Arranging Marriage in an Urban Community in Pakistan: 1982-2000

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Following Partition and the formation of Pakistan people have adapted to tremendous changes in their material circumstances and in their political, economic and social life, particularly in urban areas. Important resources that have helped support urban adaptation are the institutions of the family and its reproduction through arranging marriages\textsuperscript{1}. Despite considerable change in the morphology of family and marriage resulting in part from economic and population constraints, I will argue that the core concepts underlying family and marriage have apparently remained stable\textsuperscript{2}.

Often ethnographic studies investigating change focus on adaptation to negative influences. As an anthropologist who first worked in Pakistan beginning in the early 1980s I was fortunate to live in a new urban community called Greentown (now part of Township) where people were undergoing rapid positive change (from their perspective) in their personal social and economic circumstances. Based on research from 1982 to present I will describe some of the changes and adaptive strategies of people in Greentown to explore some ways of understanding the dynamics of culture and culture change.

Ethnographic Setting

The research was carried out in Greentown, a peri-urban community in Lahore, Pakistan, consisting of two years in 1982-3 and seven additional periods of three to four months each in 1988-2000. Greentown is a relatively new community, growing from a few hundred people in 1974 to 20,000 by 1983, an estimated 40,000 by 1988, and over 75,000 in 2000\textsuperscript{3} (Greentown now has no boundary with the surrounding Township, but is still known within Lahore as a community). About half of the population originate from \textit{katchi abadi} (‘squatters’ settlements’) within Lahore. They were relocated to Greentown by the Government to clear land for building. The Government offered each of the residents a house and in some cases a government job, which is highly prized for its security.

The lives of these people were transformed; suddenly they had acquired the attributes associated with much higher status than their backgrounds would suggest - secure title to land, government jobs, improved secure incomes, piped water, sewage, and electricity. However, these changes alone were not sufficient to entail a rise in status. Increasing status requires repositioning oneself in many other areas; education, the conduct of men, women and children, various levels of political influence, one’s real or constructed history, and the extension of these to (and from) the groups to which one belongs.

There are two fairly simple operational ‘tests’ or measurements for status; whom one is ‘friends’ with, and whom one can marry. The most noted aspect of social organisation in South Asia is the Hindu caste system, which is generally interpreted as a hierarchical arrangement between groups. In Muslim South Asia, and Pakistan in particular, there are caste-like categories, called \textit{zat}, which appear to have a ranking relationship between them, though nothing like the rigid hierarchy reported for Hindu caste. Intra-group hierarchy
appears to be the underlying structuring principle. Rough inter-group rankings can be derived from intra-group rankings, but intra-group rankings cannot be derived from the inter-group rankings. Besides zat, there are other types of groups ranging from a household (ghar - house or home) to a large agnatic (baradari) and cognatic kin group (rishtidar), all of which exhibit the internal/external structuring principle. This principle appears to be applicable at the macro-political level in Pakistan.

In the first research in Greentown (1982-3) I approached this problem at a low level, using marriage as the focus. An attempt was made to relate the symbolic models of arranging marriages to the practical application of those models in Greentown. Data were collected about past, present, and planned marriages, as well as less structured data about marriage and arranging marriages. The analysis of this ‘low level’ material was relatively straightforward in anthropological terms, and formed the basis of an ‘expert system’ that made reasonable predictions about the suitability of candidates for marriage. This research suggested that the transactional structure and values underlying the arranging of marriages are replicated throughout the economic and political structure of Greentown. Marriage is not only the basic reproductive act of a social unit, but one of the prototypes for all social relationships. Specifically, inter- and intra-group hierarchy should be derivable from the set of marriages contracted; the historical sequence of marriages is evidence for the evolution of group dynamics in the community.

Later I concluded that this constructs a model of the society as a system, not a model of the society from the vantage point of one or more of its participants. However, further research upset this as a valid object of research. It might, indeed be the case that the products of anthropological analyses have generally produced such conceptions of models of ‘global’ social systems. But this product masks an important perspective because at the base of this ‘system’ are the productions of individuals executed from their individual perspective. In subsequent work I focused much more on how individual productions interact to generate the ‘global systemic’ view we experience and construct as anthropologists, and, indeed, that in the end are source of future contexts of experience for all the participants.

For example, one important domain is how the reputation of various family members influences a woman’s marriage chances. If we look at the problem from a statistical perspective, the norm is fairly clear; mother’s reputation is most important, followed by older sisters, younger sisters, brothers, and father. However there is a lot of variation, and the statistical norm does not really match other aspects of reputation. For example, a great deal of mother’s, sisters’ and female ego’s reputation are derived from father and brothers, yet they are ranked lowest when applied to marriage chances. What is clearly needed is some information that ‘explains’ this apparent inversion, or at least distortion, of a ranking which in almost every other domain puts male members at the higher end. I thus required further information that related the public status of men to the private status of their women, not as mirror images of each other but as different views of the same situation, which work together within the social framework of marriage. In other words, the structure is more complex in the other domains than had been suspected before. Women may derive their reputation from men, but men derive theirs from their women.

Previously I produced an analysis based on reputation as control, and the most primitive form of control as that over women. This argument is not sufficient. Women have control as
well, and this is clearly reflected in the ranking given above. Responsibility and control is not concentrated in a specific role, but distributed between a number of agents. This generalisation not only accounts for this case, but also leads in a new direction, reconciling some problems with control of the marriage decisions themselves. Earlier statements from consultants about how it is really the mother who decides the marriage partner take on new significance, and the general analysis of the structure of control and reputation takes a new shape.

**Family and Household**

Ideologically, people in Greentown present the patrilineal extended family as typical of their society, and one they prefer. Practically, they expect their own children to establish new households. Discussions of family types often focus on property rights: the control and transmission of property. There is little property to control in Greentown. Families do remain together in Greentown after the marriage of sons of the household, either as a temporary condition or permanently. But the primary economic benefit of an extended household, whether patrilineal or with other relatives, does not involve the control of property but the sharing of salaries and responsibilities. Multi-earner households can be a response to individual household members’ low earnings. But these households also allow individuals (and families) to manipulate household structure to permit themselves greater economic freedom and flexibility.

We observed that family and household structures are supported by ideology—whom one should live with and how one should live. Kinship is the most important determinant of household membership: we live with relatives. “Which relatives” shows cultural variation, but it is commonly assumed that one will live with one’s culturally relevant family. As Bender points out, family and household are logically and analytically distinct. Family obligations extend beyond household boundaries and households contain members who are not kin. However, households are most commonly based on kin groupings (in Greentown over 99%), and the long-term reciprocity that distinguishes kinship allows the family to use household structure in ways not possible to a household of strangers. The household provides for the practical implementation of the ideal of common fraternal responsibility, the rights and obligations of kinship. Common household membership is often the only way to satisfy these obligations and obtain these rights.

In Greentown, the low earning individual supports non-paid kin by common household membership. Most children, most women, most elderly are maintained within a household. The household is used to support the cost of reproducing labour, non-paid work, and those the work force is not using. The household supports its individual members against the outside world. Multi-earner households afford their members greater choice: the possibility of retiring early, changing occupations or simply enjoying additional free time. Members are less concerned with maximizing income than with maximizing choice within a system of wage labour. The household provides for those who cannot earn but also for those who decline to earn. The household, institution of dependency, is a primary source of independence.

**Context of Arranging Marriages**
Arranging a marriage in Greentown is a complex and risky enterprise with no obvious ‘correct’ or unique solution - an important problem which every man and woman faces in one or more capacities in the course of their life. My research has attempted to establish the resources available to solve this problem, and how these are combined and adapted to solve the problem at the level of an instance. Arranging a marriage is not a single activity that can be described using a single systemic approach. The process of arrangement draws on many different people’s considerations in reconciling many different demands.

There are an enormous number of ways through which people can solve a specific complex problem, such as the arrangement of a marriage, and all can be seen to be ‘correct’ even when they fail to closely correspond to the norm. Of course these events of arranging are themselves embedded in a vortex of other events, some directly related to the activity, others not related but having relevance: effects which are real, but unexpected. Although I can give general accounts of how specific arrangements are undertaken I could not, and suggest that I can never ‘predict’ how a specific case will develop for more than a short time. Although indigenous experts will fare better, they too have a short horizon of prediction. Although the goals may be known in advance – arranging a suitable marriage – the process of achieving this goal is dependent on the unfolding of events, both those precipitated by the actors, and those which occur incidentally.

This raises some of the essential problems of understanding human problem solving – how can specifiable goals be attained in an essentially unspecifiable environment, how do we formalise the unspecifiable?

Anthropologists have typically been uncomfortable characterising the operation of human societies out of context, to the extent that to being called a “reductionist” is a serious insult. Prior to the 1950s anthropologists tended towards ‘organic’ and ‘holistic’ theory, and even after the emergence of Systems Theory in the 1950s anthropologists have typically taken a holistic systemic view within which ‘everything’ is connected. However, the introduction of a systems orientation did lead to anthropologists recognising different systems from both analytic and indigenous perspectives. However anthropologists also recognised that most of these systems were practised in a variable manner within a given social or cultural group, and have come to regard these systems as idealisations that perhaps act as a kind of template or governor for cultural and social action that interconnect individually enacted systems.

Anthropologists have a rather mixed view of context. On the one hand it is viewed as the framework within which people enact their lives, and on another recognition that much of context is constantly being socially constructed and interpreted, and thus in part individually or collectively malleable. Context is both stable and unstable. Of course, the underlying principles of different elements of a context may fall out of immediate control of people to construct, ignore or accept, but people often manage these components to some extent (e.g. weather, illness, birth and death, other peoples’ actions). And the rate of change in elements differs, making some aspects more persistent than others (e.g. the built environment, the meeting of two people).

In many ways a given context could be seen as the product of an initially unpredictable sequence of events and states. Although the context may be generated around a set of principles, it is the transformation of a number of operationally random (or unspecifiable)
events into the specific context; demographic events, weather events, accidents. Human perception, planning and problem solving shape this sequence into something rather more stable: in Bateson's terms something that is more persistent than the random events surrounding it. The situation is not as bleak as it may appear. What we cannot do is specify a system as deterministic, even if it were so. Even if the social responses were fixed in each situation, the situations are unspecifiable. Moreover, social rules are not immutable laws. Not only do they change over time, but it is never impossible to violate them. Often the consequences of violation are small or nil, and indeed often necessary. It is more likely that many such rules are impossible to fulfil rather than impossible to violate. Finally, there is usually more than one possible response within the acceptable practice associated with any given situation.

In this context we can only speak of causal rules in the weakest of senses – as an enabling context, although we may find small sequences of a more obligatory nature. Social rules are more likely to be relations between states of information and further subgoals than links between states of information. For example, ‘if the girl is of good character and beautiful and has an adequate education then consider more assessment of the girl and her family’. The latter is a subgoal that will alter the state of information, rather than a necessary consequence of the former. There are many such girls about.

**Ideation and Instantiation**

One stated ideal is marriage to a close relative. This, it is argued, is a secure marriage. The knowledge about the prospective spouse is relatively complete, and the family as a whole has an interest. Additionally, the marriage partners know each other, know what to expect and what is expected. In Greentown this type of marriage is common: about a third of all marriages are between close relations. Obviously, though, the majority are not. What reasons do people give for this variance?

I do not intend to suggest that this is yet another of the cases where the ideal situation is not adhered to. I am concerned rather with the role of the ideal with respect to its function in the solving of problems. One suggestion is that it serves as a backdrop, a means of measuring or evaluating the situation so that deviance from a pattern can be identified, and a new problem solving course set. It also serves as a basis of understanding and interpretation on the part of interested parties (which in the case of arranged marriage is almost everyone). It serves as a source of ideas for solving classes of problems, and can be manipulated as part of the solution itself; that is, by matching some aspects of the ideal, the manipulation of interpretation is possible.

But part of the problem here is that we are trying to directly link ‘ideals’ to behaviour, assuming the process of going from one to the other is complex and idiosyncratic, but direct. Fischer and Lyon proposed a new theory relating ideals to behaviour, with a more explicit account in Fischer and Read. Instead of a one stage enactment of ideals to behaviours, we can conceive of the connection between symbols and behaviour in two stages.

The first stage is entirely symbolic. Important ideas relate to conceptual categories such family, kin, and marriage, but are not bound by any particular manifestation or instantiation of these categories. There are, however, relationships between symbols that do bind; there are
logical properties which apply to and between symbols. These can be instantiated in thought or language using different conceptual categories and relations between these such as relations in family or between kin to create a series of ‘idealised’ statements we record, such as ‘we marry kin’ or ‘marriage is between equals’. These statements are not simple one to one links between the underlying symbols and the conceptual instantiation - the latter are outcomes dependent themselves on the context in which the thinker is located. Many such statements can be collected and as anthropologists we can begin to get insight into the underlying logical properties of the symbols as a system of symbols. There will be variation, because these conceptual idealisations may not be monotonic, but it is highly ordered variability, and logically consistent with the symbol systems.

The second stage is instantiation of the idealised conceptual outcomes into a possible behaviour. This utilises what I have elsewhere called “powerful knowledge.” Powerful knowledge is not itself logically true or false, but is used to reconcile the immediate situation with instantiating conceptual knowledge in the world. It is knowledge that ‘works’. The process of instantiating with powerful knowledge is unconcerned with the logic of the symbol systems underlying the conceptual ‘fragments’ that is being instantiated. Powerful knowledge simply attempts to produce the best fit of our conceptual outcome to circumstances as they are.

For example, from the point of view of instantiation, the primary parameter used by the residents of Greentown to measure status is izzat (honour).  Izzat is a direct consequence of the degree of control that can be exerted over the other members of the community. Within a community such as Greentown a man can have direct control over the members of his household, his family, and his patrilineage -- his group, natural’ relations by birth or marriage. Further control extends from alliances (friendships) with members of other groups (who can control their lower ranking members). For a given man, social relationships are ranked within the group, and unranked with respect to his social relationships with other groups. Relationships outside the group must either be interpreted as unranked relationships of access or as patron/client relationships of obligation.

To increase one's level of control (and izzat), the images (properties) of more control must be present and accepted. A possible mechanism for this is to decrease ambiguity in status between segments within the group so that observers can establish the 'proper' interpretation; they can rank. Marriage is one medium for decreasing this ambiguity.

There is almost certainly a ideational symbol system that defines the logic of izzat, although this must remain a theoretical construction until we devise a way of looking into peoples’ minds. Egler, Donnan and even Das, using fiction, relate this logic in some detail. Identifying and relating symbolic logics (not necessarily formally) has been a major part of the anthropological enterprise for the past century. Where we have been less good is in relating these to accounts from effectively the other direction. That is, the process of instantiation is not, in practice, a flow from symbolic representation to action, but a process of trying to fit facts as they are to the symbolic representation though the conceptual products of the ideational systems in a given context.

So powerful knowledge does not flow from conceptual statements that might arise from instantiating ideational systems in a give context, but rather from behaviour as they experience and interpret it to the conceptual statements. The conceptual statements are the
focus of the activity, not a medial stage that is simply rendered into behaviour. Thus in the above example of izzat, the instantiation of the ideational systems relating to izzat depicts a set of conditions that should hold ideally or logically. But only through successful use of powerful knowledge on the ground can someone begin to take action to meet that specification. If they do achieve a close enough fit to meet others’ specifications, then they do, indeed enhance their own symbolic resource of izzat, and can instantiate this izzat in future more easily. If they don’t, they try again.

Arranging Marriages in Greentown

In Greentown many of the residents have acquired in recent years many of the surface manifestations of higher status that they lacked before; a house, education, and higher prestige employment. In conjunction with this new status is associated an emphasis in marriage to distant relatives or unrelated zat members, and even to non-zat members, and a very limited number of marriages within the biradari or rishtidar except for marriage to sibling’s child. The residents of Greentown, in the choice of marriage partners for their children, are attempting to establish either maximum reduction of ambiguity, or maintenance of ambiguity, ignoring the moderate ambiguity of marriage to rishtidar.

The marriage system practised in Greentown, although not an elementary system, has marriage rules that are usually phrased positively; one must marry within the maximal patrilineage (zat or biradari) and like should marry like. In ideational terms these statements are equivalent. In the practice of Punjabi social organisation, they are not equivalent. It is the presumption of equivalence which supports models that social organisation depends upon.

The highest expression of the previous rules is to marry children with the children of siblings. This comes closest to satisfying the rule of endogamy. While it is minimally ambiguous with respect to the rules, it is the maximally ambiguous with respect to the larger social order; no new information is revealed; rather it is an affirmation of what everyone already knows. Marriage between relatives produces more information, and marriage between non-relatives, distant relatives or unrelated zat members produces even more. The lowest expression of the rules, marriage to non-group members, produces maximum information; it provides a basis not only for ranking the immediate families of the bride and groom (and the segments superior and below them), but also for ranking and aligning the groups themselves.

The choice of a son’s or daughter’s marriage partner indicates where one thinks one is located in the social world; a proposed marriage is not likely to be attempted unless it is certain it will be accepted, and it will not be accepted unless the other party considers itself equal. Because of the presumption of equality, marriage decreases ambiguity within the lineage with respect to ranking of individuals within the lineage. The external marriage is valued based on increasing the number of contacts, and by demonstrating the capacity to do so, the internal marriage by consolidating contacts, and demonstrating the value of the self.

Cousin Marriage

Cousin marriages whether parallel or cross were more or less equally ranked both in discussions and on a formal questionnaire, with parallel cousin marriages having a slight edge (not statistically significant). But almost all of the cousin marriages contracted in the
sample (about 25% of marriages overall) were with parallel cousins, FBD/S, and MZD/S. There are several surface themes that might help account for this structural discontinuity, although none is sufficient for a complete explanation.

The brother-sister (B-Z) relation is quite affective, and effectively void of conflict of control -- the brother must (in principle) have formal control, but the sister has great capacity to in fact control the relationship. Same-sex sibling is the minimal control-conflict unit, but as brothers are in fact formally ranked by age, they are not equal. Marriage is a contract that is made by parents for their children. The selection of candidates is their activity. A completed marriage is a symbol of the reduction of conflict, and resolution of control. This is unnecessary between B-Z. Same-sex siblings are in direct conflict. They can negotiate because they are in conflict; B-Z roles demand indulgence by the brother, acceptance by the sister, not a good negotiating role.

Another theme is to recast the relations from the male, izzat bearing, position: from this perspective the parallel marriages represent an exchange of like for like. In the case of brothers, it is a dual set of close marriages. In the case of sisters, or more accurately, sisters’ husbands, it is a dual set of rishta marriages, marriages that make more contacts. In the cross-cousin case there is asymmetry, with one side exchanging a child for sibling’s child, and the other exchanging a child for wife’s sibling’s child. Without conflict the result is ambiguous. This is not an outcome of rules, but of structural principles - a principle of control, and a function of the role of the male in managing izzat. This view draws the relatively endogamous marriages and the relatively exogamous marriages into a common theme; they are organised by the same underlying structures, and are syntactically coherent, as all the matches represent positions of conflict, marked by positions of sameness. It is only in an asymmetric case that no result can occur.

This situation is not forced, and there are cross-cousin marriage, although infrequently in Greentown. It may not be so rare elsewhere in the Punjab. Regardless of the status of sibling contracted marriage, they are now in line with all marriage, and account for the izzat value of a marriage. Izzat of a marriage is directly proportional to the level of conflict, and hence the risk of that conflict. Examining the criteria for preferential marriage, a common pattern is exhibited. Conflict is maintained, but risk is minimised in the very close cases, and risk is maximised in the distant cases.

Although the symmetry in the positions between the parallel cousins and the near-lack of symmetry with cross-cousins is important, other positions must be examined. As ‘everyone’ in Greentown knows, fathers often have little to do with the selection of potential mates, rather it is the mother who often actually determines who the candidates will be, although fathers have the right of refusal. Examples of this can be seen in some tupei, traditional songs sung by women at the pre-marriage ceremonies. In these, the request is for the mother not to marry her to some boy, never the father. In addition the mother often confers with her sister, and the mother’s sister has considerable influence in the selection process. Thus the consideration of izzat above is an ideational model, rather than a production model. The ideational account of the marriage choice is based upon a patri-centered perspective. The actual production of choices is based on a matri-centered perspective. How does this potentially change things?

It is in fact still symmetrical, like the prior case, with the sexes reversed. The motives
suggested are not strictly patri-centered. The mother has the same goals as the father, to increase the izzat of her local family, and to do so she must adhere to the ideational principles inherent in the situation. The dynamics are somewhat different though.

In the exchange of children with wife's sister's husband there can be any of the relations of inferiority, equality or superiority, but the relation is well defined. In the exchange by sisters of children this entails that the sisters, born equal, may well be in different status relationships now, as their current status is based upon that of their husband's family. This can provide a means of sharing increases of status. The son-giving family must be at least equal to the daughter-giving family, and the daughter, being the daughter of the sister, must be seen as equal. This works from the sister’s husband's point of reference also, as if his wife, who was selected by his parents, was of sufficient status to be marriageable, so must the daughter of his wife's sister. The relation is symmetric, and unambiguous - there can be no mistaking the relationship. With the case of the different-sex siblings this is not so.

What, then, is the significance of cousin-marriage since it serves to make no rishta? There are two basic possibilities. One is the relation between siblings. Male siblings are of the same kind but not equal, at least internal to the family. The elder of two brothers has authority over the younger. It is sometimes the case that it is difficult to marry a daughter properly, either for financial reasons, or because she is homely (beauty ranks high on selection of a bride) or because she is disabled in some way. Marriage is still necessary, so a brother has an obligation to supply a son for the marriage. (It can work in the reverse also, although less frequently.) An exchange of children by brothers is always a good marriage, although in this case it does little to alter interpretative scope. However, if the brothers have enjoyed different fortunes, which is common in Greentown because older brothers are very often disadvantaged with respect to education in comparison with younger brothers, then an exchange of children is a direct assertion of equality that no one can deny. It serves the elder brother by bringing him to the same contextual level as his brother, and serves the younger by equalizing him internally against his brother.

In exchange between sisters, although the mothers have enormous influence in selecting a mate for her children, the actual decision must be made in context by the respective husbands and their families. Still, many of the same conditions that apply to brothers apply here. The husbands cannot ideologically object on the basis of equality, because their families selected their wife, and the sister of his wife, and her husband, must be equal. This can be more ambiguous than the case of brothers because of the possibility of hypergamy. But it is unlikely to be interpreted as such by the husband, since hypergamy has a degrading effect on both parties. Sisters will in some cases provide children, under similar circumstances to brothers, as mates for physically unsuitable children, although this takes some co-operation from their husbands. The situation of different fortunes is less clear, unless the husbands are in the same biradari.

**Marriage to Friends and Relatives**

There is considerable scope for political manoeuvring and positioning by creating groups that intermarry, forming a political hierarchy. In the village, where the localised biradari is the localised zat, and constitutes much of the social membership, this will account for much political activity. In Greentown, there the localised biradari is smaller, and a small segment of
overall political structure of the community, this intermarriage is less useful, and even unnecessary. There are so few representatives that most of the ranking is predetermined. To engage in society activity in extensive larger groups is necessary. Zat is exchanged for biradari, which has the advantage that as an extensive category it is present over a wider area geographically, and provides a context for integrating into a community.

Within the zat, there is a need to establish hierarchy as well. This is not simply in the high ranking members' interest. The localised zat, even though larger than the localised biradari, is still a small segment of a community such as Greentown. To extend social relationships, entry into friendship circles is necessary. These friendships connect the groups into a community.

However, friendships are unranked relations. This is necessary because a friendship is a lena-dena, take and give, relationship. One must have something to offer in exchange for what is taken in equal measure. The primary commodity friends have to offer each other is loyalty and influence. A friendship in Greentown is an intensive, demanding relationship, where each side expects demands and makes them. When a promising acquaintance is made, each person will begin to tell who his relations are, in order for the other to evaluate what is on offer, and expects a reciprocation. Each, through their kinship, has something to offer, and, if they are well-matched, friendship can develop.

Within the kin group or the zat, one has influence as both a patron and a client. As a patron, demands can be made of clients. As a client, requests can be made of the patron. The patron must deliver his influence in exchange for the loyalty of the client, and the services the client can deliver. In a friendship, there are two kinds of influence on offer. That which can be given as a patron, and that which can be delivered as a client. The former is more secure, but the latter is the principal role that powers society in the Punjab, as patrons are nothing without their clients.

A necessary condition of friendship is conceptual equality. Equality is an important attribute to be able to establish, and can only be established when the respective groups, and the relative position of the prospective friends within that group, can be established. Friends do not need to be the same relative position within their respective groups, but the same position in ‘absolute’ terms. Thus a highly placed member of a lowly placed group is an acceptable friend for a lowly placed member of a highly placed group. This comparison of positioning can be done on several bases; one by comparison of the apparent levels of direct and secondary influence - gauging the respective importance and quality of contacts, by comparing the internal standing of a prospect within his group, examining existing friendships between the two groups, or by examining the prospect's orientation to an existing marriage between the two groups, or with another oriented group. The hierarchy between groups is due to the degree of political influence each can command, which is a consequence of the sum of relationships both by marriage and friendship that each group claims. If one group changes in this respect in relation to the other, then the friendship requires realignments; the old ones are transformed to patron-client relationships, and entry is made into new friendships with those more equal under the new circumstances. The basis of hierarchy is internal to the group, and is necessary to make connections outside the group.

This view concurs with Marriott's observation of localised status for caste groups. However, it is an account of how the whole system appears to work. It is, like all social processes,
based on individual actions and decisions. It is necessary to consider how these lead to this kind of structure; how does it produce or reproduce itself.

By matching izzat within the context of marriage, one enters into a clear reciprocal relationship, and provides context for ranking the segments. It certainly has the effect of validating control and izzat, and in a situation of mobility, such as Greentown, the total set of marriages made will have a different character.

The ranking that is of importance is the ranking of the same kind. Ranking here has the outcome of making clear the responsibilities of the individuals involved in a context which is the natural power base of the individual. It is to the advantage of a lower ranking member to show respect to the higher ranking person, because this enhances the overall izzat of the group, and advances the lower ranking individual's opportunities. Ranking between groups is important for a different reason. Lateral lines of power can be aligned, and these have distribution over the affected groups. Ranking between groups is more a function of inclusion and isolation, than direct political influence. If this model is generalised, then these groups can be seen as segments, which are hierarchically arranged to form a larger group, which itself has relations within larger groups.

The process of constructing social relations between groups is one of constructing a structure. Until each side can understand the derivation of the other, there can be no real social relationship. Marriage is one method of defining the two sub-forms. In a two-way group relationship, not necessarily marriages between the two groups, which might be altogether inappropriate, but by defining relationships within the groups. Once the internal definition of each group is sufficiently defined to where relative relations can be determined, the structure is sufficiently defined to be productive. The zat/biradari in Greentown serves to provide the bounds within which such structures can be defined, resulting in a system that allows spatial and social mobility of arbitrarily large communities.

Conclusions

The theoretical position at the onset of my research framed human problem solving in social situations as a social activity; different people coordinating to solve a problem, each with their own interests that were joint in a particular context. Because of the differences in interests of the participants it was assumed that the systemic view (the analytic view) would vary from the views of the participants in the situation; they would not be entirely aware of the situation they were jointly creating with others. However, it was implicitly assumed that each individual had a more or less complete view and more or less complete knowledge about their own activities.

By the end of the research it was apparent that the situation was rather different from that assumed. It was confirmed that many different individuals contributed to the solution. What appeared to break down was the assumption of complete knowledge of individuals. A great many of the activities that people engaged in were supported by the use of other people's knowledge (or their assumed knowledge) in meeting goals, and correspondingly providing the use of their own knowledge to others. Arranging a marriage was the result of a number of cooperative and non-cooperative exchanges and uses of knowledge distributed throughout the community. In other words, a lot of the knowledge that people appeared to mobilise was knowledge about mobilizing other people's knowledge;
specifications of the use of knowledge that they did not know, but knew about.

Decision processes are characteristically depicted using an ‘ideal’ self-contained decision maker, representative of a homogeneous group of such decision makers. Although theoretical abstraction is necessary, this level of abstraction fails to capture the heterogeneous composition of social groups. It also offers no prospect for modelling aspects of social processes which depend on the heterogeneous distribution of knowledge within a social group.

In the case of Greentown I encountered an unusual situation as an ethnographer. Not only was Greentown a new community, but in 1982 it was a community where virtually everyone had also acquired ‘new’ indices of status. Although I was aware of the process of using marriage to consolidate status in Greentown, in my first fieldwork experience I was oblivious to the anomaly that everyone was following the ‘rules’ of arranging marriages to a great extent, and suffered serious effects in their status if they did not. In a sense these rules worked too well. This was consistent with the ethnography available at the time, and had a marked effect on my results. It was rapidly apparent in later fieldwork that the rules had either changed or were often ‘violated’.

On the basis of a series of conversations and interviews in 1982-3 I noted that most people had a good general model of how other people of higher and lower status should act, and were able to project this model onto themselves in imaginary lives we discussed. What I did not realise is that this was apparently what they were doing in daily life at the time. Virtually the entire community was engaged in role behaviour in which they were inexperienced. Their specification was detailed enough to undertake positive action and strategies, but not enough to skilfully violate norms.

This suggests two hypothesis about social change in general which should be testable on existing ethnographic data from other areas. First, after change sufficient to alter social roles affected individuals will effect behaviour which they associate with these new roles, but in a reduced and ‘uncreative’ manner. This will be followed by rapid social change as people become more experienced in their new circumstance. Second, a general feature of individual life in all societies is changing status throughout their lifetime, and we should find similar ‘reduced’ behaviour on the part of these individuals as they change status (to mother, grandmother, widow etc.), which may play a part in supporting the stability of social norms over time.

The process of getting results from the kinds of empirical research in which anthropologists are engaged in is rather complex. The problems are a) the interaction between people and their actions and the context within which they are embedded, b) the almost universal presence of variation in anything people are involved in, c) the fact that human structures and processes undergo constant change; they are moving targets and d) that we cannot know what people know, only what they appear to know.

One of the objections to ‘rule based’ models that these depict people as operating under a common set of principles (culture) enactment of which vary according to context. I agree with these objections, and suggest that in our analyses that separating ideational rules that relate to symbol systems from rules associated with “powerful knowledge” that relate the experienced world to the conceptual products of the former avoids many of the problems
of the past.

In particular this strongly mediates the ‘two cultures’ that have developed in anthropology over the past half-century. Because the underlying ideational systems do not need, in any way, to conform to the ‘realities’ of the ‘real world’ these are free to define virtually any set of relations. There are, however, consequences of these relations, which are expressed as conceptual statements (logical or in language). So long as there is a way to fit experience (through powerful knowledge) to these conceptual outcomes, then the symbol systems can remain relatively stable and consistent. It is powerful knowledge that changes often and sometimes dramatically to adapt to the changes in the world around people, not the symbolic order.

This theory entails that while the symbol systems are not an analogue of an external world these are the effective drivers for how people relate to, adapt to and modify the external relations within which they are embedded. In this we can accommodate analytic viewpoints that favour both the symbolic construction of reality and the behavioural relations of how this construction is enacted. See Fischer²⁶ for a detailed discussion.
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Notes


14. Ibid.


