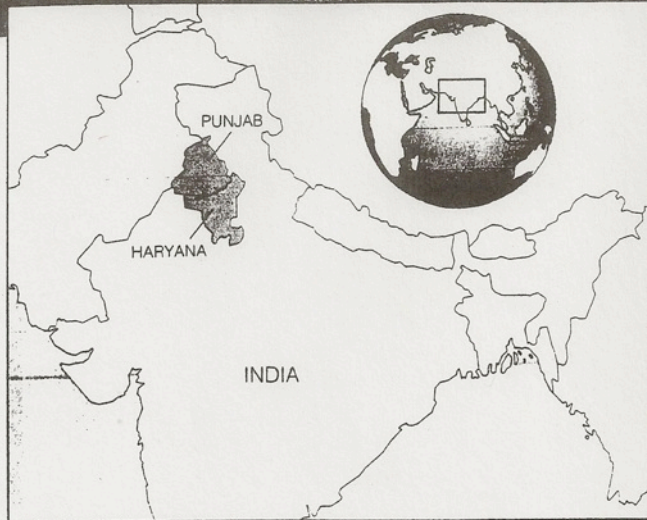


Study Guide for the Film *Dadi's Family*

- (1) Can you make a kinship chart of Dadi's family?
- (2) Describe the division of labor in the Indian rural joint family. How is the work people do related to their status and power in the family? What other criteria (age, sex, etc.) are the basis for status and power in the family?
- (3) What qualities are considered desirable in a woman being considered as a bride for the joint family? How are these qualities related to the structure and function of the Indian joint family?
- (4) How do women spend their time in rural Indian villages? What seem to be the various sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in their lives?
- (5) What are the family dynamics (emotions, bonds, tensions) in the relationship between:
 - (a) daughter-in-law and mother-in-law
 - (b) new bride -- husband's sister
 - (c) mother - son(s)
 - (d) mother - daughter
 - (e) wife - husband
 - (f) bride - husband's elder brother
 - (g) bride - husband's younger brother
- (6) How is the relationship Dadi has with each of her three daughters-in-law different from one another? How do you account for this?
- (7) What appear to be the options for a rural Indian woman who does not marry or who is unhappy in her marriage?
- (8) What are some of the minor and major tensions in the Indian joint family; what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of the joint family from the point of view of different family members? From your own point of view?
- (9) Be able to discuss the system of arranged marriage in terms of the functions of the Indian joint family.
- (10) How does the material in the film reinforce or contradict the material in the readings?

KINSHIP CLASSIFICATION SYSTEMS IN ACTION:
A COMPARISON BETWEEN NORTH AMERICA
AND NORTH INDIA



As an anthropologist, I have had the traditional professional interest in kinship classification systems. As an American woman married to a man from North India, however, I have had a more personal interest in understanding how the principles of classification in my own culture differ from those of my husband's culture. In order for me to behave properly with the members of my husband's family, I had to learn each of the North Indian kinship terms and the expected behaviors associated with them. At first, I made a lot

of mistakes but as I continued to meet new family members I learned to ask the relevant questions about their relationship so that I could act appropriately. My anthropological experience in making and interpreting kinship diagrams was very helpful in this respect.

As the two diagrams indicate, one immediately apparent difference between the North American and the North Indian kinship classification systems is the number of terms: In North India there are forty-five terms, while in the United States there are only twenty-two. This is because the North Indian system distinguishes several kinds of kin that we, in North America, group together. Thus, although my husband also had to learn a new cultural classification of kinship, it was somewhat easier for him because of the smaller number of categories of relatives, and the correspondingly greater flexibility in behavior that is acceptable in North America as compared to North India. For me, learning the many different North Indian kinship terms and the many corresponding "rules" of kinship behavior seemed quite a burden. But when I understood the cultural patterns upon which these terms and rules of behavior were based, they made more sense to me and I could more easily fit new relatives into the system and act accordingly.

Many of the North Indian cultural patterns that underlie kinship terminology are based on the importance of the patrilineal and patrilocal joint family (see p. 243): the importance of the male principle in inheritance and seniority; the lower status of a family of the bride compared to that of the groom; the obligations a male child has toward his parents, including specific ritual obligations of the eldest son; and the ritual roles played by various kin in life-cycle ceremonies such as marriage and death. These patterns are based on two major

principles of Indian culture and social organization: the values of hierarchy and the importance of the group. These values contrast with the Western values of equality, individualism, and the nuclear family, which are expressed in our kinship terminology. While space limitations prohibit examining all of the ways in which the contrasts between the Indian cultural values of hierarchy and group orientation, and our own values of equality and individualism, are reflected in the kinship classification systems, several examples will make this clear.

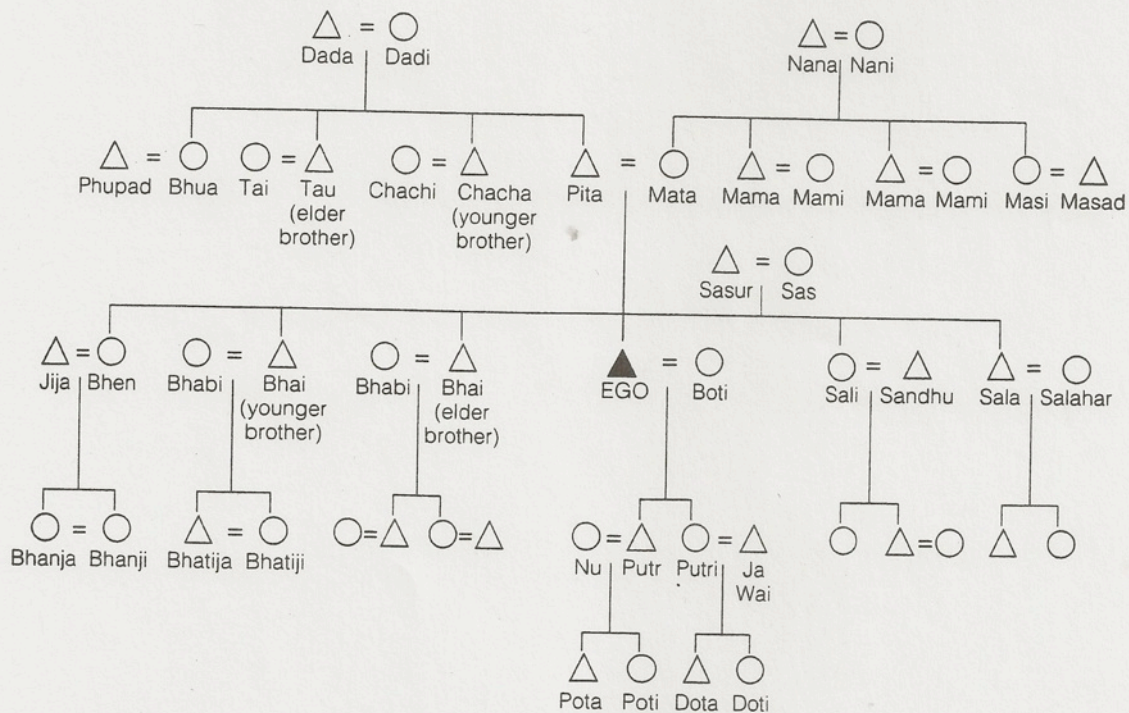
The principle of relative age, which is an aspect of hierarchy, is critical in the Indian kinship system but absent in our own. Thus, my husband uses different terms to refer to his father's elder brother (*tau*) and his father's younger brother (*chacha*) and this carries over to their wives; his father's elder brother's wife is *tai* and his father's younger brother's wife is *chachi*. This terminological difference reflects the importance of respect attached to seniority. My relationship with my husband's brothers and their wives is also regulated by this same principle of seniority. I was instructed that my husband's elder brother is my *jait* and his wife is my *jaitani*, and that both these relations must be treated with deference, similar to that shown to my father-in-law, by adding the suffix "ji" to their kinship terms, by touching their feet when I meet them, and by refraining from using their first names in either referring to or addressing them. But my husband's younger brother, who is my *deva*, and his wife, who is my *devrani*, may be treated with the friendly informality more characteristic of sister and brother-in-law relations in the United States. On our trips back to India, I can greet my husband's younger brother with an embrace, and talk with him in a joking, familiar manner, but I must never embrace my husband's elder brother, even though I feel equally friendly toward him and like him equally well. Because Indians understand that Americans are generally friendly people who do not recognize these status differences in their own culture, my husband's relatives were very tolerant of my sometimes forgetful lack of deference. For an Indian woman, however, such lapses would be much more serious and her relations with her husband's elder and younger brothers would be much more strictly differentiated. Indeed, were I an Indian woman, out of respect for the principle of hierarchy, I would probably have to cover my hair, if not my face, in the presence of both my father-in-law and my husband's elder brother.

A second principle that complicates the Indian kinship system from the point of view of a Westerner is the differentiation of kin according to which side of the family, male or female, the relationship is based on. This principle, bifurcation, is absent in English kinship terminology. In North India, the father's brothers and the mother's brothers are called by different terms, as are the father's and mother's parents: *dadi* and *dada* are the "grandparents" on the father's side, and *nani* and *nana* are the "grandparents" on the mother's side. These terminological distinctions reflect the Indian principle of respect and formality that is associated more with the male side of the family and the more open show of affection permitted with the maternal side of the family.

In India, social interaction with one's mother's parents is very different from that with one's father's parents also because, ideally, the Indian household

is based on the patrilineal joint family, composed of a man, his brothers, his father, and his sons. Thus, a son interacts with his father's parents on an everyday basis, whereas his mother's parents will live some distance away. Visiting his mother's parents has more of the nature of an exciting pleasure trip, and increased fondness and absence of conflict seem to come with distance. In addition, because the parents of a daughter are expected to give gifts, both to her and to her husband, when she visits, this extends to her children, who thus have an additional reason to look forward to such visits.

The patrilineal joint family structure also accounts for another terminological difference between India and the United States, in this case, their grouping together terminologically kin that we distinguish. In order to highlight the importance of the nuclear family in the United States, our kinship system distinguishes between our siblings (brothers and sisters) and our cousins, both of

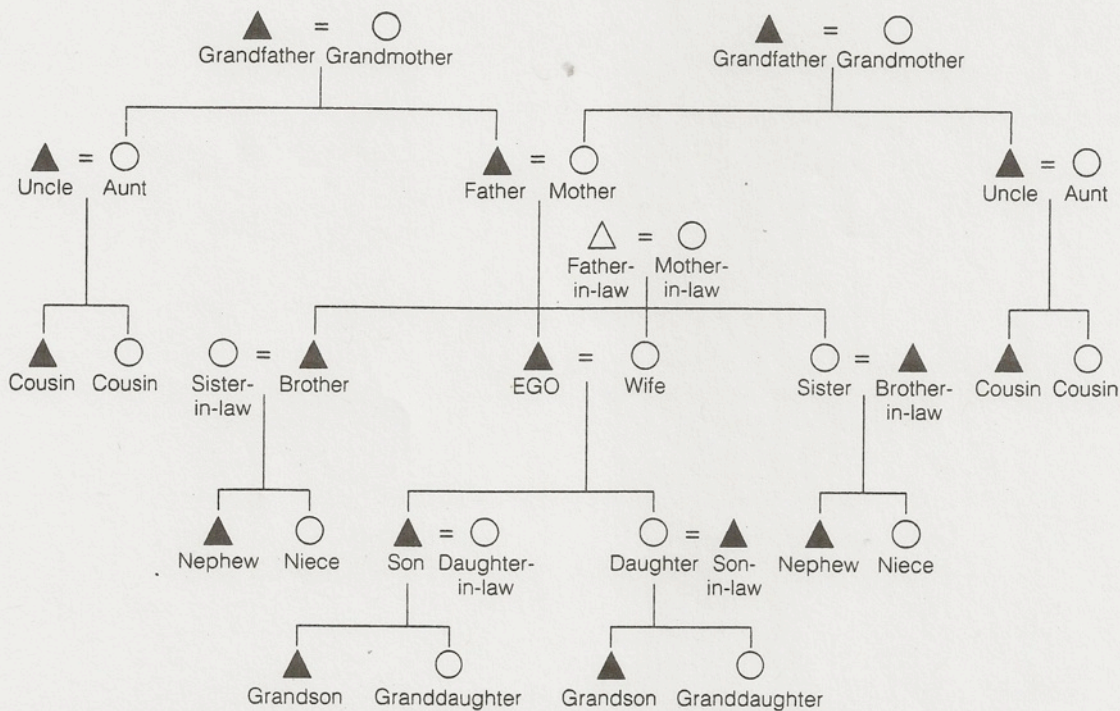


Kinship Classification in North India

Note: There is no term for a man's nieces and nephews on wife's side. They are referred to descriptively as wife's sister's daughters or sons. Not shown on this diagram are the terms a wife uses for her husband's sister, her husband's sister's husband, her husband's elder brother, his wife, her husband's younger brother, and his wife, which adds six terms to the thirty-nine used by EGO.

which are collateral relations. But in India, this distinction is not made. There is no word for cousin, and what we call cousins they refer to by the terms for "brother" and "sister."

The Indian principle of hierarchy turns up again in the higher status accorded the family of the husband relative to that of the wife. This status inequality is reflected in a number of ways in Indian kinship terminology and behavior. For example, in the terminological distinction between Ego's wife's brother (*sala*) and his sister's husband (*jija*), both relations are called "brother-in-law" in the English system, reflecting the general equality in North America of the husband's and wife's sides of the family. In India, a man's sister's husband is in a higher position relative to him than is his wife's brother. Correspondingly, a sister's husband is treated with great respect, while a wife's brother may be treated more ambivalently and may be the target of jokes. The behavioral expectations of this unequal relationship between the bride's and groom's families extend even further. When my husband's sister's husband's sister's husband first visited our home, we treated him with the extra respect due to a man who had taken a "daughter" from our family (the "daughter" referring to both my husband's sister and her husband's sister).



Kinship Classification in the United States

A last example I use to illustrate the importance of kinship terminology in regulating behavior involves the ritual role that different relatives take in life-cycle ceremonies, a form of behavior familiar in the United States. For example, in the United States, a woman's father accompanies her down the aisle when she marries. In India, the marriage ceremony is much more complex. Each part of the ceremony involves a person in a specific kinship relation to the groom or bride, reflecting all of the important principles by which kin are classified there: relative age, lineality, collaterality, bifurcation, gender, generation, consanguinity, and affinity. Thus, when my husband's sister's son got married, my husband, as the brother of the groom's mother, tied the turban on the groom. However, when my husband's sister's daughter marries, he, as the mother's brother, will give her the ivory and red bangle bracelets that she will wear for one year, and the special piece of red cloth that is used in the marriage ceremony. These rituals are concrete symbolic expressions of the continuing warmth and support a girl can expect to find among her mother's male kin, a very important expectation in a culture where a woman is otherwise separated from her own family and incorporated into her husband's joint family household. This ritual role of the mother's brother in an Indian marriage ceremony also symbolizes the very important kinship tie in India between brother and sister, which is ritually affirmed every year. These rituals, like other aspects of culture involving kinship, reflect the underlying values of a society.