husband receives the rest of the fund. The husband, therefore, acquires the profit or absorbs the loss made on the fund.

One of the parties is usually fined in connection with the divorce. Representatives from the patrilineal descent group of the husband and from the natal group of the wife meet with the village headman and the village mediators, and mediators from other villages if necessary, to decide on whom the fine should be imposed. The wife is usually fined if she has committed adultery. The husband is usually fined if he has mistreated his wife, or if he has spent an excessive amount of money on alcohol or gambling.¹¹ The party claiming divorce without any 'good' reason is also fined. There have been cases where the individual claiming divorce without any 'good' reason has had to pay the other person between two and three thousand rupees as compensation.

There are three references in the literature relating to the inheritance system of the Thakalis:

"Thakalis can leave their property to any or all of their children, sons or daughters or they may choose (though this is not often done) to give a share to an outsider."
(Manzardo, Dahal and Rai 1976: 96-97).

"Thakali inheritance patterns encourage independence since a father can leave his estate to any of his children, or even his dog if he so desires. There is no provision for fixed shares as in the case of the Nepal castes, hence a son is encouraged to make his own way, since he cannot count on a share of an estate." (Manzardo 1977a: 440).

"This leaves the son in an uncertain position in regard to his patrimony and encourages him to set off on his own at an early age...." (Manzardo 1977b: 64).

According to my information, these accounts given by Manzardo of the inheritance system of the Thakalis are inaccurate.¹² The transfer of the paternal property can take place at different times and in different ways, but the result is always that all sons with a legal right share the property equally among themselves.¹³

The majority of the property in the common fund is contributed by the husband. We shall, therefore, consider only how the property of the husband is passed through generations from father to son.

The Thakali man does not necessarily need to die before his property can be passed on to his sons. Thakali men retire politically at the age of 61 years (jharche, th.). This means that they can no longer represent their household in formal political organizations, and no longer carry out political duties in the community.¹⁴ The property of men who "retire" is divided among the sons.¹⁵ Property may also be divided before a man becomes 61 years old, if he so desires.

The first step in the division of ancestral property is to make up any inequalities in the amounts the sons have received as mānā thi chuwā. The next step is to place a part of the property aside for the marriage of unmarried sons and daughters, including dāijo for the daughters. Finally, the remainder is divided in one of the two ways:

1) There can be made as many equal shares as there are sons, plus one extra share for the parents. The share of the parents includes the house. After the division of the property parents commonly stay in a joint household with their youngest son who now represents the household politically. The share of the parents is written down and later utilised for covering the expenses of their death ceremonies. Little remains then of the original estate to be divided among the sons. Theoretically the sons should divide the remains equally. Actually, the youngest son usually gets more than the others, e.g. the house, because he has had his aging parents staying with him in a joint household for a number of years.

2) The paternal property can also be divided in another way, which is especially common among the Yhulkasummi. In this instance, there are made as many shares as there are sons and the parents keep only a few necessities including their clothes and jewelry. The sons divide the ancestral property equally among themselves, but the youngest usually gets a bigger share, including the house,

if he has stayed for a long time in a joint household with the parents. After the division of their property, the parents will maintain a separate household in a room in the house of their youngest son. The sons are obliged, usually in writing, to provide their parents with foodstuffs and firewood, and also to cover the expenses of their parents' death ceremonies.

The property of a man who dies before his property has been transferred is passed on to his sons in different ways according to their ages. The property is passed to the sons undivided if none of the sons have left the natal household. The property will then only be divided when one of the sons leaves the natal household and establishes his own. On the other hand, the property is divided among the sons after their father's death, if one or more sons have already established their own independent households. In this case sons still staying in the natal household merge their property and form one single household.

A widow does not inherit her husband's property, but she has the right of maintenance. She may stay in an independent household in a room of the house of the youngest son and live on foodstuff and firewood provided by her sons; or she may receive a share of the property for her maintenance and live in a joint household with her youngest son. The widow has, however, only usufruct rights to the share and cannot dispose of it.

A widow can also return to her natal household. In such an instance her situation and status is like that of a divorced woman. The Thakalis say that in both situations the woman returns to the soil of the syāng' (syāng sa re yewa, or syāng sa yan yewa, th.). A woman's syāng refers to the male members of her family of procreation, especially her brothers. In both situations the woman's membership switches from the patrilineal descent group of her husband to that of her father.¹⁶ The widow has the right to take with her the same amount of property as she had placed into the common fund shared with the husband. She forfeits her right to maintenance from the property of her deceased husband and also her right to children from the union, if her deceased husband's brothers wish to accept the responsibility of their upbringing. Due to this restriction, normally only young and or childless widows return to their natal households. The benefits to the widow returning to her natal household are that she no longer needs to work in her deceased husband's household, she no longer needs to remain chaste to her husband, and that if she so desires she may take a new husband.

Any man can make a written will (thālu thamba, 'to place a wish', th.) if he wants his property divided in a special way. It may be that a man wants his youngest son to get a bigger share than the other sons because he stayed for many years in a joint household with the youngest son. It may be that a man without sons

wants his daughters to get a share of his property. Or it may be that a man wants to be sure that sufficient amounts are set aside for the marriage of his unmarried daughters.

There are no limits to what can be included in a will. But, on the other hand, there is no rule that the wishes of a will have to be fulfilled. In case of conflict, representatives from the patrilineal descent group of the deceased and the village community decide how the property shall be divided.¹⁷ The general rule is that property shall be divided equally among sons entitled to a share. It will thus not be accepted that a particular son gets significantly less than that to which he is entitled. The representatives will accept a wish that the youngest son shall have more property because he has stayed longer in a joint household than the other brothers. They will, however, see to it that the extra property which the youngest son gets is in reasonable relation to the time he has spent in the joint household. They will also accept that a part of the movable property is spent according to particular wishes. For example, a man's will might state that half of his property shall be given to the local temple. In that case, it may be decided that the sons shall keep and share equally all the immovable property. Movable property will first be used to cover expenses for the death ceremonies and the remaining movable property will then be distributed according to the will. Usually, there is not much left after the expenses of the death ceremonies have been paid. The representatives will then advise the sons to save some money and spend it according to the wishes of the will at a later date.

According to Thakali tradition daughters have no rights to ancestral property. Here the Thakali tradition agrees with Nepalese law. In recent years, especially in connection with the International Women's Year in 1975, there have been minor changes concerning women's rights to inherit. These changes, however, have had little effect. A married woman still has no right to ancestral property if she has any brothers.¹⁸

The property of a man without sons is, according to tradition, inherited by his close patrilineal relatives (siki, th.), usually his brothers or their sons.¹⁹ Informants state, however, that in this case a significant share of the property can be claimed and will be given to his daughters, if the daughters have been looking after their aging parents and if the brothers' sons have shown no concern for their father's brother.²⁰

There are, however, many means in Thakali society by which parts of the ancestral property can be transferred to daughters. A man can state in his will that his daughters shall have a minor share of his property and then hope that the wish will be followed.

More directly, he can give his daughters parts of the property as su nar s̄awa, or as d̄aijo. Finally, it is also possible to give daughters part of the movable property secretly (behind the backs of the sons or the brother's sons) or, more openly, if the sons are not against the transfer.

Household Types

Members of Thakali households are always relatives, and the various types of households can thus be distinguished according to the kinship relations between the members. The frequency of various household types among the Thakalis has been established on the basis of a sample of 121 households from Thak Khola. My general survey of Thak Khola shows that there are 640 Thakali households in the valley, and the sample used for this study includes every fifth household. Table 1 shows the distribution of the 121 households in four major categories -- single, nuclear, joint and "Special Cases." Two of these categories have been further subdivided as shown in Table 1. Unfortunately, the literature on the Thakali households contains no statistical information, so comparisons are not yet possible.

The nuclear family household is the most frequent type with 74 cases, i.e. 61.2% of the sample. 54 of these are actual nuclear families, while 20 are "variant" forms of the nuclear family. Six of the latter consist of married couples without children, five of married couples all of whose children have left the household, five of widowers with unmarried children, two of widows with unmarried children, one of a divorced man with his children, and finally, one of a divorced woman with her children.

Another 20 households, i.e. 16.5% of the sample, consist of single members. Seven of these are widows, one is a widower, six are unmarried men, two are unmarried women, and four are divorced women.

19 households, i.e. 15.7% of the sample, are joint families. One consists of a married couple, their children, and the husband's younger brother, who is still unmarried (collateral joint). Nine consist of a married couple, their married son and the son's wife (lineal joint). The last nine consist of a widow or a widower, her or his married son, and the son's wife ("broken" lineal joint).

Finally, eight households, i.e. 6.6% of the sample, are special cases. Their composition is as follows: 1) an unmarried woman and her illegitimate child; 2) a divorced man, his widowed mother, and his unmarried brother (a monk); 3) a widower, his unmarried son, and his unmarried brother (a monk); 4) an unmarried man, his widowed mother, his younger unmarried siblings, and his father's mother; 5) a man, his wife, their divorced daughter and her two daughters;

Table 1: Distribution of Household Types

	<u>Yhulkasummi</u>	<u>Tamang</u>	<u>Mawātan</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Single Households</u>	7 (15.2%)	5 (9.8%)	8 (33.3%)	20 (16.5%)
<u>Nuclear Households</u>	28 (60.9%)	34 (66.7%)	12 (50.0%)	74 (61.2%)
Nuclear	18	28	8	54
Broken nuclear	10	6	4	20
<u>Joint Households</u>	6 (13.0%)	9 (17.6%)	4 (16.7%)	19 (15.7%)
Lineal joint	2	5	2	9
Broken lineal joint	4	3	2	9
Collateral joint	0	1	0	1
<u>Special Cases</u>	5 (10.9%)	3 (5.9%)	0	8 (6.6%)
<u>Total</u>	46 (100.0%)	51 (100.0%)	24 (100.0%)	121 (100.0%)

6) three brothers and their divorced sister--two of these brothers are unmarried, and the third one is divorced; 7) a man, his wife, their children, and the husband's father's sister who is divorced; and 8) a widower and his three grandchildren. The father of these children is a widower, who has lived for many years south of Thak Khola together with his brother.

The frequency of household types is not precisely identical for the three Thakali groups. The frequency of single households is, for instance, higher among Mawatan and lower among Tamang. These differences are, however, statistically so small (chi-square, $Q = 9.37$ is less than $\chi_{.95}^2$ [six degrees freedom] = 12.59) that it can be concluded that the distribution of household forms is basically similar for the three Thakali groups.

The number of household members has been established from the data on the households in the same sample, and is shown in Table II. The 46 Yhulkāsummi households have a total of 170 members. The mean average size is 3.7 members. Households with four members are the most frequent followed by households with two or three members. The 24 Mawātan households have a total of 76 members. The mean average size is 3.2 members and households with one member are the most frequent followed by households with three members. The 51 Tamāng households have a total of 252 members. The mean average size is 4.9 members and households with seven members are the most frequent followed by households with four or five members. The 121 Thakāli households have a total of 498 members. The mean average size is 4.1 members. Households with one or four members are the most frequent followed by households with seven or three members.

The number of household members is relatively low among the Thakalis.²¹ The major reason for this low mean average size is the high frequency of nuclear households and households with single persons.

Residence Patterns

In the literature on the Thakalis there is only one reference to residence pattern. Manzardo (1977b:68) notes that "the Byanshi do retain some of the features noted in both Thakali and Sherpa society, namely the nebulous freedom from joint family control as nuclear families are formed at marriage through neolocal marriage patterns..." Manzardo did not explicitly state what he meant by 'neolocal marriage patterns.' It is, however, implicit that he follows Murdock, 1949:16, who defines neolocal as "where a newly wedded couple, as in our society, establish a domicile independent of the location of the parental home of either partner, and perhaps even at a considerable distance from both..."

Table II: Number of Household Members

		<u>Number of Household Members</u>										
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Yhulkasumi		7	8	8	9	6	2	5	0	0	1	46
Mawatan		8	3	4	3	1	2	3	0	0	0	24
Tamang		5	4	5	8	7	6	10	4	1	1	51
Total		20	15	17	20	14	10	18	4	1	2	121

Table III: Residence Pattern

	<u>Yhulkasummi</u>	<u>Tamang</u>	<u>Mawātan</u>	<u>Total</u>
The couple stayed, one month after their wedding, in:				
<u>The Husband's Former Household</u>	26	40	14	80
- husband's father's household	14	30	11	55
- husband's own household	12	8	3	23
- husband's own household including husband's first wife	0	1	0	1
- husband's elder brother's household	0	1	0	1
<u>Own Separate Household in Husband's Village</u>	0	1	1	2
<u>Own Separate Household in Wife's Village</u>	1	0	0	1
<u>Their Natal Households</u>	2	0	0	2
<u>Total</u>	29	41	15	85

The residence pattern among the Thakalis has been established on information from a sample of 85 couples. This data is provided in Table III. This information contradicts Manzardo's assertion that nuclear families are formed at marriage through neolocal marriage patterns. 80 couples, i.e. 94% of my sample, settled and established themselves in the household where the husband was a member prior to the marriage. In 55 cases they joined the household of the husband's father. In 23 cases the couple joined the household of the husband, who at the time of marriage, already had established his own household independent of his father. In one case, they joined the husband's elder brother's household, and in another case, the household of the husband, who was already married and lived together with his first wife.

It is interesting to note that the men in 23 cases at the time of their marriage had already established their own household independent of their parents. These are mostly men, who, in mature age, had established their own households without getting married, or those who, at a relatively young age, had established their own households following the death of their father. Only seldom were they widowers and divorcees.

Only three couples settled and established themselves in a household where the husband was not a member prior to the marriage. They did so, in one case, by moving to the wife's village and settling there independent of the wife's father. The couple had stayed after the wedding in the household of the husband's father, but settled shortly after in the wife's village, because, according to my informants, the wife insisted on staying in her natal village. The couple had a son, who later married a woman from his father's village and settled there. These two cases provide exceptions to the general rule that the newlywed couples always settle in the husband's village. This rule is obviously interconnected with the patrilineal inheritance system. It will be interesting in the future to see if a change in the inheritance system enabling daughters also to get a share of the land is associated with a change in the residence pattern and the household forms.

Finally, in two cases the husband and wife remained for some years after marriage in their respective natal households. Both cases are found among the Yhulkasummi among whom it was common for parents to only give away their daughters on the condition that they could keep them for some years to work at home.²² This custom, known as syāptu chimpa (yh.), is no longer popular and is also forbidden according to local law.²³

The Development Cycle of the Household

The frequency of household types is a function of several factors, of which residence is only one. The developmental cycle of

the household is another, and more important, factor and helps to explain the lack of correlation between the frequency of household types and the frequency of residence types.

In this respect, the most important feature of the developmental cycle of the household is that elder sons and their wives stay only for a relatively short period in a joint household with the sons' father. Most couples leave the joint household within the first five years of marriage. A few couples stay for more than five years, but usually leave, at the latest, when a younger brother of the husband marries.

The situation is different when the husband is the youngest or the only son. He will more frequently join the household of his father after marriage and then stay in a joint household until his father dies or retires, and he himself takes over the household.²⁴

The developmental cycle of the household, and hence the frequency of household types found among the Thakalis, reflects a traditional preference. The Thakalis themselves say that they prefer to have nuclear family households rather than joint family households since the latter are bound to lead to conflicts.

The conflicts between members of households based on lineal joint families, lineal-collateral joint families, and collateral joint families are well-documented for Hindu communities (e.g. Madan 1965). The Thakalis say that it is mostly the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law which causes trouble in the lineal joint family household.²⁵ The daughter-in-law usually has difficulties in such a household. She must work harder than any member of the household including her husband's younger sisters. She must not eat too much because that does not "look good." She cannot serve her old friends a cup of tea without her mother-in-law's permission. Many such daughter-in-laws see their mother-in-law as the major reason for their troubles and dream about the day when they can establish their own household. A strained relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law eventually becomes problematic for their respective husband and son. Even if he tries to remain neutral both women accuse him of siding with the other.

The main cause of trouble in the lineal-collateral joint family or the collateral joint family household is, according to my Thakali informants, the relationship between the married brothers' wives. One, or even more, of the wives often feel that they, their husband and their children are not treated properly and that they do not benefit as much from the joint enterprise as do the other brothers and their wives and children. Moreover, the brothers usually start to quarrel over money.

The Thakalis are thus explicitly aware of the potential conflicts in the joint family household. The reason why lineal joint family households are formed is that somebody has to look after the aging parents. It is especially hard for an old couple to plough, harvest, and collect leaves for making manure. The Thakalis solve this problem, as shown above, in either of the following two ways: 1) the parents give up all their property and stay separately, sometimes in a room in the house of their youngest son, and live on food and wood supplied by their sons. This custom is commonly found among the Yhulkasummi, and rarely among the Tamangs; or 2) the parents keep a part of their property and stay in a joint household with their youngest son. The data from the sample shows that the young husband was the youngest or the only son in fifteen of the eighteen lineal joint family households.

The sample does not include any lineal-collateral joint family households, that is, a family which consists of a man, his wife, their married sons, and the sons' wives. A general survey of all the present Thakali households of Thak Khola includes, however, two households of this type.

Furthermore, I was informed of a former household of this type. This household was a special yet revealing case in many ways. It consisted of a widower, his married sons, and the sons' wives and children. Only few members stayed in Thak Khola. The father was first engaged in the traditional salt-grain exchange in Thak Khola. Later, he became involved in large scale business in the hills and plains south of Thak Khola. The business included, among others things, a cigarette - monopoly in Western Nepal, a timber-business and a rice-mill. A reliable non-Thakali informant considered this house to have been among the one hundred richest households in Nepal. The father and his sons were also deeply involved in politics, first in Thak Khola and the surrounding areas, and later at the national level.

There were, according to informants, several reasons why the elder brothers of this household did not leave their natal home and establish their own at the marriage of a younger brother. The father and his sons were influenced by the Hindu values and had no intention of following the Thakali tradition, if there was no good reason to do so. On the other hand, there were several reasons to stay together. Investments had been made in many distant places and the father had problems in finding trustworthy managers other than his sons. Furthermore, the family was involved in a conflict with the father's elder brother and his sons, especially concerning the economic and political leadership in Thak Khola and the surrounding areas.

The conflicts of the joint household, as discussed above, were latent in this household. The father was an authoritarian and could keep his sons together. However, at his death, the sons are said to have started to quarrel over money (one of the sons is known as a business wizard, another as a big spender) and separated into five independent households. The rice-mill is still owned jointly and the profit shared among the brothers.

One of the present lineal-collateral joint family households resembles this case. The household owns several enterprises, including a big horticulture farm, a joiner's shop, a carpet factory, and some local hotels, among the best in Thak Khola. The father and the eldest son are also deeply involved in politics. The kinship relations between the members are unusual in that the wife of the eldest son is the younger sister of the wife of the younger brother. According to informants, the fact that the daughter-in-laws are sisters is one of the major reasons why this household is not troubled by the usual conflicts found in the households based upon lineal-collateral families.

The father will soon reach the age of 61 years and will then have to retire. I have been informed that his two sons will then, according to a local rule, have to split into two separate households. If this information is correct (cf. Note 14), it will mean that a local jural rule partially accounts for the lack of collateral joint family households that include married brothers above the age of eighteen years whose father is either dead or retired.²⁶

Household Labour and the Labour Market

Most Thakali households control no more land and animals than the household can exploit with its own resources.²⁷ The two yearly harvests are, however, very labour intensive and most households are, during harvest, in need of extra labour. There are also several households with so much land and animals, that they need outside labour, especially at harvest. This problem is solved through hiring labour and through cooperative labour exchange between households.

The labour market in Thak Khola includes mainly four categories of workers. First, there are Tibetan-speaking workers from the areas north of Thak Khola who come every year in the early summer to help with the first harvest. They number more than one hundred persons and come from Baragaun and especially Lo, but also from Charka in Dolpo district. These workers stay from four to six weeks, first in the southern part where the harvest starts, and later in the northern part.

Secondly, Hindus from the areas south of Thak Khola come to the valley to work because the wages in Thak Khola are higher than in the south. Prices are also higher, but if thrifty, one can save more in Thak Khola than in the south. The Tibetan-speaking workers are of both sexes; they come in groups and stay for a short period, working in many different households. The Hindus are all men, they come as individuals, and stay for half a year or longer, working in only one or two Thakali households. The Hindus work as general helpers in the households, or as herdsmen for households with sheep, goats, yaks, or mules.

Third, there are local workers from the occupation castes, also known as the "low" castes (sānu jāt, nep.). The low castes staying permanently in Thak Khola are tailors (ḍulī, th.) and blacksmiths (Ṛemī, th.). Each village usually has a few tailor and blacksmith households, but a village like Taglung has more than a dozen. The low caste households own little or no land, and their income from their traditional work as tailors and blacksmiths is poor. Therefore, they have to market their labour in order to survive. The low castes usually work as labourers for short periods in different Thakali households. There are also low caste men who work for longer periods as herdsmen.

Fourth, there are the poor Thakalis with little or no land who also need to sell their labour in order to survive. They work for short periods in different Thakali households or for longer periods as herdsmen, especially with mules.

Inter-household cooperation is another way of solving the labour problem. The Thakalis resort to many forms of such cooperation, but all are geared toward a more efficient utilization of available resources, or are used to cut risks involved with investments, especially in animals. Under the form known as gusāri (th.), sheep, goats, yaks, and mules from different households are herded as joint property. The households involved share the profit and cover any loss made on the herd according to their share of the animals. A newborn animal is thus a common gain, while the death of an animal is a loss for all the owners of the joint herd. Gusāri takes place mostly between closely related households, e.g. the households of two brothers, but can also take place between more distantly related households.

Under another form of cooperation, animals from separate households are herded together, but as individually owned animals. The households divide common costs--especially the herdsman's salary--according to their share. Unlike gusāri, however, the households continue to receive their own separate profit or loss on the individually owned animals.

Cooperation more often involves labour instead of animals. One form of labour cooperation resembles gusāri. Each winter a large number of younger women, especially among the Mawaatan and the Yhulkaasummi, travel to the hills and plains south of Thak Khola, where, for half the year, they run local-style hotels and restaurants (bhaṭṭi, nep.). Several of the women are the only female members from their household who migrate south. They will often find one or more other women they know with which to operate a bhaṭṭi. The women in these temporary, joint enterprises share all work and all expenses, eat from the same stock, and share the profit equally among themselves. The women, like the people taking part in gusāri are usually relatives. For example, the husbands of two sisters had a herd of mules together as gusāri, while one of the sisters operated a bhaṭṭi together with her sister's husband's sister.

Another form of cooperation are the temporary labour groups formed in most Thakali villages during harvests. One or two members from several households join such a group which can include from only a few to more than a dozen members, usually women. They work one day in the fields of one member, and then the next day in the fields of another member. This continues until the party has been in the fields of all the members for an equal number of days.

Conclusion

The nuclear family household is the ideal norm among the Thakalis and is also the most frequent household type. This high frequency of nuclear family households is mainly a function of the developmental cycle of the household. The newlywed couples join the household of the husband's father, but stay there only for a few years and then establish their own independent household, at the latest, when a younger brother of the husband marries. The Thakalis state that they do this in order to avoid the conflicts latent in the household based upon the lineal-collateral family. This explanation seems sound, and my suggestion is that the Thakalis' preference for the nuclear family household is primarily a product of these social considerations.

The landholdings in Thak Khola are often small and close to the villages, and can be utilized with the labour of a nuclear family household or that of the lineal joint family household. Therefore, it could be argued, that the Thakalis' preference for nuclear family households is more influenced by ecological and economic conditions than by social considerations. This thesis is attractive, but it misses the fact that there are several Thakali households which control so much land and animals that they need more labour than can be provided by a nuclear family household. Elder sons may, due to labour shortage, delay their departure from the joint household, but they will usually always leave when a

younger son marries -- even if it means a lack of labour. Another point is that the sons leaving a joint household receive only a small proportion of their total share. Therefore, the total amount of land, animals, and labour would often have been much better utilized, if more or all the married sons and their wives had stayed in a joint household. I argue, therefore, that it is primarily the social considerations, as explained above, rather than ecological and economic conditions which determine the Thakalis' preference for the nuclear family household.

Finally, it is important to note that the existence of a labour market and cooperation is a condition - but not a primary cause - for the high frequency of nuclear family households and the lack of households based upon the lineal-collateral joint family. The distribution of household types would certainly have looked different, had it not been possible to sell and buy labour in Thak Khola.

This conclusion is likely to be valid not only for the Thakalis but for many other patrilineal settled agriculturalists as well. I would expect that in general, in those agricultural societies where the frequency of nuclear family households is high, a labour market would also be found.

Notes

1. I am grateful to the Danish Research Council for the Humanities under the Royal Danish Government, for financing my fieldwork in Nepal. Thanks are due to Krishnalal Thakali, who assisted me for more than a year in the field, and to Professor Johannes Nicolaisen, Copenhagen University, who as my supervisor has been a constant source of encouragement and stimulation. Special thanks are due to Jim Ross, Case Western Reserve University, who read and commented on an early draft of the paper.
2. See Iijima (1960), Jest (1966), Bista (1967), Fürer-Haimendorf (1975), and Gauchan and Vinding (1977) for an introduction to the Thakalis.
3. The joint family household is among Hindus an ideal, but not behavioral norm. There is in fact in most Hindu communities a higher frequency of nuclear family households than joint family households (cf. Shah 1974).
4. Mohme (th.) may derive from ma-smad (tib.), "mother and children", cf. Jäschke (1881: 426).

5. Nī māh syāng (th.) refers to a kinship unit or group which includes the male members of a particular patrilineal descent unit or group (syāng), the women who were born into that unit or group (nī), and the husbands of these women (māh), cf. Vinding (1979b)
6. Among Hindus a woman's opportunity to marry a man of high social status is often related to the amount of dowry (dāijo, nep.) she brings with her. Economic considerations have traditionally never been, and are in general still not, important in the selection of a spouse among the Thakalis.
7. According to Turner (1931: 389), pewā (nep.) as an adjective means "special, peculiar, or own", while as a substantive it means "the private property of a married woman given her by her parents, dowry". However, the section on Inheritance Rights of Women in the Legal Code of the Nepalese law notes that "movable or immovable assets gifted in writing by the husband or by relatives on the husband's side, and any increment made or occurring thereto, is considered pewa" (Nepal Press Digest 1972: 40). Further, I have found among Tamangs in Darjeeling District in India a custom similar to su nar sāwa (th.) and there it is known as pewā (nep.). We may thus conclude, that pewā generally refers to the special or private property of a married or an unmarried woman.
8. For information on the Thakali subdivisions, see Gauchan and Vinding (1977: 97-99), Vinding (1978: 183), and Vinding (1979a: 192-193).
9. To divorce is known as peh piwa (th.), "to dispose of the wife", from a male point of view. From a female point of view it is known as syāng sa yān yewa (th.), "to return to the soil of the syāng". Syāng (th.) refers for women to the male members of their family of procreation, especially their brothers. Divorces are relatively infrequent among the Thakalis, perhaps as few as 10% of all marriages result in divorce. Divorces usually only take place in the first years of marriage, when the couple are still without children. Divorce between a couple who have been married for several years and have children is extremely uncommon.
10. Gor dhuwāi (nep.) refers among Hindus to the ceremony of washing the bride's feet while gor dhuwā or gor dhuwā dhan (nep.) refer to the presents the bride receives from her nearest relatives on this occasion.
11. Most Thakali parents only agree to give away their daughters, when the husband-to-be has signed a paper stating the rights and obligations of both parties in the marriage - especially

the rights of the wife and the obligations of her husband. This paper is known as srungpa (th.), which generally refers to amulets. This paper, the amulet of the bride, is kept by her parents. It is an important document in case of conflict because the wife can always claim a right to divorce if her husband has broken the conditions of the agreement.

12. Manzardo evidently found that the inheritance system of the Thakalis was quite different from what he had previously thought because he adds in his article that "subsequent research has shown that the most common form of inheritance among the Thakali is the equal shares for all male heirs' system, the most prevalent form in Nepal". (Manzardo 1977b: 79).
13. When an illegitimate son (ngelu, th.) of a Thakali man grows up and wants to establish himself, he may claim some property from his father if the latter is still alive. The illegitimate son will then receive a one-time-only payment and can claim nothing upon the father's death.
14. The households have certain rights and obligations toward the village community, e.g. the right and obligation to send a representative to the village assembly, and the obligation to provide labour for communal work when required. These rights and obligations depend on the social status of the household, ownership to land, and on the residence of a man in the household between 18 and 61 years of age. Only households with a male member in that age range have the right and obligation to send a representative to the village assembly. The partition of a household is thus not only a matter of concern for the household members, but also of concern to the village community whose representatives keep records on each household in the village.
15. I am uncertain whether or not a man who reaches 61 years is obligated to divide his property, and the information needs thus further verification.
16. The most important part of the traditional Thakali wedding is khimi cuwa (th.), during which the bride switches membership from the patrilineal descent group of her father to that of her husband.
17. There is also the possibility of appeal to the representatives of the Nepalese Government to resolve the conflict according to the Nepalese law, but this is only seldom done.

18. See Nepal Press Digest (1973), Acharya (1977), Shrestha (1977) for women's property rights, and especially women's right to inherit paternal property.
19. In Hindu societies and in Tibetan-speaking societies, married daughters and not the brothers' sons usually inherit the property from a man without sons. In such cases, one of the daughters and her husband joins her parents' household, and their sons will eventually take over their mother's father's property. This household type is not found among the Thakalis, where brother's sons rather than married daughters, as a rule inherit the property after a man without sons. I have, however, been informed of two exceptions. One case occurred in a village which for decades, and against tradition, had been ruled by a particular family. One of the grandsons of this family was to marry the daughter of a rich man without sons; thus his family became a temporary exception to the inheritance system. The grandson's wife became entitled as the heir to her father's property and she and her husband stayed after their marriage in a joint household with her father.
20. The heads of 121 Thakali households were asked their opinion about women's rights to inherit paternal property. First, they were asked whom they thought should inherit the property of a man without any sons. 26 refused to give their opinion, or had no opinion. 38 thought the property should be given to the siki while 37 thought it should be given to the daughters. The last six thought the property should be given to those persons who had cared for the aging man. Secondly, the heads were asked if they thought daughters should have the same rights to paternal property as sons. Only two or three thought so, while all others were against this. One informant noted that, according to tradition, it was the sons and not the daughters who would inherit their father's property or debts and that daughters after their marriage should live on the property of their husbands.
21. Jest (1975: 213) reports that the average number of people in the households in Tarap in Dolpo District is 4.1, while Schuler (1977: 81) in a study on the Tibetan-speaking peoples of Baragaun notes that the average number is 4.8. Messerschmidt (1976: 39) reports 5.0 for Gurungs, while Caplan (1972: 20) notes that the average number in Brahmin households in Belaspur District is 6.0.
22. Poor parents-in-law could also let their son-in-law carry a part of their debt. This custom is known as ko nar sawā (th.). The amount is usually a few hundred rupees and would be paid back to the son-in-law, if the parents-in-law acquired money later.

23. The Yhulkaasummi agreed at their meeting in 1974 that a married woman could not be kept in her parents' household, and that offenders shall be fined fifty rupees. This rule was confirmed at the meeting in 1977.
24. The course of development described here is the usual one. There are, however, also some households which follow other courses than the usual one. It is, therefore, incorrect to talk about the developmental cycle of the Thakali household.
25. There are, however, several households among the Thakalis where the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is good. The Thakalis say that this is especially true for households where the husband and his wife are first generation cross-cousins. The daughter-in-law knows, in such cases, her parents-in-law and is usually on very good terms with her husband's younger sisters.
26. The raison d'etre for this rule is obvious. Communal work is done ~~with~~ a fixed number of members from each household regardless of size. Without this rule, brothers would perhaps stay together more often in order to reduce their obligations towards the village community.
27. The landholdings in Thak Khola are on the average relatively small. There are considerable variations according to the locality and the economic status of the household. The mean average size is, in the southern part, about two hectares, while in the northern part it is only about half a hectare. The fields in the southern part are not irrigated and the yield is significantly lower than in the northern part, where all the fields, except the relatively few mountain fields, are irrigated.

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