

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

Sociology Optional Systems of Kinship in India, and Religion and Society

Paper 2 · Unit 3

Karve's zones, Shah's households and Chakravarti's Brahmanical patriarchy: the three tools that turn description of Indian kinship into argument, plus the sociology of religious community and minority.

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UPSC SYLLABUS

(v) Systems of Kinship in India: (a) Lineage and descent in India. (b) Types of kinship systems. (c) Family and marriage in India. (d) Household dimensions of the family. (e) Patriarchy, entitlements and sexual division of labour. (vi) Religion and Society: (a) Religious communities in India. (b) Problems of religious minorities.

Lineage and descent in India

Descent decides three things at once: who you are, what you inherit, and whom you may not marry. Indian kinship states descent briefly and works out the marriage prohibitions in enormous detail, so read the prohibitions to find the structure.

- Most of India is patrilineal and patrilocal: descent, name, ritual obligation and property pass through men, and the wife moves. Matriliney is a minority pattern with a specific geography: the Nayar of central Kerala, the Khasi, Garo and Jaintia of Meghalaya, the Mappila of Lakshadweep. Double descent is essentially absent.
- The vocabulary is the analytic apparatus. Gotra: an exogamous unit tracing descent from a rishi, a fiction that works. Pravara: the line of ancestral sages invoked at ritual. Kul and vansh: lineage. Khandan and biradari: the wider agnatic and caste-fellow circles. Sapinda: those connected by shared bodily particles, the ritual idiom of consanguinity.
- Sapinda differs by school: Mitakshara counts seven generations on the father's side and five on the mother's; Dayabhaga defines the pinda by offering rather than by body. The Hindu Marriage Act 1955, Section 3(f), simplified it to five degrees of ascent through the father and three through the mother, counting the person concerned as the first generation. Section 5(iv) prohibits sapinda marriage and 5(v) marriage within the degrees of prohibited relationship, both unless custom permits.
- That 'unless custom permits' clause is the north-south story compressed into statute: Parliament could not write one rule for a country where a Tamil man may marry his mother's brother's daughter and a Haryanvi man may not marry a woman of his own village.
- Descent theory, from Radcliffe-Brown and the Africanists, treats the unilineal group as the building block and marriage as recruitment to it. Alliance theory, from Levi-Strauss, treats marriage itself as the structure, the exchange that binds groups over generations.
- Louis Dumont, 'Hierarchy and Marriage Alliance in South Indian Kinship' (1957), applied alliance theory to India and won the argument for the south: affinity is inherited. Marriage repeats in the same relationship across generations, so the same lineages are permanently wife-givers and wife-takers to each other, and the terminology preserves the affinal tie as a durable category rather than dissolving it.
- Set that against the north, where marriage is kanyadan, the gift of a virgin, and a gift by definition is not returned. The northern rule creates a permanent asymmetry between giver and taker. Dumont's contrast is therefore repeated alliance in the south against non-repeatable gift in the north, and it is the theoretical spine under Karve's ethnographic map.
- T.N. Madan, 'Family and Kinship: A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir' (1965), added the corrective: the chulah, the hearth group, is not a type but a phase. The same set of kin is joint at one moment and nuclear at another, so a household census cannot tell you what kind of family a society has.

KEY TERMS

Gotra — An exogamous descent unit tracing to a mythical rishi; a putative, not demonstrable, lineage, which is what makes it usable across a whole caste.

Sapinda — Those sharing particles of the same body; the kin within which marriage is prohibited. HMA 1955 s.3(f): five degrees through the father, three through the mother.

Kanyadan — The gift of a virgin daughter, the dominant north Indian form; because a gift cannot be reciprocated, it makes wife-givers permanently inferior to wife-takers.

Alliance — Dumont's principle that in south India marriage is an enduring, inherited, repeated relation between lineages, so affinity is a category of kinship rather than an event.

Irawati Karve's kinship zones

Karve's 'Kinship Organisation in India' (1953) is the anchor of this unit. Her method was to read kinship terminology and marriage rules as evidence of social structure, and to map the results onto linguistic and cultural regions.

- Karve divided India into four zones, northern, central, southern and eastern, aligning roughly with the Indo-Aryan, mixed, Dravidian and Munda linguistic areas. Her claim was not that language causes kinship but that language regions and kinship regions coincide because both record the same history of settlement.
- Northern zone, from the Himalayas to the Vindhyas, Indo-Aryan speech: the governing principle is the multiplication of exogamy. Village exogamy, so the village's daughters are all sisters. Gotra exogamy extended by the four-gotra rule, barring the father's, mother's, father's mother's and mother's mother's gotras. No cross-cousin marriage, no uncle-niece marriage, disapproval of exchanging sisters. Hypergamy, anuloma, in which the bride goes up.
- Northern effects: the bride marries a stranger in a distant village and is severed from natal kin, so a woman carries two irreconcilable identities, daughter and daughter-in-law. Terminology keeps the father's and mother's sides rigorously distinct, which is why Hindi has chacha and mama, bua and mausi, where English has uncle and aunt. Affinal terms are a separate set, because affines remain outsiders.
- Southern zone, Dravidian speech: the principle is the reverse, marriage preferentially inside the kin group. Cross-cousin marriage is preferred, especially with the mother's brother's daughter; uncle-niece marriage, a man with his elder sister's daughter, is found among Tamil, Telugu and Kannada speakers and is the feature Karve singled out as diagnostic. Village endogamy is permitted and gotra exogamy is weakly observed outside the Brahmins.
- Southern effects: because the same families exchange spouses repeatedly, wife-givers and wife-takers are not permanently ranked, and the daughter is not lost to her family but marries into a household she already knows. Terminology is bifurcate-merging, classing cross-cousins with affines and possible spouses, parallel cousins with siblings. The mother's brother, the mama, is central and indulgent rather than distant.
- Central zone, between the Vindhyas and the Godavari, covering Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Odisha: mixed and transitional, and the mixture is the finding, not a failure of the scheme. Gotra exogamy is retained from the north while cross-cousin marriage with the mother's brother's daughter is permitted in many Marathi and Gujarati castes, and Marathi kinship vocabulary is itself hybrid.
- Eastern zone: Karve was explicit that this is not a homogeneous zone. It covers Munda and Mon-Khmer speakers and the eastern peoples, cross-cousin marriage occurs among some, and variation between neighbouring groups is as great as between zones. Treat it as the residual category it is, and say so.

- The criticisms are as examinable as the scheme. The zones track language families, which risks explaining kinship by linguistic descent. Variation by caste within a zone can exceed variation between zones, since a Tamil Brahmin follows gotra exogamy while his Vellala neighbour does not. Matrilineal Kerala and the Northeast do not fit a scheme built on patrilineal descent. Karve's use of Sanskrit sources imports a Brahmanical and normative picture into an ethnographic argument. And the scheme is synchronic, so it cannot register the changes in age at marriage, migration and residence that have run through all four zones since.
- What survives: the north-south contrast is real and is not reducible to language. Use Karve for the map and Dumont for why the map looks like that.

Karve's four kinship zones (Kinship Organisation in India, 1953)

Feature	Northern zone	Central zone	Southern zone	Eastern zone
Extent and speech	Himalayas to the Vindhyas; Indo-Aryan	Vindhyas to the Godavari: Rajasthan, Gujarat, MP, Maharashtra, Odisha; Marathi, Gujarati, Odia	Peninsular India; Dravidian: Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam	Munda and Mon-Khmer speakers and the eastern peoples; Karve treated it as not a single zone
Governing principle	Maximise distance: marry outside every known circle	Mixed and transitional; northern rules with southern permissions	Minimise distance: marry back into known kin	No single principle; variation between neighbouring groups is as wide as between zones
Exogamy rules	Village exogamy plus gotra exogamy plus the four-gotra rule (father's, mother's, father's mother's, mother's mother's)	Gotra exogamy retained; village exogamy weaker	Gotra exogamy weak outside Brahmins; village endogamy permitted	Clan exogamy common among Munda speakers; rules vary
Cross-cousin marriage	Prohibited absolutely	Permitted in many castes, chiefly with the mother's brother's daughter	Preferred, especially the mother's brother's daughter; uncle-niece marriage with the elder sister's daughter also found	Present among some groups, absent among others
Wife-givers and wife-takers	Permanently asymmetric; kanyadan is a gift that cannot be returned; hypergamy (anuloma)	Asymmetry weakening as alliance repeats	Symmetric, because the same lineages exchange spouses over generations	Not characterisable as a zone
Woman's position on marriage	Marries a stranger in a distant village; severed from natal kin; two identities, daughter and daughter-in-law	Intermediate	Marries within a known circle, often nearby; retains natal ties; not lost to her family	Varies; bride-price and bride-service reported among several Munda-speaking groups
Terminology	Father's and mother's sides sharply distinguished (chacha vs mama); affines a separate set	Hybrid: Marathi vocabulary carries both patterns	Bifurcate-merging: cross-cousins classed with affines and possible spouses, parallel cousins with siblings	Mixed

Types of kinship systems: matriliney and the limits of the patrilineal model

Matrilineal India is a small population and an outsized theoretical resource. The Nayar case forced anthropology to redefine marriage; the Khasi and Garo cases settle whether matriliney means female power. It

does not.

- The Nayar of central Kerala before the twentieth century: the taravad was the matrilineal property unit, descent and residence ran through women, and it was managed by the karanavan, the senior male of the line, who was the woman's brother, not her husband. A girl underwent the tali-kettu kalyanam before puberty with a ritual husband she might never see again, then took sambandham partners, visiting unions from which the man acquired no rights over her, her children or her property; his obligation was to his sister's children.
- Kathleen Gough, 'The Nayers and the Definition of Marriage' (1959), used the case to break the standard definition. If marriage means a man and a woman cohabiting with sexual and economic rights, the Nayar had no marriage, yet Nayar children were fully legitimate. Her reformulation: marriage is a relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship is accorded full birth-status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum. Marriage is defined by legitimacy, not cohabitation.
- Edmund Leach ('Polyandry, Inheritance and the Definition of Marriage', 1955) reached the opposite conclusion from similar evidence: no universal definition is possible, and marriage is a bundle of rights combined differently in different societies. Gough sought a universal, Leach denied there was one. Cite both; the disagreement is the answer.
- Khasi matriliney: the iing is the household, property runs through women, and the khadduh, the youngest daughter, inherits the ancestral property and keeps the family shrine, so inheritance is not equal among daughters either. Authority is held by u kni, the mother's brother. The Garo run parallel: the nokna is the heiress, the nokrom her husband, often her mother's brother's son, brought into the house, and a'king land is held by the machong, the matrilineal clan.
- The lesson: matriliney is not matriarchy. Property descends through women while authority is exercised by their brothers. Descent and authority are different variables, and conflating them is the commonest error here.
- Audrey Richards named the strain in 1950: the matrilineal puzzle. A man has authority over his sister's children but lives with his wife and hers, so the system must choose where the woman and her brother reside, and no arrangement resolves it. Nayar visiting marriage is one solution, Garo nokrom residence another.
- Matriliney is receding for legal and economic reasons rather than cultural ones. The Madras Marumakkathayam Act 1933 and the Kerala Joint Hindu Family System (Abolition) Act 1975 dissolved the taravad into individual shares, and salaried employment made the conjugal household the economic unit. Among the Khasi, the Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai movement campaigns for a shift to patriliney on the argument that matriliney disadvantages men, which is itself evidence that authority and descent were never aligned.
- Polyandry completes the typology: fraternal polyandry among the Toda, described by W.H.R. Rivers in 'The Todas' (1906), where a woman marries a set of brothers, alongside female infanticide and a skewed sex ratio; and polyandry in Jaunsar-Bawar among the Khasa, described by D.N. Majumdar in 'Himalayan Polyandry' (1962), usually explained as preventing the fragmentation of scarce hill land.

KEY TERMS

Taravad — The Nayar matrilineal corporate property group, all descendants of one ancestress in the female line, managed by the karanavan, the eldest male of the line.

Matrilineal puzzle — Audrey Richards' term (1950) for the tension in matriliney between a man's authority over his sister's children and his attachment to his own conjugal household.

Khadduh — The youngest Khasi daughter, who inherits the ancestral property and the family shrine; proof that matriliney is not the mirror image of primogeniture.

Family and marriage in India

The joint family is the most written-about and least accurately described institution in Indian sociology. The literature on it is a sequence of corrections to a myth, and the corrections are what get marked.

- Karve's definition is the standard one: a joint family is a group of people who generally live under one roof, eat food cooked at one hearth, hold property in common, participate in common family worship, and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred. It stacks five criteria, and the subsequent literature is about what happens when they come apart.
- I.P. Desai, 'Some Aspects of Family in Mahuva' (1964), pulled the first criterion away from the rest: jointness is not residence but the persistence of property, obligation and functional relation. He graded households by degrees of jointness rather than sorting them into joint or nuclear, and found nuclear residence coexisting with joint functioning, with brothers in separate towns still pooling income.
- A.M. Shah, 'The Household Dimension of the Family in India' (1973), delivered the decisive correction. The household, a residential and commensal unit a census can count, is not the family, a kinship unit that can span households. Confusing them produced the myth. His substitute for the nuclear-joint dichotomy: simple household, containing one elementary family or its parts, against complex household, containing anything more.
- Shah's findings against the myth: Indian households have always been mostly small; complex households were historically found chiefly among the propertied upper castes, who had the land to hold together and the longevity to do it; and demography, high mortality and early marriage, capped household size regardless of ideology. There was no golden age of the universal joint family, so there is nothing to be breaking down.
- Milton Singer ('The Indian Joint Family in Modern Industry', 1968) and M.S. Gore ('Urbanization and Family Change', 1968) both found less change than modernization theory expected. Singer's Madras industrialists found the joint family an asset, supplying capital and trustworthy managers. Gore's Aggarwals in Delhi showed urban residence did not automatically nuclearize, and attitudes shifted well ahead of behaviour.
- Hindu marriage is a sanskara, one of the sixteen, not a contract, and its stated aims are dharma, praja and rati in that order, placing progeny and pleasure below duty. The eight classical forms are Brahma, Daiva, Arsha, Prajapatya, Asura, Gandharva, Rakshasa and Paisacha, of which the first four are approved and the last two are abduction and rape by any modern reading.
- The rules are a lattice: caste endogamy, gotra and sapinda and often village exogamy, and the hypergamy-hypogamy pair, with anuloma tolerated and pratiloma condemned. Endogamy and exogamy are not opposites; they operate at different levels of one system, which is how caste reproduces itself.
- The contrasts are examinable. Muslim marriage, nikah, is a civil contract with mahr, witnesses and iddat, and several Muslim communities prefer father's brother's daughter marriage, a parallel-cousin union the

northern Hindu rule prohibits absolutely. Christian marriage runs under the Indian Christian Marriage Act 1872. K.M. Kapadia, 'Marriage and Family in India' (1955), documented the drift of Hindu marriage from sacrament towards contract while caste endogamy held firm, which is still the correct summary.

- What has changed: age at marriage is rising, with NFHS-5 (2019-21) recording 23.3 per cent of women aged 20-24 married before 18, down from 26.8 per cent in NFHS-4; TFR has fallen to 2.0, below replacement; dual-earner households and later marriage are normal in urban India; live-in relationships gained recognition through the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005, covering relationships in the nature of marriage. What has not: caste endogamy, with the India Human Development Survey finding inter-caste marriages at roughly five per cent of all marriages; near-universal marriage; very low divorce.
- The legal frame: Hindu Marriage Act 1955; Special Marriage Act 1954 for inter-faith and civil marriage; Prohibition of Child Marriage Act 2006; Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Act 2019, criminalising instant triple talaq after Shayara Bano v Union of India (2017) held it void. In Supriyo v Union of India (2023) the Supreme Court declined to recognise same-sex marriage and left it to Parliament.
- Patricia Uberoi's 'Family, Kinship and Marriage in India' (1993) supplies the closing frame: the family is not a natural unit that law regulates from outside, it is constituted by law, ideology and the state, and personal law is where that becomes visible.

Household dimensions of the family

The syllabus lists this separately for a reason: it is a methodological item. The question is what unit you count, and every claim about the Indian family standing or falling turns on the answer.

- The household is a residential and commensal group, the unit an enumerator identifies at a doorstep. The family is a kinship group, which may spread across several households and cities. Shah's point is that census data measures the first and is routinely used to make claims about the second.
- Shah's categories: simple household, one elementary family or a fragment; complex household, anything larger, whether lineally extended, collaterally extended or supplemented. This grades the evidence instead of forcing it into two ideological boxes, and it lets you say a household became complex when a widowed mother moved in, which the nuclear-joint dichotomy cannot.
- Meyer Fortes' developmental cycle in domestic groups (1958) finishes the argument. Every domestic group passes through expansion, from marriage until the children are grown; dispersion or fission, as children marry and split off; and replacement, as the parental generation dies and is succeeded. A household is joint at one point in the cycle and simple at another, and they are the same household.
- The methodological payoff is large: a cross-sectional census counts households at random points in their cycles, so a snapshot showing mostly simple households proves nothing about whether joint families are declining. That claim needs panel data or genealogies, which Shah and Madan used and the modernization theorists did not.
- Madan's Kashmiri Pandit chulah is the ethnographic version: jointness is an ideal a household moves into and out of, and separation of hearths is often a stage that later reverses. Desai's Mahuva families make the same case from the other side, functionally joint while residentially separate.
- The measurable trend is towards smaller households, not the disappearance of the joint family. Census 2011 put the average Indian household at about 4.8 members, and NFHS-5 (2019-21) reports a mean of roughly 4.4. Smaller households follow from lower fertility, later marriage and migration, none of which is the collapse of joint obligation.

- Migration makes the distinction indispensable now. A migrant working in Surat and remitting to a household in Ganjam is in a simple household and a joint family at once. Count by residence and the family has nuclearized; count by property, obligation and remittance and it has not. Both counts are right about different units.
- The corollary for policy: ration cards, housing schemes and beneficiary lists are built on the household, so the state's unit of account is the residential one. That is why families split households on paper, and why household data on Indian families is noisy in a direction the researcher can predict.

KEY TERMS

Simple and complex household — A.M. Shah's substitute for the nuclear-joint dichotomy: simple contains one elementary family or its parts, complex anything more. It describes rather than judges.

Developmental cycle — Meyer Fortes (1958): the phases of expansion, dispersion and replacement through which every domestic group passes, which is why a household census cannot detect family change.

Patriarchy, entitlements and the sexual division of labour

Here the unit stops describing kinship and starts explaining it. The argument that carries the section: caste is reproduced through endogamy, endogamy requires control of women's sexuality, so Indian patriarchy is not a separate system coexisting with caste. It is caste's reproductive mechanism.

- Sylvia Walby, 'Theorising Patriarchy' (1990), gives the general frame: a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women, operating through six structures, household production, paid work, the state, male violence, sexuality and cultural institutions. Her historical claim is a shift from private patriarchy, exercised by individual men in the household, to public patriarchy, exercised collectively through the workplace and the state. India has both at once.
- Uma Chakravarti, 'Conceptualising Brahmanical Patriarchy in Early India' (EPW, 1993), gives the Indian specification and is the single most useful citation here. Caste purity is maintained by endogamy; endogamy by controlling whom women bear children to; therefore the upper-caste woman must be closely guarded, and her sexuality is a matter of caste order, not private morality. Gender, caste and class are one structure, historically enforced by the state.
- The corollary explains the violence: honour killing, khap panchayat intervention against same-gotra and inter-caste marriage, and the policing of women's mobility are not survivals of tradition but the maintenance of caste boundaries now. Prem Chowdhry's work on Haryana, including 'The Veiled Women' (1994), documents this and shows it intensifies where land, dominant-caste status and marriage markets are under pressure.
- Leela Dube gives the ideological mechanism in the seed-and-earth metaphor: the man contributes the seed, which carries identity and varna, and the woman is the field, which nourishes but does not determine. Descent is therefore patrilineal and a woman's body must be controlled, since a field sown by the wrong seed is a caste catastrophe. In 'On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India' (EPW, 1988), she traced how this is installed through the ordinary discipline of childhood, over food, space, dress, speech and comportment, long before anyone states it as doctrine.
- Amartya Sen's cooperative conflicts (1990) models the household without romanticising it. Decisions combine cooperation, since everyone gains by staying together, with conflict, since the gains can be divided many ways. Outcomes turn on the breakdown position, how badly off each person is if cooperation ends; the perceived interest response, whether she perceives her own welfare as a legitimate claim; and the perceived

contribution response, whether her contribution is seen to count. Indian women lose on all three, and the third is why unpaid work becomes weak entitlement.

- Bina Agarwal, 'A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia' (1994), is the central Indian text on entitlements. Her thesis: the single most important determinant of women's economic wellbeing, social status and empowerment in rural South Asia is effective rights in arable land. 'Effective' is the load-bearing word, since she distinguishes legal ownership from actual control, and land in a woman's name that her brother cultivates and her husband manages changes little.
- Agarwal's extension in 'Bargaining and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household' (1997): bargaining power is not only intra-household, since a woman's fallback position is set by the state, the market, the community and social norms outside the door. Land matters because it is the one asset that improves the fallback position permanently.
- The law has moved and the practice has not. The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act 2005 made daughters coparceners by birth in Mitakshara joint family property, equal to sons, and Vineeta Sharma v Rakesh Sharma (2020) settled that the right is by birth and applies whether or not the father was alive on 9 September 2005. Yet daughters routinely relinquish shares, because claiming means suing your brother and forfeiting the natal home as a refuge. Agarwal's framework predicts exactly this: a right nobody can afford to exercise is not an entitlement.
- The sexual division of labour is a measurement problem as much as a moral one. The NSO Time Use Survey (2019) found women spending close to five hours a day on unpaid domestic services against roughly an hour and a half for men, with similarly lopsided participation rates. None of it enters GDP, which is why the perceived contribution response is low, and Sen's model then converts invisible work into weak entitlement mechanically.
- Female labour force participation is rising and needs careful reading. The Periodic Labour Force Survey shows female LFPR on usual status for those aged 15 and above climbing from roughly 23 per cent in 2017-18 to over 40 per cent by 2023-24, but much of the increase is unpaid helper work on family farms. That is a statement about distress and about improved measurement of work always being done, at least as much as about empowerment.
- Sen's missing women (1990) is the demographic endpoint: son preference plus the economics of dowry and patrilocality produces a sex ratio no natural process explains. Census 2011 recorded a child sex ratio of 919 girls per 1,000 boys, and NFHS-5 reports a sex ratio at birth of 929 for children born in the preceding five years. Nivedita Menon's 'Seeing Like a Feminist' (2012) closes it: the family's achievement is to make all of this appear natural, which is what an ideology is for.

Religious communities in India

The sociology of religion in India must explain two things at once: how one tradition contains enormous internal variety, and how theologically distinct communities nevertheless share a social structure. Both have canonical answers.

- Census 2011: Hindus 79.8 per cent, Muslims 14.2, Christians 2.3, Sikhs 1.7, Buddhists 0.7, Jains 0.4, other religions and persuasions 0.7, not stated 0.2. Decadal growth 2001-11 was 24.6 per cent for Muslims against 16.8 for Hindus, but the gap has narrowed every decade, and NFHS-5 records a Muslim TFR of 2.36 against a Hindu 1.94, the smallest recorded difference. Differential fertility tracks education, income and infant mortality, not doctrine.

- M.N. Srinivas, 'Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India' (1952), is the founding study and gave the discipline two tools: Sanskritization, the process by which a low caste adopts the ritual, diet and idiom of a higher one to claim rank; and the levels of Hinduism, all-India, peninsular, regional and local, arranged as a spread, which explains how a village deity and a Vedic god belong to one religion.
- McKim Marriott, 'Little Communities in an Indigenous Civilization' (1955), from Kishan Garhi, worked Redfield's great and little tradition into a two-way process. Universalization: a local practice carried upward and given Sanskrit sanction. Parochialization: an all-India festival pulled downward and reworked in local idiom. Neither tradition is the source, which is why Indian religion cannot be read off its texts.
- Louis Dumont, 'Homo Hierarchicus' (1966), makes religion the encompassing value: the opposition of purity and pollution generates caste, and status is separated from power because the Brahmin's superiority is ritual while the Kshatriya's is temporal. His 'World Renunciation in Indian Religions' (1960) adds the escape hatch: the renouncer, the sannyasi, is the only true individual in Indian society, standing outside the hierarchy that defines everyone else.
- Imtiaz Ahmad is the essential corrective for Indian Islam, in his edited volumes on caste and social stratification among Muslims (1973) and on ritual and religion among Muslims in India (1981). Two findings: Indian Muslims are stratified in practice, in the Ashraf, Ajlaf and Arzal ordering, despite doctrine's insistence on equality; and Indian Islam as lived is syncretic, with shrine worship, saint cults and shared festivals the scripturalist reading cannot see. Ashraf covers the claimed foreign-descent groups, Sayyid, Sheikh, Mughal, Pathan; Ajlaf the converted artisan groups; Arzal the lowest. The Pasmenda movement is the political expression, and it is why 'the Muslim community' as a single interest is a fiction.
- The secularism debate needs all four positions. T.N. Madan, 'Secularism in Its Place' (EPW, 1987): secularism is a gift of Christianity, presupposing that religion can be privatised, and for the vast majority of South Asians religion is not private, so secularism is impossible as a shared credo and has become the ideology of a minority elite, leaving religion to the fundamentalists by default.
- Ashis Nandy, 'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance' (1988), distinguishes religion-as-faith, plural, unselfconscious and historically tolerant, from religion-as-ideology, an identity mobilised for political and economic ends. His claim: state secularism attacks the first while being useless against the second, and traditional tolerance is the better resource.
- Rajeev Bhargava answers both with principled distance: Indian secularism was never a wall of separation, and that is a feature. The state may engage with religion, as in reforming temple entry, or disengage from it, depending on whether the action advances freedom and equality. It is not evenhandedness but a defensible non-neutral principle, and it is why the Indian state can abolish untouchability and fund haj at once.
- The constitutional settlement follows Bhargava rather than Madan or Nandy. 'Secular' was inserted in the Preamble by the 42nd Amendment in 1976, and S.R. Bommai v Union of India (1994) held secularism to be part of the basic structure. Article 25's Explanation II, counting Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists within 'Hindus' for that clause, is the standing reminder that the state's categories are not the communities' own.

KEY TERMS

Universalization and parochialization — Marriott's paired processes: a local rite carried up into the great tradition, and a great-tradition festival pulled down and reworked locally. Indian religion is the traffic between them.

Religion-as-faith vs religion-as-ideology — Nandy's distinction: lived, plural, tolerant belief against belief mobilised as a political identity. Communalism belongs to the second and is modern.

Principled distance — Bhargava's account of Indian secularism: the state engages or disengages from religion case by case, on the test of whether the action promotes freedom and equality.

Problems of religious minorities and the constitutional safeguards

Minority is a legal status with sociological consequences. The problems fall into four families, security, equity, identity and representation, and the safeguards were designed for the third while the pressure is mostly on the first two.

- **Who counts:** the National Commission for Minorities Act 1992 provides for notification, and six communities stand notified, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsis and Jains, who were added in January 2014. In *TMA Pai Foundation v State of Karnataka* (2002) an eleven-judge bench held that for Article 30 purposes minority status is determined with the state as the unit, so a Sikh is a minority in Kerala and not in Punjab. Minority is relational, not intrinsic.
- **The safeguards, worth knowing exactly.** Articles 14, 15, 16: equality and non-discrimination on grounds of religion. Article 25: freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practise and propagate. Article 26: freedom to manage religious affairs and own property. Article 27: no compulsion to pay taxes for the promotion of any religion. Article 28: no religious instruction in wholly state-funded institutions. Article 29: any section of citizens with a distinct language, script or culture may conserve it, drafted for sections, not only minorities. Article 30: the right of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions, with 30(1A) on compensation and 30(2) barring discrimination in aid. Articles 350A and 350B: mother-tongue instruction at the primary stage, and a Special Officer for Linguistic Minorities. Article 51A(e): the duty to promote harmony.
- **Security.** Paul Brass, 'The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India' (2003), argues for institutionalised riot systems: riots are produced by specialists, rehearsed in ordinary times, triggered when useful, then narrated afterwards as an eruption of ancient hatred. The narration is part of the production.
- **Ashutosh Varshney, 'Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life' (2002),** asks why some cities stay peaceful and answers with inter-communal civic engagement. Everyday engagement between neighbours helps, but associational engagement, business associations, unions, clubs and professional bodies integrating members across communities, is what holds, because associations survive pressure that neighbourliness does not. His paired-city method, Calicut with Aligarh, Hyderabad with Lucknow, Surat with Ahmedabad, is the model of research design here.
- **Equity.** The Sachar Committee (2006) is the authoritative record, and its central finding is what to quote: on most development indicators Muslims sit near the bottom, close to SCs and STs and below the Hindu average. They held under five per cent of central government employment while forming over 13 per cent of the population at the time, and were sharply under-represented in the civil services, the police and formal credit. Its concept of the Muslim-concentration area, systematically under-served by schools, banks and health facilities, showed the deprivation is spatial as well as social. The Ranganath Misra Commission (2007) recommended 15 per cent reservation for minorities, 10 per cent for Muslims; it was not implemented. The Kundu Committee (2014) reviewed the post-Sachar record and found limited movement.
- **Ghettoization** is where security and equity meet. Laurent Gayer and Christophe Jaffrelot's 'Muslims in Indian Cities' (2012) documents the pattern: violence pushes families into segregated settlements chosen for safety, such as Juhapura in Ahmedabad or Mumbra near Mumbai; the settlements are under-served by municipal infrastructure and credit; the deprivation is then read as cultural backwardness; and the segregation deepens. Safety is purchased with services, and the choice repeats each generation.
- **Identity.** The standing tension is between group rights under Articles 25 to 30 and individual rights under Articles 14 and 15, which is the Uniform Civil Code argument under Article 44. Trace it through the cases: *Shah Bano* (1985) and the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986 that reversed it;

Danial Latifi (2001), reading that Act to preserve maintenance beyond iddat; Sarla Mudgal (1995); Shayara Bano (2017). Uttarakhand became the first state to enact a Uniform Civil Code, passed in 2024 and brought into force in January 2025. The sociological point stands whatever your position: a UCC that is in practice codified Hindu law is majority law under a universal name, while a personal law regime leaves women inside communities governed by the community's men. Neither horn is comfortable, which is why the debate does not end.

- Conversion. Article 25 protects the right to propagate, but in *Rev. Stainislaus v State of Madhya Pradesh* (1977) the Supreme Court held that the right to propagate does not include a right to convert another person, and several states have anti-conversion laws requiring prior notice or district approval. The sociological reading: conversion out of Hinduism by Dalits is an exit from caste and is treated as a threat to the social order, which is why the laws cluster where Dalit conversion is common.
- The minority within the minority is the most demanding part. The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order 1950, paragraph 3, restricts SC status to Hindus, later extended to Sikhs in 1956 and Buddhists in 1990, so Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims are excluded from SC reservation while continuing to face untouchability inside their new communities. The Balakrishnan Commission was constituted in 2022 to examine it and litigation is pending. This is the case showing that minority rights and caste justice can be in direct conflict.
- Representation, and the closing frame. Muslim representation in the Lok Sabha has run persistently below population share, and the Pasmanda and Dalit-Christian claims show why treating a religious community as one bloc is analytically wrong. Amartya Sen's 'Identity and Violence' (2006) names the error: the solitarist illusion, the assumption that a person has one identity that explains her, when she is at once Muslim, Bengali, weaver, woman and citizen. Communal politics does not discover a singular identity, it manufactures one.

Last-mile revision

- Karve (1953): four zones. North maximises distance (village plus gotra plus four-gotra exogamy, no cross-cousins, kanyadan, hypergamy). South minimises it (MBD cross-cousin preferred, uncle-niece found, village endogamy permitted, symmetric alliance). Central is transitional. Eastern is heterogeneous and Karve said so.
- Dumont's alliance theory explains why Karve's map looks like that: in the south affinity is inherited and marriage repeats, so wife-givers and wife-takers are equal; in the north kanyadan is an unreturnable gift, so they are not.
- HMA 1955 s.3(f) sapinda: five degrees through the father, three through the mother. Section 5 lets custom override, which is the north-south split written into statute.
- Matriliney is not matriarchy. Khasi property goes to the khadduh, the youngest daughter; authority is u kni, the mother's brother. Richards' matrilineal puzzle is why.
- Gough defined marriage by legitimacy of the child, from the Nayar case. Leach said no universal definition exists and marriage is a bundle of rights. Cite both.
- A.M. Shah (1973): household is not family; simple and complex, not nuclear and joint; small households have always been the norm; complex households were an upper-caste propertied pattern. No breakdown, because no golden age.
- Fortes' developmental cycle, expansion, dispersion, replacement, is why a cross-sectional census cannot detect family change. Madan's chulah and I.P. Desai's degrees of jointness say the same from the field.
- Uma Chakravarti: caste is reproduced by endogamy, endogamy requires control of women's sexuality, so Brahmanical patriarchy is caste's reproductive mechanism, not a parallel system. Leela Dube's seed and earth is the ideology that does it.
- Agarwal: effective rights in arable land are the key determinant of rural women's status, and 'effective' is the argument. Title without control, as with post-2005 daughters who relinquish shares, is not an entitlement.
- Sen: cooperative conflicts turn on breakdown position, perceived interest response and perceived contribution response. Unpaid work fails the third, which links the Time Use Survey to the Succession Act.
- Census 2011 religion: Hindu 79.8, Muslim 14.2, Christian 2.3, Sikh 1.7, Buddhist 0.7, Jain 0.4. The fertility gap is narrowing and tracks education and income, not doctrine.
- Secularism, four positions: Madan (impossible, religion is not private here), Nandy (faith versus ideology, recover tolerance), Bhargava (principled distance), and the Constitution, which follows Bhargava. Bommai (1994) made secularism basic structure.
- Sachar (2006): Muslims near the bottom on most indicators, close to SCs and STs, under five per cent of central government jobs. Brass: riots are produced. Varshney: associational civic engagement, not neighbourliness, prevents them.
- Six notified minorities, Jains added 2014; TMA Pai (2002) makes the state the unit for Article 30. The 1950 SC Order still excludes Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims; the Balakrishnan Commission (2022) is examining it.

Common errors to avoid

- Presenting Karve's eastern zone as if it had a coherent profile. Karve herself said it is not homogeneous; saying so scores, inventing features loses.
- Being vague about the southern rule. The preference is chiefly the mother's brother's daughter, and uncle-niece marriage is with the elder sister's daughter. Vagueness here reads as second-hand knowledge.
- Explaining Karve's zones by language family as if language caused kinship. The coincidence of language and kinship regions is her evidence, not her explanation; treating it as causal is the criticism you should be making, not committing.
- Calling matrilineal societies matriarchal. Descent through women, authority through their brothers; the Khasi khadduh and the Garo nokrom both prove it.
- Attributing the matrilineal puzzle to Kathleen Gough or Levi-Strauss. It is Audrey Richards (1950).
- Treating the joint family as the traditional norm now breaking down. Shah's point is that the norm never existed as claimed, and a household census cannot establish it either way.
- Using nuclear and joint as census categories. Use simple and complex, and say why: the household is residential, the family is a kinship unit.
- Writing about patriarchy in India without caste. Chakravarti's argument is that they are one structure; a gender answer with no endogamy in it has missed the unit.
- Saying the 2005 Succession Amendment gave women equal property rights and stopping there. It gave coparcenary rights by birth, confirmed in Vineeta Sharma (2020); it did not give control, and relinquishment in favour of brothers remains routine. Agarwal's ownership-versus-control distinction is the mark.
- Reading rising female LFPR as straightforward empowerment. Much of the recent rise is unpaid helper work on family farms, which is a distress and measurement story at least as much as an emancipation one.
- Treating Indian Muslims as one undifferentiated community. Imtiaz Ahmad on Ashraf, Ajlaf and Arzal, and the Pasmanda movement, answer that.
- Reducing the secularism debate to for and against. Madan, Nandy and Bhargava make three different arguments, and only Bhargava describes what the Indian state actually does.
- Explaining communal violence as spontaneous or as ancient hatred. Brass shows riots are produced by institutionalised systems, and the ancient-hatred story is manufactured afterwards as part of the production.
- Forgetting the minority within the minority. Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims are excluded from SC status by the 1950 Order, which is where minority rights and caste justice collide.