

Lineage or Clan: Levels of Segmentation of Konda Reddi Social units

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ABSTRACT

The Konda Reddis are an indigenous group of south India, classified under the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal group category since 1980 by the Government of India. The first detailed ethnographic study of the Konda Reddis was done by Christoph von Furer- Haimendorf and published in 1945. This book titled, 'The Reddis of Bison Hills: A Study in Acculturation' continues to be the only detailed study on the Konda Reddis, especially with reference to their kinship groups. The objective of this paper is to make a close reading of the kinship pattern and grouping discussed by Furer-Haimendorf (1945) in relation to the kinship groups identified through the ethnographic research (2000-2014) on which this paper is based. Accordingly, the paper discusses the levels of descent groupings among the Konda Reddis and argues that Furer-Haimendorf (1945) missed out on the lowest level of grouping, the lineage or *kutumbam* which plays the crucial corporate role.

INTRODUCTION

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Any discussion of an endogamous group's social units has to begin with the classification of terms, particularly when a whole range of terms exist for the purpose. Furthermore, while the concepts of descent and residence groups have universal acceptability among anthropologists, terms such as 'clan' and 'lineage' have been used with subtly different connotations. Therefore, a review of these concepts and terms has been attempted, before actually describing the Konda Reddi social units and where they stand with reference to current concepts regarding segmentation of social groups. Before that a brief on the study area and methods of data collection is given.

Study Area and Methods of Data collection

As per national census records of India, the Konda Reddis live mainly in three adjoining administrative districts of the undivided state of Andhra Pradesh in South India. The three districts are East and West Godavari and Khammam. They live in diverse habitats which includes riverside, interior forest, foot-hill and hill settlements. This article is based on the hill dwelling Konda Reddis of Chintur mandal, East Godavari district, Andhra Pradesh. It relates to the 31 hill *gumpus* (cluster), with a population of 850 individuals (165households) and seven resettlement colonies with a population of 448 individuals (92households) (enumeration done by author, 2001). The Konda Reddis are the only community inhabiting these hills. The *gumpu*, literally means a cluster and is the term used to refer to the residential unit or settlement. This term is used to signify that the settlements are small in comparison to the villages in the plains. On an average, each *gumpu* has five households, with a range of one to fourteen households and an average household size of five. These settlements are accessible through a network of footpaths that connects the different settlements and their closest foothill villages.

The data on which this research is based was collected during 2000 to 2004. A household survey was carried out in both the hill settlements and the colonies taking note of household genealogy. The household genealogy was connected through interviews into village genealogy and eventually connecting household members across all the settlements. Interviews were carried out with different members in eliciting this kinship connection. Through base questions of

residence of members post marriage and rules of alliance, a network and relationship mobility mapping was possible. Most importantly, the above data was collected as part of an ethnographic study based on participant observation.

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON LEVELS OF SEGMENTATION

The agreement among anthropologists as to what constitutes a clan and its distinction from lineage is that while both these units are recognised as descent groups, the question of ancestry is assumed in the case of the clan whereas with the lineage it is actual. This distinction between a clan and lineage is brought out in Fox's description of a descent group which states: ...the members of a group will be related to each other by *common descent*, they will be descended from a common ancestor or ancestress in either the male line (patrilineally) or the female line (matrilineally) or through links of both sexes (cognatically). Such a group, which has perhaps a name, property or ritual, or some activity in common, will be a *descent group*; a group formed on the basis of descent from a common ancestor. Where the actual relationship between members in such a group can be demonstrated... and is not simply assumed, the group is called a lineage....Higher order units often consisting of several lineages in which common descent is assumed but cannot necessarily be demonstrated, are...referred to as clans (1967: 49).

This is also the view of others such as Radcliffe-Brown (1950), Middleton (1964) and Murdock (1949). The important difference is that Murdock prescribed certain conditions for the recognition of a clan. These are clearly evident in the passage cited below:

For a group to constitute a genuine clan it must conform to three major specifications. If any one of the three is lacking, the group is not a clan, however greatly it may resemble one in composition and external appearance. In the first place, it must be based explicitly on a unilinear rule of descent which unites its central core of members....In the second place, to constitute a clan a group must have residential unity. This cannot exist if the residential rule is inconsistent with that of descent, e.g., patrilocal or neolocal when the latter is matrilineal....In the third place, the group must exhibit actual social integration. It cannot be a mere unorganised aggregation of independent families....There must be a positive group sentiment, and in particular the in-marrying spouses must be recognized as an integral part of the membership (1949: 68).

Middleton, like Murdock, specifies that the clan is a unilinear descent group, however, he differs from the latter by stating that a clan may 'not necessarily be corporate,

exogamous, totemic, or localized' (1964: 94). On the other hand, Middleton stresses the 'corporate' characteristic for a lineage. He defines a lineage as: ...a group consisting of persons who trace descent in a single line of descent (patrilineal or matrilineal) from a common ancestor.... Irregularities apart, no one can belong to more than one lineage at a time, but everyone has kin in other lineages....The usually accepted characteristics include: (a) A group of kin emphasize their unilinear linkage in a putative genealogy. (b) The group has corporateness, which is expressed in joint secular rights and ritual activities from which other kin are excluded. (c) The corporate group recognizes its identity and unity in contrast both to other like groups and also to other kin of its own members, and is recognized as a distinct unit by these other groups and kin. (d) The rights and obligations of the members of the group are distinguished from other rights and duties of kinship, although the two may overlap. (e) The group is assumed to be permanent, although its actual personnel may change through birth, marriage and death. (f) The group includes both living and dead members (the term lineage group usually being used for the living members only) (1964: 391-392).

Middleton further adds:

Lineages are found in many types of society, and emerge as a response to many different factors. Among these are the existence of heritable wealth and status and a reasonable degree of stability of settlement and density of population.... Lineages may or may not coincide with residential groups. Wealth and status are normally inherited with them (1964: 392).

Referring to the 'clan system', Radcliffe-Brown states that such a system 'provides a division of the tribe into a number of distinct separate groups, each having its own identity' (1950: 41). The possible divisions of the tribe, according to Radcliffe-Brown, include:

A moiety (which) may be divided into clans and usually is so. Clans may be divided into sub-clans, and clans or sub-clans may be divided into lineages. A lineage of any considerable size is usually divided into branches, which are themselves smaller lineages, and these again may be subdivided (1950: 39-40).

The definition of Radcliffe-Brown as to when a group may be considered a corporate group is also useful for our discussion here. According to Radcliffe-Brown:

A group may be spoken of as 'corporate' when it possesses any one of a certain number of characters: if its members, or its adult male members, or a considerable proportion of them, come together occasionally to carry out some

collective action-- for example, the performance of rites; if it has a chief or council who are regarded as acting as the representatives of the group as a whole; if it possesses or controls property which is collective, as when a clan or lineage is a land-owning group (1950: 41).

Befu and Plotnicov in their study on the *Types of Corporate Unilineal Descent Groups* argue: ...the corporate functions of a unilineal descent group--economic, political, and religious-- and the strength of its corporateness are determined by structural factors, namely, by the spatial arrangement (settlement pattern) and size of the group (1962: 313).

The hypothesis of their study is stated as:

...given a group whose members regard themselves as related by descent, the smallest segments will tend to emphasize economic activities, the median segments political activities, and the largest segments religious activities (1962: 313).

These three segments form the structural units of unilineal groups. Befu and Plotnicov have termed these structural units as minimal group, local group and dispersed group. They have defined the minimal group as:

The smallest kinship group of any corporate significance is probably the domestic unit. Sometimes this is referred to as the household, homestead, or residential unit.... This unilineal descent unit differs from the domestic group in the exclusion of affinals and others who, though co-resident, might be unrelated to the core members (1962: 319).

The local group is defined as one, which:

...consists of unilineally related individuals living within a village (otherwise called "hamlet," "settlement," "community," etc.). This is the most inclusive unilineal descent group whose members are in geographical proximity to one another and which permits fairly regular contact between its members. A local group may be either a lineage or a clan (1962: 319-320).

The third structural unit is the dispersed group, which:

...consists of unilineally related individuals who are not all localized in any one area. Here, as in the local group, we shall distinguish between dispersed lineages and dispersed clans (1962: 320).

The three structural units have been correlated with the corporate functions by Befu and Plotnicov as follows:

Table.1: Occurrence of Types of Corporate Unilineal Descent Groups*

Descent Groups	Economic	Political	Religious	Noncorporate
	Ownership, management and use of resources	Authority structure and representation	Supernatural sanction and ritual solidarity	
1. Minimal	x	(x)		
2. Local				
Lineage	x	x	(x)	
Clan		(x)	x	
3. Dispersed				
Lineage		(x)	x	
Clan			x	x

* x, frequent; (x), infrequent but possible; blank space, lack of correlation.

Source: Befu. H and L. Plotnicov, 1962, "Types of Corporate Unilineal Descent Groups", *American Anthropologist* Vol.64. No.2. p.p. 325.

Befu and Plotnicov (1962) have used the above three structural units of the unilineal descent group for their study. But the segmentation of the tribe as described by Radcliffe-Brown (1950), includes more units. The segmentation of lineages into smaller lineages forms the last level of segmentation here, unlike Befu and Plotnicov who look directly at the household as the minimal group after the lineage.

How and why do smaller lineages form? According to Fox (1967), segmentation of lineages can happen in two ways. The first, the 'drift method', where some members of the lineage drift away forming a sub-lineage, which again can be segmented. The second, is the 'equal and opposite method' where a lineage splits into equal segments, which in turn split into further segments. The main difference between these two forms of segmentation is the question of

seniority or which sub-lineage first formed from the parent lineage. The question of seniority has relevance to the drift method but not to the split method.

Fox is of the opinion that sub-lineages are formed when “the lineage gets too large” where the “splitting up can occur for various reasons, the most common being simply pressure on land” (1967: 123).

We thus have the different divisions that are commonly found in an endogamous group, tribe or not. In trying to draw parallels with the terms of these divisions with those of the Konda Reddis I first refer to Furer-Haimendorf’s (1945) study on the Konda Reddis, which is the only authentic study on the community’s social organisation.

Identifying the Konda Reddi Social units

Furer-Haimendorf notes the presence of three different social units besides the household. The terms he uses for these units include the village community, the clan and an exogamous group that includes a number of clans. Let us first see what the Konda Reddi clans are, according to Furer-Haimendorf:

The clans of the Reddis are exogamous groups which are distributed over large areas and dispersed throughout many village communities; clan members are considered descendants of a common ancestor and are known by a common name. In accordance with Telugu custom, this name is nowadays described as a “house-name” (*inti peru*) and precedes a man’s personal name: a man of Pogal clan whose personal name is Lachmaya is known as Pogal Lachmaya. Among themselves Reddis often refer to their clans as *gotram*, an expression also used by Hindus. Descent in the clan is strictly patrilineal, and the marriage ritual includes a particular ceremony, by which the bride is transferred from her own to her husband’s clan ... although henceforth a married woman is known by her husband’s clan name, the dormant membership in her father’s clan governs the choice of a second husband. The number of Reddi clans is so great that a complete enumeration cannot be attempted (1945: 161).

Referring to the position of a clan in a village, Furer-Haimendorf writes:

At present no clan is restricted to any single village and the distribution of most clans is so wide that no localization of clans is likely to have existed in the near past. The Reddis frequently state that one particular clan was the first in the village, but this does not mean that the village is the original home of the clan though generally the members of the founder clan furnish the *pujari* and are responsible for the cult of local deities (1945: 162).

With respect to the corporateness of the clan Furer-Haimendorf states, There is no pronounced feeling of solidarity between clan members.... The only occasion on which in some localities the members of a clan act as a body are the rites in honour of a deity that bears some of the features of a clan-god. The exact nature of such deities, whose cult is the obligation and privilege of one clan is however somewhat obscure, and it appears that only certain clans have a tutelary deity of their own. The clan-deity resides either in the house of one clan-member or in a place in the jungle at some distance from the village. Reddis frequently refer to these deities as ‘house-gods’ in the same way as they describe their clan names as *inti perulu* ‘house-names’. They admit, however, that all the clan members in a village keep their ‘house-god’ in one house, or at one particular place in the jungle (1945: 164).

Let us now see how the three social units of the Konda Reddis identified by Furer- Haimendorf fit with those of this study. The Konda Reddis of this study are divided into eight patrilineal descent groups. I have some reservations about how these groups fit with the clan as explained by Furer-Haimendorf, which I will come to later.

The two other social units, the ‘village community’ and the ‘exogamous group larger than the clan’ are both present in this study. While Furer-Haimendorf has not given the local term for the ‘village community’, in this study area the term used is *gumpu*. With regard to the exogamous group larger than the clan, Furer-Haimendorf says:

The clan is, however, not the only exogamous unit; certain clans are said to be ‘like brothers’ and form therefore larger grouping within which marriage is not permissible. Those clans with which a person can intermarry are called *varse*, while brother-clan are described simply as *anna-tamudu* (elder brother-younger brother). A man addresses all men of his own generation that belong to a *varse* clan according to their age as *bawa* or *bamardi* (i.e., brothers-in-law) and those belonging to a brother clan as *anna* or *tamudu*. Today no clear system is discernable in the formation of the group consisting off brother-clans, and to describe them as phraties would not be justifiable. For although two clans may be “brother-clans”, their marriage relations to all the other clans are not identical (1945: 165-66).

This situation with regard to the exogamous grouping of clans holds good in every respect to the Konda Reddis. However, there is a fourth social unit which the Konda Reddis refer to as the *kutumbam*. Here each of the eight patrilineal descent groups identified with the ‘clans’ of Furer-Haimendorf’s study are further segmented. We thus have two levels of patrilineal descent grouping, with eight groups in the first level and 29 in the second level (Table. 2). The first level of grouping which Furer-Haimendorf refers to as clan is known locally as the *kulam* and not as *inti peru* or *gotram* as mentioned by Furer-Haimendorf. In fact, the Konda Reddis of this study contrast their *kulam* to the *gotram* of their neighbour, the Koyas.

Table. 2: Levels of Segmentation of Descent Groups

The Konda Reddis																													
First level patrilineal groups – <i>Kulum-Clans</i>																													
Ketchal			Kadambal		Konla				Kadala					Valla			Chandala					Chedala			Chuntru				
Second level patrilineal groups – <i>Kutumbum- Lineages</i>																													
Korkonda	Buggu	Rachalka	Pujari	Mittivada	Siri	Bangaru	Perivar	Musur	Mirup	Ippur	Pogalvada	Maedipalli	Karuda	Addathegala	Poosinur	Gadaratha	Nadumguda	Pattu	Pallal	Errakonda	Pujar	Ejalur	Tulgur	Iydulla	Lakka	Selur	Peddinti	Puttal	Tulgur
Households																													

The difference between the local terms given by Furer-Haimendorf to those used in this study could be a result of regional variation. But the second level of grouping observed in the present study area has not been accounted for in Furer-Haimendorf's study. Though the villages studied by Furer-Haimendorf are not the same as those covered in this study, it should be remembered that Furer-Haimendorf's study is supposed to be representative of the entire Konda Reddi region including both plain villages and hill villages. In fact, the reservations I have on Furer-Haimendorf's understanding of 'clans' is linked to this fourth social unit. The term *inti peru* that Furer-Haimendorf uses for the clan is used in this study area for the fourth social unit.

Further, Furer-Haimendorf's understanding that clans, though dispersed, attach themselves to certain villages as the founder of those villages providing the *pujari* for the village and that 'there is no pronounced feeling of solidarity between clan members' but yet in 'some localities' and 'only certain clans have a tutelary deity of their own' reflects a great deal of incongruity. I assume this incongruence is a result of the fourth social unit that Furer-Haimendorf failed to identify. I say this because among the Konda Reddis, even though the clan is dispersed and does not show solidarity, it is the fourth social unit that acts as founder of villages where they place the *gudi*¹, the shrine of their tutelary deity and also provides the *pujari* (the religious headman). Each group of this fourth social unit has its own *pujari* and *pinna peda* (the political headman). However, not every group (of the 29 in the study area) attaches itself to a village as its founder. Those groups that have not founded villages claim to have migrated from villages outside the study area where their tutelary deities are present and join the members of their group for rituals.

Furer-Haimendorf further comments on how on the basis of his discussion on clans it is clear that they are 'in no way political units' and that the 'village community appears as the only functioning unit' (1945: 166). Though it is true that the 'clan' is not a political unit, it is equally true that the village community is not the only functioning unit because it is the fourth social unit that is the overruling functioning unit in the social structure of the Konda Reddis. I will now, go back to the different terms that I have quoted from the literature to see where the two levels of patrilineal descent groups identified in this study fit.

***Kutumbam*: Clan or lineage**

From the divisions of an endogamous group given in the literature quoted above we can arrive at two probabilities for the two levels of descent groups found among the Konda Reddis. The first probability could classify the two levels as a clan and lineage while in the second probability they can be classified as a lineage and sub-lineage. Let us first see

¹ The Telugu word, '*gudi*' though when translated in English will be 'temple', I have used 'shrine' taking into consideration the function of the *gudi*.

how the probability of the Konda Reddi groups being a clan and lineage fare.

The definitions of clan and lineage given above show that members of both these descent groups trace descent through a common ancestor or ancestress. The main difference is that, with the lineage, descent can be actually demonstrated whereas with the clan it is assumed. The members of a lineage, as with the clan, share a common name, but unlike the clan, a lineage is a definite exogamic and a corporate group. From the table given by Befu and Plotnicov we know that a clan and lineage can either be a local group or a dispersed group. However, a lineage “frequently” exercises economic and political functions when it is a local group and religious functions when it is a dispersed group. On the other hand, a clan “frequently” exercises religious functions irrespective of whether it is a local group or dispersed group. Interestingly a clan is usually noncorporate when it is a dispersed group.

In the light of the above discussion let us look at the first level of eight groups of the Konda Reddis in the study area. As shown in Table 2. on the ‘Levels of Segmentation among the Konda Reddis’ each of these groups has a name. The members belonging to each of these groups address themselves with this name. These groups are exogamous and claim to have descended from a common ancestor through the male line. They are not corporate, that is they do not have economic, political or religious functions. Also, they are not local groups, that is, they do not live in the same *gumpu*. Using Befu and Plotnicov’s table in correlating the structural units and corporate functions, this level of grouping can be considered as structurally dispersed groups and functionally noncorporate, thereby signifying a clan structure. If these groups are clans then their subgroups can be construed as lineages.

Let us now see how the second level of grouping fare as regards the discussion pertaining to lineages given above. The Konda Reddi groups of the second level are exogamous dispersed units that have corporate functions. Each group of this second level identifies itself with a *gumpu*, which is symbolised with the presence of the *gudi* that belongs exclusively to the group. These groups also have political and religious functions. The groups though dispersed, gather at the *gudi* for all rituals (as shown later), and have both a political head and a religious head. The political head of the secondary group is also the head of the *gumpu* where the group *gudi* is located. When we look at the secondary groups with reference to Befu and Plotnicov’s table we have here a structural unit which is dispersed, having both political and religious functions, thereby signifying a lineage.

Thus, the first probability for the two levels of grouping being a clan and lineage seems to hold good. But in this case how does the second probability of lineage and sub-lineage fall out of favour. If we assume that the first level of grouping is a lineage and not a clan then we have a lineage group that is dispersed and not corporate. When relating this situation to Befu and Plotnicov’s table we find that a lineage is never noncorporate, whether it is dispersed or localised. So, if our first level is not a lineage then automatically the second level cannot be a sub-lineage.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the above discussion, I conclude that the first level of eight groups of the Konda Reddis correspond to clans and the 29 groups of the second level correspond to lineages. Thus, as listed in Table.2. on the ‘Levels of Segmentation among the Konda Reddis’ the social units of the Konda Reddis include the *kulam* (clans), *kutumbam* (lineages), households, the social unit larger than the clan and the *gumpu* (village). The terms *kulam* and *kutumbam* belonging to the Indo-Aryan language group have been cited extensively in kinship and marriage studies on Indian communities. However, there seems to be no consensus in drawing terminological parallels to them. The term *kulam* used synonymously with *gotra* has been cited to mean ‘lineage’ (Uberoi 1993) and ‘clan’ (Karve 1953, Beck, 1972). The term *kutumbam* is used to mean an extended family (Uberoi 1993) or a household (Beck 1972). A. M. Shah in his article on the “Lineage Structure and Change in a Gujarat Village” adds in one of his footnotes that the ‘words *kula*, *vamsha* and *kutumb* are used more or less as synonyms to refer to various kinds of kinship groups larger than the household’ (1993: 124). Given this disparity in the meanings and usage of the native terms argued by Shah (1993) and others, I conclude that the term *kulam* and *kutumbam* used by the Konda Reddis need to be understood through the levels of segmentation and corporateness specified by the people. However, as discussed through the literature above, the Konda Reddi *kulam* is identified as the clan and their *kutumbam* as the lineage.

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