

A STUDY ON ORGANIZATION OF KINSHIP AND FAMILY IN MARWARI COMMUNITY OF MORIGAON DISTRICT, ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

The Marwari's at Morigaon, Assam is a migrant community from the rugged desert of Rajasthan. Records show that this community spread across the globe, travelled as migrant merchant traders Four hundred years ago. It offers a potential research area in the understanding of organization of Kinship and family structure. The study explores how tradition and modernity of this community has given it a unique character where it has been fruitful enough to still practice the olden ways of Social organization. In the midst of this tradition several exogenous factors have operated outside the community. The Marwari's have exhibited flexibility and have adapted positively to these diverse changes

Keywords: Marwari, Community, Kinship and Family

INTRODUCTION

The Marwari's at Morigaon, Assam is migrant community from the rugged desert of Rajasthan. Records is show that this unique community spread across the globe, travelled as migrant .Merchant traders four hundred years ago. The area is marked by narrow lanes and congested Shops lining on both sides of the road. Morigaon seems to be symbolic with trade, industry and Commercialization. However, it is the business ethnic and energy of the Marwari community That has set the flame of active business enterprise, production of massive exclusive sarees and Other items in this area. Some of the shops are older than twenty years and helps in securing Valuable foreign exchange for the city.

The vibrant Marwari community are prominent in Morigaon. The migrant traders belonged to variety of trading lineages and came to be identified as Marwari. Even though majority of them were from heterogeneous lineage, they have eventually adopted the community name of 'Marwari'. The earliest of migrants to Morigaon hailing from Rajasthan and from the already settled community in Kolkata were the *Oswal Jain* and *Maheshwari* merchants. The Marwari's have been successful in building their reputation as being wealthy and earning lump some money through their business culture. It is through their well-established trading network and business sense that helped them to form strong trading group. What is to be noted here is the Fact that these well-knit trading connections and relationship is formed through institution of Kinship, family and marriage. These commercial linkages serve as foundations for transition of A heterogeneous community to a unified Marwari community in civil society like Assam. It should be mentioned here that all forms of social organization and the existence of social Institutions emerge out to meet certain human needs and desires. By

organizing themselves in basic human institutions of kinship and family, the needs, aspirations, purpose of mankind is achieved in a systematic manner. These organizations are based on human existence and Provides scheme for conducting human life on a daily basis. As per the Hindu tradition life of a living individual has to be understood only in terms of linkage and bonding with other people. For understanding the basic scheme of social organization every human is to be understood with respect to his social unit. As a result, man is considered as a social being since he is trained and grows from infancy to the adult stage in his natural and social environment. This has aspect has to be ingrained with man's natural qualities and attitudes.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present study are:

1. To examine the family and kinship network of the Marwari Community of Morigaon, Assam.
2. To examine the importance attributed by the Marwari people to the various values, beliefs and traditions within the community

METHODOLOGY

Structured questionnaires were designed to collect Quantitative data from the participants. The questionnaires included both closed-ended and Likert scale questions to capture participants' responses on various aspects related To the study. The questions were formulated to address key research objectives and Gather information on the participants' perspectives and experiences. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted With a subset of participants to gain qualitative insights into their experiences and viewpoints. The interviews were guided by a set of pre-determined questions but allowed for open-ended responses to explore themes in greater depth.

STUDY AREA AND PEOPLE

The present study is about the Marwari community at Morigaon. It's been stationed in Assam or more than a hundred year.

Exposed due to the prevalence of other cultures in Assam. Generally termed to be bound by conservative values and tradition, this community has its own unique style of Organization of family and kinship. However, there are similarities in its structure and Network building with the well-known Hindu Tradition of India. The Marwari's have the Ancient tradition of being composed in joint families with three generation staying under one roof, sharing property, worshipping in common, eating food prepared in the same hearth etc. The community members identify themselves as Marwari' having a common lifestyle, Ideologies, believes and values. what becomes increasingly interesting is the fact that the Marwaris have been successful inClearly maintaining its boundaries from other social groups. The members enjoy a senseBelongingness, recognition and unity in identifying themselves as Marwaris. Well settled community in Assam, the Marwaris serve as important manufacturers, Wholesalers and retailers of variety of ethnic designer sarees, cloth materials etc. Many Families also specialize in traditional jewellery and antique commodities. Shops selling Rajasthani sweets and snacks can be well spotted too in the area.

The community has secured itself an identity of its own in the presence of other communities and social groups found in Assam. The Marwaris are well known for the business ethics and enterprising nature. They have well established themselves in areas of trade, commerce And capitalism. Continuity and change are the two parallel wheels of the Marwari community at

Morigaon. They serve as important materials to understand this continuity in light of the changes in an Urban setting of Assam. We see increased social mobility with respect to educational prospects, occupational positions and improved standard of living over the years. The number of Marwaris living in the area have also risen have taken a double fold over the years. The population has increased in the area due to Marwari families travelling from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Calcutta and other areas in search of better prospects of living and Infrastructural facilities. Hence, the structure of kinship and family in this traditional

Community has changed to accommodate the new external sources in the face of its age old traditions and customs. The area is marked by presence of number of beautiful temples especially Hindu. It's a Marker of traditional symbol while at the same time number of industries and commercial centres are springing up every time. Traditional Social Organization of Marwaris of Morigaon like other Marwaris settled across the globe are traditionally defined As conservative and orthodox. They follow the North Indian pattern of social structure, Customs and traditions. The Marwari joint family has always been a social and economic Network for the community. There was and still is approval and exercise of joint family due To the nature of occupation they are engaged in. Large scale business enterprises exist as they Can be maintained and carried forward by large number of members in a joint family. Not Only this, but the pattern of joint family of the Marwaris help in transmission of values to its Younger generation. Important rituals and ceremonies of the Marwaris are 1) naming ceremony of the new born 2) first haircut of the male child, 3) attainment of puberty, 4) marriage, 5) attainment of sixty Years of age and 6) funeral rites. Naming ceremony or *namkaran* of the new child is of utmost importance as the horoscope Of the new born is prepared. It is also on this date that in the presence of *Bhramin* priest name For the child is selected depending upon astrology. As the male child grows within the first Three years he is supposed to be taken by his family to Salasar in Rajasthan. This is a religious destination in *Churu* district of Rajasthan where thousands of devotees pay their homage to Balaji or Hanuman. The first haircut of the male child is undertaken in this holy land and Parents seek blessing of the God. This traditional is rooted in ancient believes and generous Offerings are made to Hanuman in the temple. For all Marwaris it's a major ritual to visit this Temple of belief, faith and beauty. However, no such rule exists for daughters of the house which is clear marker of gender bias and existence of differences in socialization based on Biology. Marriage forms the fourth important ritual in the life of a Marwari. They have their own Custom and marital arrangements. *Vivah* (marriage) is considered to be a sacred obligation And an essential part of all individual. This is because birth of son able one to attain Moksha Or salvation. As Manu states, 'to be mothers were woman created, and to be fathers men'. With respect to Marwaris, marriages are generally arranged by parents and elders in the Family. Monogamy is the rule of the community. It is believed that marrying in the presence Of holy fire and the *saatphas* (taking circles around the fire with the couples making Promises) strengthens the bond between couple and makes the marriage indissoluble across seven births of mankind.

The *Marwari* family structure at Morigaon is unique to the Assam tradition and culture where many of the families reside in nuclear and extended houses. The community has been successful in maintaining its ancient tradition of staying 'jointly' and sharing close bonds with kin groups. Conclusions of the interviews were a clear reflection of how majority of the family members enjoy staying with one another and are a source of support and advice at all times.

An ideal joint family at Morigaon consist of having members ranging from 6-12. This consists of three generation members staying together. The elder couple with their children

and grandchildren stay together. The elder couple share very close bonds with their grandchildren and exhibit love & affection for them. The couple ideally has 3-5 children out of which most of them are married and stay in the same house. Members of the house depending upon their position and role are vested with different entitlements to family resources by social consensus. There is a change in attitude among the younger sons of the family with respect to staying together in the same house. Many of the *Marwari* families in size and composition preferred to adapt to urban conditions than adhere to urban conditions. They desire to stay in an independent house with their wife and children. This can be attributed to the change in value for availing autonomy, increase in education and influence of external Assam culture. He has the authority to offer the funeral rites at the death anniversary of his father and ancestors. Only through the birth of the eldest son the father can be freed from his debt to manes as it is passed on to his son. All other male offspring are of desire. The eldest son has claim to honour and respect in the family by all other members. After the death of the father, sons generally live under control of eldest brother, paying him same respect and reverence as paid to the father. The eldest son feels that he alone can do things right and exercises immense authority in taking relevant family decisions.

The observations and interviews hold the important attached so the institution of family at the primary level which itself is a universal phenomenon not only in *Marwari* community but across human civilization. Among all the organizations the society holds none transcends the family in its intensity of sociological significance. As a social institution, family fulfils certain basic needs and wants of human. Its significance is too deep rooted and embraces socio- psychological aspects.

Elders of the family give significance to family as it leads to procreation and continuity of generations other than just sexual gratification. As stated by Suman Garg (Respondent; aged 45) 'Family is significant, as we are whatever today due to family members who care and always support us during illness and otherwise'. It provides care, affection and nurtures the young ones and support to the old and sick members of the house. There is sharing of resources among the members of a family.

Family norms and values are transferred across generations through the process of socialization provided by the parents and other members of the house during early years of child development. In conversation with Megha Gattani (Respondent; housewife), she laid stress that her family like other *Marwari* families give utmost importance to specific socialization values and believe in inculcating them to their offspring. Specific values like training daughters in terms of cooking, stitching, taking care of the family members are quite essential. The child is surrounded by social definitions and commonly held moral attitudes. Conceptions of right and wrong are clearly stressed on from time to time. Ritualistic traditions particular to the family are also taught and its significance clearly stated by elder members of the house. The emotional and mental interaction with members in the family helps in the development of basic traits of personality.

The *Marwari* community in Morigaon is perfect example of patriarchal society based on father's rule and tracing of lineage through male ancestors. The '*kula*' is an aggregate referring to kin-group under the leadership of males. It is *patri-clan* based on locality. There are many implications to it. The eldest male of the house enjoys respect and has the supreme power and authority in matters relating to property and other important issues. Any plan of action thought of cannot be taken in his absence or without his consent. There was clear-cut following of the concept of '*sapinda*' (*sa*= together; *pinda*= ball of rice; a body)

among all the *Marwari* families in Morigaon. It plays significant role in marriage regulation, death ritual and inheritance. This ritual has been followed from the Vedic times.

The traditional joint family structure has changed in its inner dynamics to accommodate the changes operating outside the family. To begin with the family structure has exposed itself to new ideologies favouring more autonomy and freedom for the girls. According to Ankit Biyani (Respondent; aged 27; Chartered Accountant by profession) the community has become more open and accepted Western ideas and culture in various fields. Introduction of education has transformed their conservative mindset and given them a chance to explore different opportunities. The community has become acceptable to the ideas of others. Instead of only the males having the authority of taking relevant decisions the families now go for collective decision making. Here in the women of the house are also taken into consideration especially cases of choosing marriage partner for their children, their education, job aspirations etc.

CONCLUSION

The *Marwari* community at Morigaon mark both continuity and change in the urban city of Assam. Kin group meet during occasions, festivals, marriage, emergency situations and o perform funeral rites of any member of the group. However, one cannot underestimate the unique tradition of the *Marwari* in certain aspects of their life like mate selection, occupational mobility and authoritative nature of the elder members of the house.

The *Marwari* family shows change in character, attitude and composition of structure of family. Some of the visible changes are as follows: reduced age gap among the married couple, rise in age of marriage both for men and women, decline in respect shown to elders, reduced intimacy between far cousins who are located outside Assam, selectivity of kin is based on common interest, few exceptional cases of inter-kin marriages, existence of increased intercaste marriages, restriction of assistance especially financial aid and support to close relatives, acceptance of widow remarriage, option of divorce accepted by many traditional families, covering of head in front of elders (especially in front of father in law or *sasuur*) by the daughter in law has reduced increased enrolment of women in secondary and higher education, freedom of choice of women to select and opt for career of their choice, restriction on women mobility outside the house blurred etc.

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