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Social and Cultural Context of Fertility

Tulsi Patel

Fertility behaviour includes not only biological but also social reproduction, involving a complex network of institutions. As Fortes highlights: 'The process of social reproduction, in broad terms, includes all those institutional mechanisms and customary activities and norms which serve to maintain, replenish and transmit the social capital from generation to generation' (1958: 2). Biological reproduction needs to be seen in the context of social reproduction. (see Meillassoux, 1991: 23-140 for an elaboration on this distinction in slavery, and for social context see Mac Cormack ed. 1982). Fertility behaviour, including childbirth, is the outcome of a complex web of institutional mechanisms regulated by social norms and cosmology. People's perception of fertility, and their values and attitudes are intricately interwined with social institutions. For analytical purposes, fertility behaviour is divided into domestic, economic and political spheres (cf. Srinivas and Ramaswamy 1977).

Domestic Sphere

Parenthood confers honour on a couple in Mogra. A person graduates to the status of a full-fledged adult only upon acquiring parenthood. It is supposed to make individuals more responsible and trustworthy in their households and the community. It is believed to be an insignia of individual maturity and greater knowledge of the world. A person's image and respectability get enhanced with every additional child's birth and survival. A couple with four to five surviving children is held in high esteem than younger couples without children.

The consummation of marriage heralds a transformation in the woman's status. She has to take on more difficult jobs at home as well as on land (except among those castes where women observe *purdo* and do not work in fields). As a new entrant in the conjugal home, she has to work under her mother-in-law's strict supervision. It is only by becoming a mother that she can establish her common interest in the household. The mother-in-law's behaviour is generally domineering and authoritarian. The ideal daughter-in-law is one who is meek, docile and subservient. She is expected to be respectful and deferential. The relationship tends to be stress-laden, but there are few open confrontations while she is young. She has to fend for herself in the several discords that occur in the

household. The young husband cannot support her. A partisan husband is criticized as being henpecked.

The mother-in-law is the most effective agent in channelizing the institution of patriarchy in the household. She teaches her sons to keep their dominance over their wives and children. The daughters-in-law are not allowed to raise their voice before their husbands and other elders in the household. Daughters are often made aware, especially by the mother that they would have to adapt to conditions in their conjugal household, thereby preparing them for a subservient role there. My encounter with two young girls aged 6-7 years reveals the extent to which the principle of subordination is inculcated at such a tender age.

> *Meera and Chimu desired to see the place I was staying in. They accompanied me to it in the scorching heat of the May sun. On the way, the older of the two inquired about my household. She was surprised to hear that I lived all alone in the house. 'I would never be able to live like this', she said. The younger girl countered in an elderly tone, 'You will be thrashed if you don't do as ordered'. By implication, even young girls are prepared to orders unquestioningly. More so in their conjugal households when they grow up.*

Motherhood integrates the daughter-in-law in the conjugal household. This is true of all castes but much more of those that permit *nata*. Among the latter, a childless widow is more likely to get remarried (as discussed in Chapter 2). The chances of remarriage are less if she has children. Similarly, a young woman without children can seek separation (or divorce) more easily and get remarried. Children bind the widow emotionally to her conjugal household. Her emotional dependence on her natal home is shifted on to her children. She emerges stronger in the household as her children grow to adolescence.

Fertility ensures the mother a permanent position in the conjugal household. Childbirth lends stability and security to the bride's relationship with other household members. If a woman does not bear any child for 4-5 years after marriage there is serious concern. Also a fear that the man might bring in another wife. Motherhood is believed to transform the less adjusting bride into one more adaptable to the conjugal household. As a proverb says: 'Let her have a few children and her wings will be clipped'.

After establishing herself as a mother, a woman overcomes her disabilities as a bride and daughter-in-law and gains some authority. Inspite of graduation in status, the young mother remains subordinate in her conjugal household as long as others, especially the mother-in-law, are present. She has only a marginal say even in the marriage of her own children, especially among castes where child

marriage is practised. It is common for the in-laws to arrange the wedding of her children, especially if she resides with them.

The filial bond dominates the conjugal bond in Mogra. The wife's relationship with the husband is characterized by deference, especially in the initial stage of marriage. The norms enjoin that the husband and wife have minimal interaction lest their relationship become strong enough to undermine all other relations in the household and endanger its unity. The wife is supposed to conceal familiarity with her husband during daytime. She has to cover her face with *gungto,* or observe *purdo* and remain in the women's section of the house. Young spouses meet each other only when the rest of the household retires for the night. The young bride interacts directly and frequently with members younger to her husband, and usually does so without a *gungto.*

It is only after several years of marriage, coupled with attainment of motherhood, that she can dare uncover her face and talk directly to the older women of the household and the neighbourhood. The veil is never removed before the elderly male in-laws. The older women strictly enforce this custom and the younger ones comply unquestioningly. Any deviance is severely criticized as lacking in modesty and decorum. It is only after having a few grown up children that a woman can interact with her husband in public. By the time she begins to interact more freely she is either a mother-in-law or some other type of senior woman in the household.

The domination of the filial over the conjugal bond is so striking that a daughter-in-law is considered an alien grafted to the conjugal household. The wife is considered to be dispensable, while it is impossible to substitute one's parents. Childbirth changes the status of a bride into that of a mother. With the passage of time her husband's younger siblings also get married. She gains seniority, as a result of which she interacts somewhat more freely with the elder women of the household, and also contemplates establishing her own simple household by seceding from the complex one. This does not require partitioning the household property. The latter is a long drawn process and usually takes place over a fairly long period after separation.

Although a strong filial bond is the ideal and separation from parents is not smooth for married sons, it does take place nevertheless. A proverb reinforces the conjugal over the fraternal bond: 'There would be as many households as brothers' *(bhaiyon jitta ghar).* Although the daughter-in-law has some role in initiating partition, she generally becomes the sole target of criticism for having begun the process of secession. The attack is softened partly if she has lived for several years in a joint household, by which time she would have a few children.

Motherhood enables a woman to be more assertive in several household affairs, including disputes. The sheer fact of having several children is indicative of a long residence in the conjugal household. This in itself is status enhancing. But mere residence does not confer status as much as motherhood does. Fertility achievements along with a long marital fife, hard work and seniority in age contribute to status enhancement. Karve aptly remarks: 'It is not rare to see women who were nothing but meek non-entities blossom into positive personalities in their middle-aged widowhood or boss over the old husband in the latter part of married life' (1965: 136).

Status of Barren Women

Status graduation through motherhood is so marked that barrenness is a dreaded condition. The inferior status accorded to barren women is the other side of the high value accorded to fertility. Motherhood is extolled, while barrenness is held as a curse. If a woman does not produce children, her husband has the prerogative to divorce her or marry another. Sterility spells social and emotional doom for the woman. She is considered an ill omen both for the household and the larger society. It is inauspicious to run into her early in the morning or on auspicious occasions, such as rituals of childbirth, wedding and marriage or while setting out of the house to the fields for sowing or to another village or city. These considerations are indicative of her lower status. In quarrels and squabbles she is insulted for her failure in fertility performance. The dart of barrenness is thrown at her to whittle down her strength and to latently glorify fertility. She is under constant pressure from household members, relatives and neighbours to produce children.

In a male-dominated society a barren woman's status gets further lowered, as it is always her fecundity that is doubted. Rarely is male fertility questioned. Men are rarely expected to undergo fecundity tests, while a few women have been made to do so when they did not bear any children for several years after marriage. Indigenous medication is adopted invariably by such women to be able to procreate and overcome the stigma. If a woman does not have any child after 5-6 years of marriage, she feels persuaded to explore indigenous medicines thought to help procreation. These are procured through relatives, friends, *dais* (midwives) and priests. Various rituals are observed and vows made to family and local deities. Visits to thin (spirit centres) are made to seek a solution to infertility. A few women who have had only one child each despite several years of marriage, have been occasionally visiting a *than* about 40 kms from Mogra for several years. Most of them claim to have been blessed by the spirit of that than. The restlessness and fear experienced by the childless women is a response to the oppressive treatment meted out to the barren. This does not mean that childless

men do not face similar humiliation. Their position though is not as stigmatized as that of barren women.

Not all-childless women, however, have had to face divorce or the trauma of their husband's second marriage. Second marriage is less common because bride price makes a second wife very expensive in most castes. Moreover, childlessness is not always a result of barrenness. It could result from infant and child mortality. Similarly, the absence of a male child does not evoke the stigma of barrenness. There is also the uncertainty of childbirth and child survival in a second marriage. Cases of infant mortality and deaths of adult children are usually recalled to offset divorce or remarriage plans.

A barren woman usually fights a losing battle. She faces innuendoes during quarrels and disputes.

> *Cuki, 26-year-old Patel woman, was constantly worried about her childlessness despite 11 years of marriage. Her husband was losing hope in her fecundity. Her mother was equally anxious and felt awkward at social gatherings, births and other occasions, especially when people inquired of any good news of Cuki's procreation. Once during a quarrel with a neighbouring woman, Cuki felt crushed on being reminded of her infertility. She was told, 'You are barren. No one wants to even see your face.' Anadi, a 25-year-old potter woman married for 11 years, faced a great deal of humiliation from her husband's brothers' wives. They were against her getting an equal share of the joint family property for being barren.*

> *Phool, a 28-year-old barber woman married for 12 years, always engaged herself in activities that distracted her from the regular unpleasant reminders of infertility. She either spent time in a temple run by a Charan widow, called Satiji, or went to school to be with teachers. She was rarely found at home during most of the day. 'What is the use of sitting with women in the neighbourhood? They only talk of children. I prefer to avoid an awkward situation. In the temple they are somewhat restrained', Phool surmized.*

> *Satiji is a young Charan childless widow who lost her husband within two months of marriage. Women among Charans and Rajputs have a long tradition of sacrifice and even fatal self-denial. While a widow's self-immolation on the deceased husband's pyre is a well known form of sati, renouncing the world upon widowhood is another form which is locally called jivat sati, or literally, living sati. Another Charan widow, Durga, who lives in Mogra (her natal village), is in her fifties. She had no children during the five years of her marriage. Upon widowhood, she decided against living in her conjugal household. That would have entailed numerous restraints. As a widow she was entitled to receive*

maintenance from the conjugal property. She thus joined her father and stepmother in her natal home after convincing her in-laws about her decision. There was little to occupy her in the conjugal household.

Unlike Durga, widows with children continue to live in their conjugal households. Their motherhood provides them the respectful status-And emotional mooring not available to childless widows. Fertility and household work are the two major domains of Charan women. They face the maximum threat of divorce in the event of sterility.

Rekha, a Charan mother, was verbally threatened by her husband when she did not bear any child for seven years after marriage. Phatu, a Charan patwari (village-accountant) in his thirties, has had no child even after more than 12 years of marriage. His wife is perpetually anxious about her future. Her husband's second marriage is a constant fear.

In all, there are five barren women (i.e., without a child till the age of 40 years) apart from the Charan widows, Durga and Satiji, mentioned above. Of these two women, a Daroga and a Patel, are widows. The other two, a Patel and a Bhambi, are currently married. The fifth a Patel widow, was divorced by her husband for being childless for several years after marriage. She was the second wife to be divorced by the same man for barrenness. She lives with her brother's only son. However, the man's third wife also did not bear any child. She is one of the two barren widows in Mogra. She has adopted her deceased husband's brother's son, who willingly joined her to inherit her large property. The following case highlights how a barren woman may have to accept a co-wife.

Labu, a Bhambi, is one of the two currently married barren women. She is the first of two wives of her husband. As she did not bear a child despite several years of marriage, she went along with her husband's decision to have a second wife with a view to having children. The second wife, Kanwari was blind. Labu looked after her. Kanwari had three sons, who were brought up by Labu. Despite being blind, Kanwari has been cared for respectfully by her barren co-wife. She has greater authority in the family despite being the junior wife. The three parents live with one son each in three different homes adjacent to one another.

Labu's case shows that Harijans share the same values as other castes, especially in the stigma attached to barrenness, and the importance of a son. They enter into polygynous unions, adopt sons, or bring in *ghar jamais* in the event of childlessness. When the assumed-to-be barren woman's pregnancy is first noticed her status in the household and the community improves immediately. Two such cases may be recalled here:

During my fieldwork, Cuki had a son and Anadi was in an advanced stage of pregnancy. Cuki's childbirth silenced her husband's sisters and his brothers' wives. On a later visit to the field, I learnt that the birth of Anadi's daughter had made her quite confident in the family. Both Cuki and Anadi gained self-esteem as the stigma of barrenness was erased.

Virtues of Parenthood

The birth of a child to young childless couples, particularly those married for about three years is eagerly awaited by the household, other relatives, and neighbours. Childbirth dispels immediately the stigma of barrenness of a couple, especially the wife. As a first child even a daughter is welcome, although a son is more so. This is because a couple's fertility is on test. So the child's sex is secondary. Upon the first childbirth, people generally inquire first about the health of the mother and the infant, and then about the latter's sex. A successful child delivery is desirable. At this stage, the child's sex is not very important. If the first child is a girl, people frequently comment, 'She will bring a brother next time *(hamke bhai lai)*,' and 'Those who have a daughter will have sons too (*beti vae toe bita ee vei).*'A daughter is called 'curd' and a son 'milk', and it is considered ideal for a household to have both milk and curd.

A daughter provides a great deal of help to her parents in household and other tasks before she is married. Even after marriage, she does a lot of work in her natal home whenever she visits it. As discussed briefly in Chapters 1 and 2, among castes practicing the institution of *ghar jamai,* a daughter's worth is nearly equal to, though not the same as, that of a son.

A daughter has considerable emotional value for her parents, especially in their old age. She is well known for sharing with her old parents', especially her mother's, unhappiness and worries. On the other hand, a son is known to be less caring about his parent's emotional needs. A common saying about a daughter's emotional value is: '*Beti veh toe man ree vat ee kare, nee toe man ree man mein ee reh*' (literally, if there is a daughter one can at least share one's inner feelings, without a daughter the feelings cannot be let out). During unpleasant quarrels and rifts ii the household, a married daughter or sister is usually acceptable as a neutral arbiter to almost all the members. In actual practice, married daughters play this tactful role rather successfully. A daughterless mother is pitied for having missed the luxury of enjoying a daughter's company. Parents without a daughter are also deprived of earning *punya* by spending on her and giving her away in marriage. In Mogra, a daughter's birth is not an unmitigated evil, spelling disaster on the household. Although the son is valued more than the daughter, the birth of at least one daughter is considered ideal for every married couple.

With the birth and growth of grandchildren the grandparents' status gets enhanced in society. They are held as respectable elders and guardians of large households. Grandparents play an important role in deciding the betrothals of their grandchildren. Their opinion matters in the observance of rituals and in their grandchildren's matchmaking. Couples with only a few children and no grandchildren are deprived of such socially significant roles and consequent status. The time spent in social relations and pursuit of leisure increases as children grow up and take over most of the chores. This depends primarily on one's fertility performance rather than on age. The following cases vividly portray the contrast in parental and grandparental status in relation to fertility and age.

> Maganji, a Jat in his forties, has five daughters and one son who is the youngest. Two of his daughters are married. Maganji once compared himself with one of his daughter's father-in-law. The latter has three sons and two daughters. His two sons are his first two children. *Maganji commented: 'I am at least five years older than him. But he has become a bapu (a respectable term for an old man) so early in life because he has grown up married sons and daughters-in-law to work for him. His usual pastime is to relax at the street corner or in the village elders' meetings where he is lost under the influence of opium. He doesn't worry at all about running the household. My son is still young and unmarried. I am considered younger than him. It is his good luck.'*

Mere age is not sufficient for a feeling of well-being. Grown up married children especially sons, are a sure way to a relaxed old age.

> *Rajuji, a skinny old Patel in his late sixties, was generally reserved in interaction with fellow villagers as well as outsiders. Once I saw him holding his two-year-old daughter in one arm and carrying an empty pitcher in the other. He was walking towards the village pond to fetch water and also herding his cattle for watering them. The sight of an old man fetching water is rare. Although it is not uncommon for old men to be with small children, particularly their grandchildren. Rajuji was forced into work that was unusual for his age-carrying his own daughter, fetching water and herding cattle. He had to do it, as his wife was ailing and there was no one else in the household to relieve him. Rajuji had spent his entire life aspiring for a son. He married thrice. Two of his earlier wives died without a son. The second bore a girl who has been married off. The third wife had also borne a girl who was two years old (This was the one he was carrying). Rajuji's was the only Patel household without any gold and silver jewellery-the most sought after security plank after land. On being asked if he expected any girl or boy from his lineage (because they would also be his immediate neighbours) to fetch water, he responded with a bland expression: 'Who will come to help me? Even friends and relatives cease to exist when needed*

by a lonely person. They come only when they know that the help will be reciprocated.'

Rajuji's house would have been full of people had he a few sons. He would have hardly needed outside help. His sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren would not have let him work so hard. In fact, with a large family, others would have readily lent a helping hand, and he too would have conveniently reciprocated through his sons, their wives and children. People would have come to him on numerous ritual and festive occasions pertaining to his children's and grandchildren's life cycle events. But Rajuji's house wore a desolate look Even one son would have made a great difference, as would *a ghar jamai.* But Rajuji had given it little thought because he was hopeful of a son from every new wife after the death of the earlier one.

Bansoji, an untouchable in his forties, lamented: 'What is there in life for us? Though I am pretty old, I don't have grown up children. Only this three-year-old girl is alive out of the nine children we had. Every morning we get ready for work. She (his wife) does not keep well and has to stay at home sometimes. My three younger brothers have grown up children who help their parents to earn money, graze goats and fetch water and fuel. On the other hand, we have to purchase milk for this girl. A few more children and this would have been a different household. All my brothers' children are engaged. They receive numerous guests. Their houses are full of fife all the time, while we have only this little girl to talk to. I feel depressed and do not wish to meet my brothers' guests.'

Childlessness or death of several children pushes parents into a perpetual state of despair. They lose hope in life and turn indifferent to people and events around them. They prefer a general withdrawal from the wider community, unlike those with a few grown up children.

Social Onomastics

The fertility norm is reinforced by various cultural practices and symbolic expressions. The institution of personal nomenclature is an important case in point. Names are not mere labels to identify and address people, but also suggest some of the significant aspects of social structure. Social onomastics in Mogra reinforces ideas about the desirability or otherwise of childbirth during certain stages in a couple's fertility trajectory.

As fertility is not a concern solely of the couple, children, especially the first few, are rarely named by young parents. [1] The first child gets its name from the mother's natal home where she goes for the first confinement. The next child is

named by the father's kin. Parents have an opportunity to name their third or fourth child when grandparents attend to their other children's offspring, and parents have greater authority over their own. Naming is generally done without much ritual and ceremony.

It is usually possible to decipher from the child's name the particular stage of the parents' fertility trajectory. Certain names are prescribed or preferred for the first few children, while certain others are proscribed. Another set of names is usually meant only for children born after the couple's fertility expectations are met. A few of the preferred names for the first few desired children are Asa or Asi (hope), Rana (king), Rani (queen), Sukhi (well-being), and names of deities such as Ram and Sita. Other names mean vegetation, courage, undefeated, immovable, magnanimous, wealth, jewels and immortal. As the first few children glorify the parents' status, their names are chosen accordingly. The child's position in the parents' fertility career itself rules out certain names and leaves open the possibility of certain others. The pool of preferred names may be divided into three categories - one, indicating desire for children, the other, anxiety about the child's survival, and a third, suggesting the undesirability of children. In the present chapter we have discussed the first category of names. The other two shall be discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

Husband-Wife Communication

Frequently, in demographic literature, lack of communication between spouses is reported to enhance fertility and minimize its control. For instance, Poffenberger (1969) has elaborately described the lack of communication between spouses in traditional families in Gujarat. He observes that there is least communication when the spouses are young, especially while living in joint households. On the other hand, those in nuclear households communicate more and have fewer children than those in joint households.

In Mogra, the relationship between inter-spousal communication and fertility is not so clear. Communication between young spouses in joint households is minimal. Most young couples tend to five in joint households owing to the prevalence of adolescent marriages (see Kolenda 1989 for elaboration of this feature in rural Rajasthan). Logically, couples in nuclear households do communicate with each other more, which therefore should tend to suppress fertility and maximize its control. However, in Mogra, couples seceding from joint households within one or two years of marriage tend to have as many children as those living longer in, or not seceding from, joint households. Almost all-seceding couples live within the same house or on the same street. So their interaction with the patrikin and neighbours continues. The influence of even

geographically distanced older relatives on the fertility of couples residing in nuclear households in Karnataka is reported by Ramu (1988: 154).

Apart from overlooking the influence of relatives on couples in nuclear households, Poffenberger's view does not recognize sufficiently the influence of the developmental process of the household. Couples are expected to have a few children n the initial stages of the developmental process (see Chapter 4), and to stop having them once the socially optimum number is achieved (see Chapter 6). It so happens that the newly married couple's residence in a joint household and minimal communication between them during this phase coincides with their initiation into the fertility career. The developmental process of the household on the one hand and the beginning of the young couple's fertility career on the other are more closely related to fertility outcomes than the lack of communication between spouses.

While commenting on the relationship between lack of inter-spousal communication and high fertility, Poffenberger has probably in mind an implicit model of couples practicing low fertility in a highly modernized society. Srinivas and Ramaswamy (1977: 10) rightly observe that couples are not free agents, i.e., they are not absolutely free to design their own fertility course. The assumption that couples are all free is simplistic.

Dialogue constantly takes place between the individual and the larger community. For a couple in Mogra the fertility career is charted by the norms of wider society. This should not however, mean that couples follow the norms mechanically. They know the permissible range within which their fertility behaviour can vary. They know when the number of children is less or more than required, and what their optimum number and sex composition should be.
The new entrant to the reproductive career is aware of prevailing norms, precepts and practices. Even young unmarried children know the fertility norms and react with surprise if others' fertility performance falls short of the customary expectation.

Buddha, a 13-year-old Patel boy, was inquisitive about the number of children I had. He asked my 12-year-old daughter, as to how many brothers and sisters she had. On hearing that she had only one brother he responded with surprise, 'Oh no! you should have one more brother. Your parents must have at least one more son. One son is no son just as one eye is no eye (ek ank mcin ank nee, ne ek put mein put nee)'.

I lived all by myself during the initial stage of fieldwork. A Patel lady next door introduced me to Hanuman, her six-year-old son who was inquisitive about me.

The boy looked around for sometime and whispered to his mother. He was asking her: 'But where are her children?'

Even small children failed to understand the independence and individuality of an adult female. A woman without in-laws or children around is a deviant from the norm in their perception.

Children in Mogra are occasional witnesses to the reproductive processes of cattle and other animals. Teenaged boys and girls also learn about sexual behaviour through their peer groups. However, married and unmarried adolescent children rarely discuss such matters with elderly relatives and parents. This inhibition persists even in the initial years of marriage, when couples are aware that sexual intercourse is expected. The initial hesitation is overcome only with the passage of time.

Keli once discussed her problem of having to bear undesired children with a lady doctor. She did not want any more children, having borne four sons and two daughters. After rejecting all the doctor's suggestions, and not being able to get the desired contraceptive injection, Keli said: 'The doctor (an unwed lady) was too shameless and immodest to have discussed so clearly and openly about such things. She is still unmarried. How could she then speak about such things without the slightest hesitation?'

A few years of married life, preferably with a child, provides a license to women in Mogra to talk freely about sexual matters. Younger women before attaining motherhood rarely enter into such discussions as a sign of modesty.

Traditionally expected inhibitions and the value associated with modesty render it difficult for parents to frankly discuss sex and childbirth with their newly married adolescent child. Parents are able to talk about such matters freely to him/her only after the latter has had at least one child or been married for several years.

On asking whether they communicate with their spouses regarding sex and childbirth, I got a response that the adolescent typically gives to the elderly. Young married girls generally bowed their heads and lowered their eyes as a sign of embarrassment and inhibition. The usual responses I got were: 'I don't know. How do I know? What is there to know (in this matter)? What can I say?' The less evasive responses included: 'We don't talk about this. You are embarrassing me. We will not do anything extraordinary. What happens to others will happen to us too.'

Adolescents follow what Bernstein (1977) calls 'restricted code' rather than 'elaborate code' (see also Gidden's 1984 terms, 'discursive' and 'practical consciousness'). Even in later life, few spouses discuss with one another their sexual lives extensively, although other personal, social and children's issues frequently are.

Women's Gainful Employment

Gainful employment of women is-reported to curtail fertility (U. N. 1961; Mandelbaum 1974; Engels 1884; Papanek 1973). These studies show an inverse relation between higher status of women, accruing from gainful activity, and fertility. They argue that once women are gainfully employed, i.e., are able to produce goods worth exchange value, or earn cash income through productive work, their status generally improves. However, status depends on how the community ranks a person as well as on how the person perceives one's own status. In fact, status needs to be seen in the context of a given society.

The problem with the concept of status of women as used in demographic studies is that it is borrowed from urban-industrial societies and then applied to rural societies to arrive at an index of women's status. The resultant conclusion is that women have low status. Status gets enhanced by the acquisition of attributes signifying high value in the socio-cultural context of a given community. Status is thus not a static category. In Mogra, a woman's status keeps evolving with the developmental processes of progression and regression of the household. With changes in household membership, there are changes in the nature of positions and relationships. A woman's status in Mogra improves with marriage, fertility, age and seniority in the household.

Women's contribution to household subsistence does not automatically lead to their status elevation. As Patel has observed: 'Contribution to the family subsistence and improvement in status are mediated by a complex dialectics of patriarchal values and women's real life experiences (1 987: 126)'. Motherhood is crucial for a woman's status enhancement. Afshar's (1985) and Kabeer's (1985) studies in Iran and Bangladesh respectively support the foregoing observation.

> *Chandarki, a young Patel woman in her early twenties and mother of a son and daughter once had a serious quarrel with her husband, while I and a few other people were present. He threatened to beat and drive her out of the house. At this she retorted, addressing especially the standers-by: 'Don't think that I am a sonless woman. I will bring up my son in my natal home. When he grows up 1 will fearlessly come back to the village with all authority. I will approach all the village elders to listen to my plight and then claim a share of this household's property for my son. Then I will live with my son on this man's (her husband's)*

property and constantly embarrass him. Only then will he realize that he had committed a blunder.'

Heerani, a Charan woman in her forties, was deserted by her husband after he married another. For several years she lived a miserable life. She had to do away with the Charan custom of purdo and work in the fields, collect fuel and fetch water for herself and the children. She had two sons and as many daughters. Fortunately for her, her husband's second wife had only one daughter. When Heerani's sons grew up and took charge of the household, she pronounced with covert pride: 'He (the husband) will have to come back to me in the end. His name will be kept by my sons. When he is unable to stand on his own, his daughter will be in her conjugal home and his wife will be too weak to take his care. How long can he neglect me?'

A grown up son is considered strong enough to reclaim his deserted mother's property rights and honour. He is her protector and provider in old age. He is the one who ultimately comes to her rescue in adversity. His existence itself is a source of moral support to her.

Fertility plays a crucial role in a mother's status enhancement. The fusion of her identity with that of her conjugal household and its interest, her prolonged residence and the survival and growth of a few children, form the most significant ground for status enhancement. Also, as we shall see in Chapters 6 and 7, for consequent ability to stop bearing more children.

Impact of Education

Our discussion on women's as well as men's education in Chapter 2 (Table 2.18) (Table is missing) shows that the bearing education has on fertility is not significant. The educated fathers' exposure to the problem of population through their middle school curricula has had little impact on them.

The social studies text-book for Class 7 (RRPM 1984a) has three chapters devoted to population. One of them deals with the relation between population and minimum needs (food, clothing, housing education, and medicine). The chapter talks about inadequate resources and suggests population control. The chapters on Indian and world population show population growth trends and the pressure of population on insufficient resources. Information is given about less populated advanced countries with higher levels of living to show the need for population control in India. The chapter on India's population appeals that the facilities for family planning provided by the central and the Rajasthan government should be availed by all.

The social studies textbook for Class 8 (RRPM 1984b) has three chapters directly dealing with population growth and resultant problems. Two other chapters.deal, rather indirectly, with the undesirable growth of population. These pertain to social and other problems of India. The geography textbook for Class 8 (RRPM 1984c) has one chapter on-population and culture. All these text-books raise the issue of population outrunning resources, suggest population control, and inform that counseling for population control is available at family welfare clinics and health centres.

Fathers who have been to college and now hold urban jobs *(naukri)* are not strikingly different in their fertility behaviour from their counterparts in the village. In all there are 79 men holding naukri. Of them, eight have never been to school. Of these four are illiterate having two, five, five and seven children respectively. The remaining four are literate, three with two, two and seven children respectively, and one is childless. Thus only 71 of the naukri-holders have ever been to school, and three of them have no children. Of the 68 educated fathers with *naukri,* 39 have 1-3 children, 26 have 4-6 and three have 7-9 children. The pattern in Mogra is similar to that reported by Caldwell (1982) for non-agricultural urban conditions in Ibadan, where high fertility was considered rational. Whether the educated naukri-holders are identical with their illiterate counterparts in their fertility behaviour is discussed in Chapter 7.

Economic Sphere

We have already discussed the contribution of adults and children to the household economy in Chapter 1. Here we shall see how their contribution and fertility behaviour are interdependent. A daughter-in-law hardly has any respite from long working hours. She is not expected to take time off for relaxing as long as there is work in the house or on the fields. There is hardly an end to her work, both in the peak agricultural and slack seasons. Nursing and caring for the infant enables her to get some relieffrom backbreaking tasks. I must hasten to add that a mother not only gets relief from work by looking after her baby, she also enjoys caring for it. Besides, it is common knowledge that a baby's mother does not do as much work as other women because she has to attend to it intermittently.

Childbirth brings to the mother an immediate short-term relief from work. She expects some help when the eldest child reaches six or seven years of age. A mother often comments; 'The child is growing up and will tomorrow (in the near future) get me a glass of water (symbolic of being looked after)'. A mother with a few children to help her in minding younger children and doing other small chores gradually becomes assertive in the household. Her dependence on other members of the household gets relatively reduced. On the other hand, other household members also receive help from her children and thereby depend on

them for minor comforts. This enhances her as well as her husband's status both in and outside the household. A mother's interest both in physical and symbolic term's lies in having a few helping children around.

The need for more working hands is felt particularly by small households in rural India. Mamdani (1972) and Caldwell (1982: 96-8) show that variations in fertility determine which families can take advantage of economic opportunities requiring increased family labour inputs. People in Mogra are clear about the value of family labour.

> *Maggi, a mother of four children, remarked: 'It was difficult for me to manage all the work when I had only two small daughters. Now my daughters help me do household work, take care of cattle, and mind the two little ones (their younger siblings). Everything will be set right when my children grow up and begin helping me on land as well. We can then cultivate more land and grow more grain.'*

The arrival of a daughter-in-law is a boon to working hands in a simple household. As already mentioned, people prefer family labour to wage labour. With family labour one can avoid paying cash wages and the constant haggling with hired workers. A common saying is that agriculture can prosper only under the personal care of the field owner *(kheti dhaniyon cheti).* There is, however, a paradox in some people's attitude towards parents having only one surviving son. On the one hand such parents are envied because a single son keeps the household land intact, while on the other, according to society's collective experience, there is a fear that a lone son might be lost.

Child Rearing Practices

Child rearing in Mogra involves minimal monetary expenses compared to a modem middle class family. (The minimal cash expenditure involved in conducting child delivery is discussed in the next chapter.) After childbirth, there are hardly any commodities to be purchased from the market for the baby. Soaps, oils, talc's, towels, diapers and other modem toilet articles are unknown. The baby is bathed in warm water, and wiped and wrapped in soft rags. Proper clothing is provided after a few days of birth. Old soft pieces of cloth are used as napkins. No special bed is purchased for the baby. Its layette is made of rags. When the baby is 4-5 months old it is put in a *ghodi* (cradle); a swing made of cloth hanging from a four-legged wooden stand. A broad-based basket (dali) is also used as a cradle. It is hung from a branch in the field or from a beam in the house. Massaging and bathing of infants is scarcely done everyday even during summer, let alone in winter. The baby's face and hands are sponged and some oil

or ghee is applied to keep flies off. The baby's bed smells of ghee, oil, milk, urine, etc., and not of perfumed toilet articles. The concept of hygiene and cleanliness is strikingly different from that of the urban middle class. Infants are usually confined to their beds and to their mothers for the first few months. The mother generally looks after the baby's physical needs, and is often helped by an elderly woman in the household.

Breast milk is the only feed for an infant till the age of 6-7 months. There are no hassles or expenses involved in arranging for' milk bottles, sterilizing them, preparing the feed, etc. Although frequent bathing and changing of baby clothing is rare, breast-feed provides resistance against infection and ailments. Toilet training is neither elaborate nor strict. Most children are opiated to sleep for longer durations. [2] It is also believed that opium constipates the infant and thus relieves the mother from frequently cleaning soiled napkins.

An infant's expressive and instrumental needs are looked after more by its numerous relative than by its parents alone. If the child is taken ill, other household members take care of medication. The father usually conceals his affection and other emotions towards his baby when elders are present. He refers to or addresses his child rather impersonally as 'the boy' or `the girl' and rarely by its name before elders. Even younger mothers are criticized if they fondle the infant openly. They are expected only to look after the child's physical needs while others are there to take care of emotional needs. Parents rarely purchase clothes for the infant. They mostly come as gift from the maternal and other relatives. If a father buys clothes or shows obvious fondness for the infant, it is frowned upon or disapproved by his family and neighbours. The family, kin and neighbours contribute in their own ways towards bringing up children. For proper growth of children, a family's relations with kin and neighbours are valuable. Expenses on relatives and neighbours are therefore valued highly.

The above institutions whereby the network of relatives and neighbours contribute economically and socially towards child rearing minimize the effort and cost of child rearing, especially for an infant's parents. It is relevant to recall the micro-economic analysis of fertility in terms of costs and benefits of children. The 'choice between a baby or a car' is redundant in societies like Mogra, where the very meaning of costs and benefits is not limited to economic considerations alone.

The child is brought up on resources that are seldom provided by the parents alone. People do not calculate their household expenditure in isolation from those required for bearing and rearing of children. All expenses are viewed as household expenses. The members of a household share some of their resources with those of others, especially their kin, affixes and neighbours through

customary gifts, etc. The household produce is also shared by several members of the eco-system, be they relatives, priests, servants, scavengers, birds, animals, ants and other insects. Economic expenses incurred by a household on child rearing are an infinitesimal part of the total.

Members of all except the untouchable castes offer grain or flour, called *(aka),* as alms to several members of the Saad, Saami and Brahmin castes every morning. In addition, alms are given to untouchables on religious occasions. Alms giving are perceived as a religious act bringing punna. It is common for a child or an aged person from each household, early in the morning, to give *aka* (a few fistfuls of grains) to sparrows, pigeons, peafowl and other birds. At times, a bowl of water is placed in the courtyard, cattleshed and such other open places for birds. Occasionally sweetened grains and water are kept around anthills for ants. A small *hogro* (bread) is given daily to a dog or a cow. People consider such deeds a part of religious activity. Several of them reported these acts to explain their interest in religion. They thought it rather fortunate to be able to give alms even if they had to do so by cutting down their own consumption of delicacies. As distinguished from the consumption attitudes of the urban middle class, the people of Mogra consider enjoyment of delicacies and comforts by saving on the obligatory alms as base and selfish for a human being. One's actual fate is believed to rest with alms given and other acts of *punna* performed in this life.

Whenever a peasant steps into the field for sowing, he prays for **a** harvest sufficient not only for his household but also for the priestly castes, Harijans, birds, cattle, ants, etc. It is believed that the household produce depends on the fate *(bhag)* of all the living beings listed above. The peasant does not reap a crop from his fate as a single individual. He 'reaps through sharing others' fate, and so should he distribute', goes the maxim. In such a social and cultural framework, an individual cannot augment his resources by putting a stop to an additional childbirth nor does he think in terms of such a calculus.

A household's spending on daily alms is sufficient to cater to the daily monetary requirement of bringing up a baby. Or a few months of alms are enough to buy one of the herbal contraceptives (discussed in Chapter 6). But an individual's withdrawal from the routine of giving alms is equated to inviting impending doom for the household. It is believed that punna must be earned as long as there are grains in the house.

Expenses on children and the returns from them are subjective perceptions of people. In their cosmology related to income, expenditure, consumption and work a simple calculation of cost and benefit does not find any expression. People do not think in terms of 'a baby or a car'. The attitude towards children and consumer goods is entirely different. A child is not seen as a choice made

against some consumer durable. An attempt to evaluate fertility behaviour in the village in terms of such a choice is both absurd and irrelevant. The tendency to superimpose a modern consumerist instrumentality on the subjective choices of a typical villager is widespread among demographers of the micro-economic genre, like Becker (1960) and Easterlin (1975).

Parents in Mogra usually have expectations from their children pertaining to their adult productive roles. Unlike urban middle class parents' aspirations that their children be smart and healthy babies, outstanding students in school and college, and prestigious jobholders in adulthood, the aspirations of parents in Mogra are different. Most of them wish that their infants survive, provide a helping hand as children, settle down as socially-influential married persons with children, and give respect to and take care of their old parents. This precludes a perception of the future as the domain of a plurality of possibilities. [3] The various stages in a child's life are seen to be largely given, so that all children born have some place in the world. Nevertheless, parents do aspire that at least one of their sons holds a white-collar job. In fact, it is believed that with a few children to help parents, at least one son can be spared for education. However, not producing a child in order to save resources for the betterment of the family's future is seldom a part of the parents' survival calculus.

The values attributed to children and the social and symbolic returns that accrue to their parents are supportive of high fertility. The following is the only exceptional case, which conveys the predicament of a mother with a single son, and highlights the need for several children for reasons other than mere economic ones.

> *Parti, in her forties, belongs to the Tailor caste, and is well-known for providing secret assistance in fertility control. She has set up an example to others by having only one child, a son. But now, Parti sometimes wonders whether she was wise in doing so. During one of my visits to her house, she wept bitterly that her son had failed in Class 10 and then again in Class 11. Her husband, a school teacher, had explained to her that their son could not be trained for a teacher's job with such poor performance. She lamented: 'I had thought, he would study well and get a naukri (and associated prestige). But now what will happen of us? All our hopes were vested in him. They are now shattered. I can at least unburden my grief before you, but he (her husband) cannot even cry out his heart to anyone. If only I had another son I would have consoled myself that one of them might study well and get a naukri. My life has been wasted thoroughly. The sarpanch's (Mogra's panchayat head) son passed in Class 10 in the first attempt. His wife was boasting about her son's success to me. If only I had another son who studied well, I wouldn't have been a silent listener to that woman's bragging.'*

The failure of her only son in the public examination was enough of a jolt to Parti. It signalled a less radiant future for the family. Her long-standing wisdom of deliberately having one son was now under challenge. Like others in the village she began to feel that having only one son was not enough.

If only Parti had more sons, at least one of them might have achieved success in the educational sphere and got a prestigious job to further enhance the household status, while the others could have taken up tailoring, that being their traditional calling. Though *naukri* is an economic proposition, it provides social prestige and symbolic value, which the wealthy Parti longed for.

It is commonly argued that only when there are three or more sons can one of them be spared for education with the hope of *naukri* after studies. Though formal education is believed to help obtain salaried jobs, parents realize that education is a relatively poor means to securing an urban job. They also find their children dropping out of school or college and remaining unemployed as well as unfit for strenuous agricultural tasks. Returns from agriculture are low. As a result of such uncertainties tension prevails in people's mind. Two sons are held as the minimum, but sterilization is seldom an option just after that. The survival of two sons and a daughter offers some assurance about future life. This assurance comes only with the birth of four or five children-the traditionally prescribed and practiced average. It is at this juncture that people wish to put a stop to their fertility.

Political Sphere

Most political activities of the villagers are usually centered on the village. Only occasionally do these extend beyond the village to the *chautilo, tehsil* and the district. Extra-village politics is influenced by intra-village politics. More men than women are interested in politics at the wider level. For the villagers, the village is the place where they perform most of their roles pertaining to the routine of economic and social life. Their relations with neighbourhood, lineage and jati members are of particular political importance. Struggles for precedence and dominance are endemic in village India (Bailey 1957; Lewis 1958; Mandelbaum 1970 and many others report on this phenomenon). There is competition for status and power between people within the village. It amounts to each family striving to climb up the local hierarchical ladder of authority and dominance. Families of a lineage and/or neighbourhood may come together to form an alliance to protect themselves against powerful rivals. Families may come together because of affinal ties as reported for a village near Jodhpur by Bose and Malhotra (1964).

The significance of numbers in the village community has been sufficiently highlighted by Srinivas' (1959) concept of the dominant caste. He has observed that the ability to 'field' a number of able-bodied men is an important criterion for one's dominant position. Mandelbaum (1970) substantiates the status of *a jati* in its numerical strength in villages (see his description of alliances and factions). Instances where scores are settled in favour of a numerically dominant caste have been cited by Srinivas (1959), Atal (1968) and others in their studies of villages in different parts of India. Studies conducted in the field of fertility in rural India (Wyon and Gordon 1971 and Mamdani 1972) have also reported the importance of numerical strength to a caste or clan, especially for faction fights. The latter two studies of the famous Khanna villages in Ludhiana district have reported on people's perception that bitter faction fights in villages are won by men, not contraceptives.

Mandelbaum (1970) has reported that factional quarrels are endemic to villages and that only a large united lineage or family can be confident of safeguarding status and interests. Fertility provides numerical strength and social status to a lineage or a jati. The primary interests augmented by fertility are located within the household and the family. We have seen earlier in this chapter the nature of economic aspirations parents harbour about their children. Here I wish to say that having several children, especially sons, is a sure protection for parents against denigrations and depredations. This does not mean that couples have children with the primary and explicit purpose of deriving political advantage. Similar observations have been made on other communities m India and elsewhere (Mamdani 1972 on Punjab; Caldwell 1982 on Africa; Cain 1977 on Bangladesh; Nag, Peet and White 1978 on Java and Nepal.)

Fertility is perceived as bringing status, prosperity and numerical strength. Enhancement of parents' status in the house-hold, their strength and standing in the wider society, their interaction with outsiders, and their ability to earn more and to help others, if need be, are some of the direct advantages parents experience through having children. With an increase in the status of a member of a household or family, the status of elders of the household, the family and relatives also increases. The larger the household, family and lineage, the greater the prestige ofits senior members. Their sphere of authority widens as the lineage enlarges itself. More people approach them for help in matters such as labour exchange, borrowing money, and influencing government and other officials for expediting some pending matters in favour of those with fewer, and by implication less influential, members in the household.

Larger households enjoy a number of other advantages. They are likely to have more educated members holding salaried jobs and having contacts with government officials. The elders in these households frequently exercise their

power through the younger members of their household and family. Many people approach them for their children's and grandchildren's marital alliances. People call on them to socialize. Since their network of relatives is wider than that of the others, more people interact with them. Thus, high fertility (birth of boys as well as of girls) is a politically beneficial venture both for parents and grandparents. A larger family means a larger gathering of kin and affines on ritual and ceremonial occasions, which enhances the status of the family. (See Caldwell 1982 and Shah and Desai 1988, for similar observations on Africa and India respectively. Lewis 1958 in his study of Rampur village near Delhi also reports that the assembly of a large number of relatives for a marriage party is an indication of one's power and influence.)

Being related to a large number of people and meeting them from time to time is a sign of a household's prestige. Kinship links with such a household are useful for all kinds of purposes, such as marital alliances for children and grandchildren, political alliances, capital accumulation, meeting economic and farming setbacks, security against unemployment, help in illness, and above all, sharing with insiders and denying to outsiders vital information and experiences of all kinds. The kinship and affinal connections are frequently invoked on occasions of rites of passage, such as birth, wedding and death.

Respect and honour in the community are important for precedence and dominance, which are earned by maintaining kinship and affinal and neighbourhood ties. Lorimer (1954) and Davis and Blake (1956) argue that families with several children may gain economic strength through political clout in local decision-making organizations. Caldwell (1982) raises an important question to understand the vital relevance of extended kinship ties: What do people want to do with their lives? Honour, esteem, affection, and pleasure are attained by spending on the extended family and the community.

A large network of relatives usually supports its members in adversity, such as morbidity, migration and unemployment. Srinivas (1978) observes that customary practices represent, among other things, people's social and psychological insurance in an extremely hostile world. Caldwell (1982:35) further elaborates that political prestige is attained by cultivating the network of relatives and the cooperating group. Political success depends on the ability to tap more or better communal resources, increasing the number of people attending family ceremonies, and magnifying one's social importance. Kinship and other social relations are so dominant that a material transaction is usually a momentary episode in continuous social relations, observes Sahlins (1972: 185-6).

Besides the social and emotional advantages of having several children, affinal alliances are forged with members of other larger and socially prestigious

families to strengthen one's social standing. Parents with several children have numerous alliances in terms of their children's and grandchildren's affines. These usually stand by whenever a need arises.

> *Vinji, an old Patel woman in her fifties, has seven children and 25 grandchildren (sons' and daughters' children). Five of her children were married into families in Mogra. Similarly, she has in Mogra a number of near and distant affines arising out of marriages of the 25 grandchildren. She also has many affinally related people in the neighbouring villages. Vinji is thus related to numerous families in one way or another in and around the village.*

> *In the village she belongs to the complex network of kin and affinal relatives and has direct access to a number of households. A fairly large number of people in the village, mostly consanguinous and affinal relatives, expressed concern and respect for her.*

As most of the social and economic activities in the village are woven around the family, relatives and the community, a person with a large number of relatives is better placed than others. Having no children or having only one or two restricts one's sphere of interaction. There are only a few people to take care of such parents in adversity. Whatever be the occasional internal rifts in the family, its members stand united as a cohesive group 'when others pose a threat to its prestige and economic interests.

> *Baa, a Patel in his sixties, has five sons, one daughter and 27 grandchildren. On the other hand, his younger brother has only one son and two daughters. Whenever there are rifts between the two brothers' families, usually pertaining to farm produce or social obligations, Baa generally has an upper hand as all his sons (including those separated from his household) and grandsons stand by him. His younger brother cannot push matters forth-rightly as he is aware that with fewer hands he cannot guard his property, fields and produce with the same efficiency and vigilance as Baa can. Even though people generally disapprove Baa's usual high-handedness, they rarely come out against him in public as his numerical strength is quite formidable. To antagonize Baa is to face the anger of his entire lot. People praise Baa's younger brother for his forbearance on social occasions, but they rarely fear him because his effective strength compared to that of Baa is insignificant.*

Local dominance and precedence come more easily with a larger number of children. With more people's support, parents make their presence felt. Local dominance helps to sway people, even if the dominant group is unjust in its claims.

Pemji, a shepherd in his forties, has only two surviving daughters out of seven daughters and two sons born. His elder brother, on the other hand, has three sons and two daughters. Due to his and his wife's illness, Pemji was heavily indebted. Consequently he wished to sell a part of his land to repay some of his debts. But his elder brother has been obstructing all his moves for nearly a decade. The land is in Pemji's deceased father's name. For any land deal, both brothers have to come together. Pemji cannot convince his brother who knows that the land will belong to him and his sons one-day. If Pemji had a few sons, he would not have been indebted nor felt the need to dispose of the land.

Pemji's case shows the plight of a sonless household. It is not enough to have a child to absolve parents of the curse of barrenness. In the absence of a son, parents may lose effective control over their own property.

The problems faced by a lone person or by parents with only one son are reflected in the adge: '*ekaliya ree heday chare*' (literally, the cattle of a lone person always graze on the periphery). In other words, it is easy to brush aside a lone person. This is a metaphorical explanation of the weakness of those having fewer children.

Movni, a 25-year-old Jat woman, explained to me the importance of high fertility and the need for a minimum of two sons by asking: 'Can a single piece of wood bum if put in the hearth? Only two, rather three or four of them put together bum well. 'She also explained: 'However much there are quarrels among household and family members, they stand as a united front against any outsider. Outsiders generally think twice before attacking or harming any member of a large family, while a lone person may be attacked any time. For people going to work in the fields the company and security provided by family members are essential.'

Fertility leading to the birth of several sons is as crucial as fire in a hearth in a house. By implication, one can live better only with a few sons.

Hari, a young mother in her twenties, has two young daughters and a three-year-old son. She lives in a complex household comprising herself, her husband, three children and her mother-in-law. The husband works as a tractor driver and is away most of the time. The work on the family's farm is done mostly by Hari and her mother-in-law. Puni is Hari's neighbour and has three sons and two daughers, all married. One son looks after the land, while her husband and two other sons manage a grocery shop in Jodhpur city. Puni takes pride in the fact that her large family owns not only land but also a shop. On one occasion, Hari's cattle strayed into Puni's land. A scuffle broke out between the two and Puni was roughed up. Puni retorted with innuendoes against Hari's husband and ridiculed

the two women for having to manage the family's land. The absence of men to work on her land was a degrading fact in Hari's life. But she claimed that she would one day be a mother of 12 sons and be in a position to settle scores.

Even though Hari is physically stronger than Puni, the fact that the latter has more children confers a superior status on her. But for such a drawback the older and weaker Puni would never have dared challenge Hari in the field. Later Hari was widely criticized for her disrespect towards the elderly Puni.

The above cases illustrate that larger families are generally associated with prosperity, political strength and influence. We have already seen that a family's influence increases not only with the birth of several sons but also with that of daughters. Although a daughter leaves her natal home upon marriage, her affinal alliance helps her natal household to enlarge the network of relatives. A daughter helps enhance her natal household's social position through affinal alliances with other politically and economically influential households. The influence of fathers and brothers increases with the enlargement of the network of relatives in the village, the *chautalo,* and occasionally, even outside it. The religious and emotional value of daughters is well-known (discussed separately), but their social and political value is rarely highlighted in fertility studies. For instance, studies conducted by Wyon and Gordon (1971), Mamdani (1972) and Mandelbaum (1974) emphasize the political significance of sons in India but pay little attention to the value of daughters.

This should not, however, mean that couples in Mogra go on producing as many children as their fecundity permits. We have already seen in this and the previous chapter that household formation and fertility are mediated by convention. We shall see more of this pertaining to fertility control in Chapters 6 and 7.

Cosmology

The prevalent fertility behaviour has an associated set of beliefs. Children have vital social and religious significance. Not only sons but daughters also enjoy a religious value in all caste groups. It is believed that one earns *punna* by giving away a daughter in marriage. A common saying is: 'The courtyard of a house should not remain virgin.' Its implication is that the marriage of at least one daughter must be performed in the courtyard. Couples without a daughter usually arrange for the wedding ritual and related expenses of an agnatic kin's daughter in their courtyard to earn *punna.* Shah (1973: 17) refers to the deeply ingrained belief about the marriage of a daughter bringing religious merit in Gujarat. Giving gifts to daughters by parents and to sisters by brothers on various occasions throughout their lives is believed to bring not only social

honour but also punna. If there are several brothers, they share their obligation toward sisters.

The ritual importance of a son is demonstrated uniformly in all castes, although there are variations pertaining to details in rituals. It is strongly believed that sons are important to continue the family name by maintaining the patriline. The absence of a son is compensated by the practice of adoption and also of *ghar jamai* (among some castes). Sons bring *moksha* (liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth; ultimate salvation) to deceased parents. Sons light the funeral pyre, take their parents' ashes to the holy Ganga for *moksha* (locally called *gati;* actually short form of *sadgati).* Harijans too practise this but not as elaborately as the other castes. Sons organize mortuary feasts upon their old parents' death. Feeding people on such an occasion brings religious merit both to the deceased and to the host of the mortuary feast, besides enhancing the status of the household.

If parents have a large number of children they consider themselves to be fortunate. Fecundity is god's gift. If it was not so there would have been no sterility, they argue. Sterility is considered a curse. It leads to termination of life. Fertility is thus a divine blessing. It brings a sense of completeness and fulfillment to a couple, a purpose and relevance to life. It leads to prosperity and well being in the present and the other world. It is through one's children that one's name and memory get perpetuated. The customary practice of reading out genealogical records of one's lineage and clan ancestors upon every new entry in one's genealogist's register is zealously practiced. The records are a valued possession and are an important component of one's cherished treasure kept in the custody of genealogists. [4]

A house full of children in compared to a flowering tree and is a source of parents' pride. Children symbolize prosperity and happiness. It is rare to find a household without children. Such a household is considered unfortunate and unbearably desolate, one that pounces upon one like a glutton *(khali ghar khavane daude).* Not having children implies that a person is unable to continue one's patriline, which is clearly a disrespect to one's ancestors. By producing children, especially sons, one repays one's ancestral debt.

An open door signifies a happy household, fill of people. There are, however, customary practices (adoption and *ghar jamai*) that enable an individual to overcome the problems associated with not having a son. Discharge of kinship and ritual obligations needs a large number of children. The need for sons in Hindu society is well known. The son in all caste groups has a number of functions to perform in relation to his parents, siblings and sister's children. A major responsibility of children towards parents is to take the ashes of the deceased parents to the Ganga. It also involves arranging the mortuary feast

discussed in Chapter 1. A son's other responsibilities after parents' death are to bring up the younger siblings, get them married and, as already mentioned, in case of sisters, to arrange for obligatory gifts on various occasions throughout their lives. The obligations toward sisters can be shared if there are several brothers. The total number of gifts received by a sister is also large if she has more than one brother, which enhance her standing in the conjugal home.

The ritual and symbolic significance of children to parents is found in their status enhancement through birth itself Right from the time of birth, the child begins to add to the parents' and the households status. The domestic, economic, political and ritual spheres are symbolically interlinked in the cosmology that reinforces the positive value of fertility.

1. The Brahmin priests, while preparing a child's horoscope, suggest a few syllables that form the first syllables of a child's name. But this practice is prevalent only among the upper castes. Among other castes only the well off prefer to avail such a luxury. Horoscopes are generally prepared for boys, and rarely for girls even among the upper castes.

2. Opium is an important element in of traditional culture of this part of Rajasthan. It is a significant constituent item of almost all ritual and ceremonial occasions. Opium is offered commonly to visitors and guests. Sharing of opium indicates mutual honour both for the host and the guest. Opium is found commonly with elderly men in Mogra. By the age of40, most men become opium addicts. They take granules of opium with water and tea. As it is believed to be tranquilizing and constipating, it is administered for diarrhoea. An infant is given opium usually to prolong its sleep and reduce bowel movement, because opium is believed to be constipating and euphoric. This relieves the mother for other chores without having constantly to care for the infant.

3. Krause (1980) analyses the American experiment of public education for urban middle class and ghetto children. He observes how achievement becomes a cherished value for a middle class child and for middle class parents, while ghetto children depend on their usual fate.

4. Members of the caste of genealogists, called Rav or Bhat, live in other villages in the region and visit their patrons in Mogra for the purpose of updating the records in their registers. They visit Mogra once or twice a year. See Shah and Shroff (1958) for an account of such a caste in adjoining Gujarat state.