# CHAPTER IV.

## THEORY.

Before tackling the Minangkabau problems, we shall first devote a chapter to a purely theoretical discussion of some possible types of social organisation, so as to leave as little occasion as possible for a misunderstanding of the terms to be used in future, and so as to have some diagrams grouped together to which we can refer back later on.

*Primâ facie* Minangkabau social organisation appears to have clans (unilinear descent groups whose members are all traditionally related) and cross-cousin marriage. Later on we shall discuss the question whether a man's ideal spouse is his mo-br-da exclusively (in which case we shall speak of exclusive cross-cousin marriage, abbreviated e.c.c.m.), or whether she may be either his mo-br-da or his fa-si-da *. We shall now consider some possibilities of clan organisation and marriage forms.

If a society only recognises two unilineal descent groups, then these must of course regularly intermarry (presupposing them to be exogamous). In diagram it may be expressed thus :

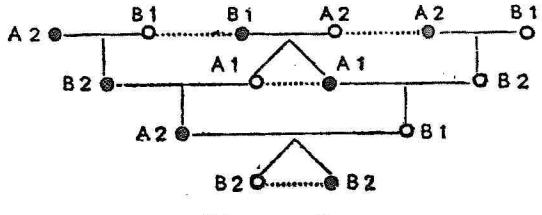



Diagram I.

In this one diagram we have made use of symbols to denote either matrilinear or patrilinear descent. The letters, in this case A and B, designate the matrilineal relatives, the numbers, 1 and 2, the members of the patrilinear groups. The black circles denote males, the open ones females. The lines connect spouses, the dotted lines siblings. So we

* We shall use the following abbreviations of kinship terms :
fa for father br for brother so for son
mo for mother si for sister da for daughter,
with the component elements of composite terms connected by hyphens.

find that, supposing this society to be matrilineally organised, A men marry B women, and A women marry B men. Using $\longrightarrow$ to indicate marriage, the arrow pointing from the woman to the man, it may be symbalised as : $A \overleftarrow{\underrightarrow{\ }} B$.

In cases of this kind we shall say there is a "symmetrical connubial relation", or symmetrical connubium, between A and B. (If the society were organised patrilineally, the same would apply to the groups 1 and 2). A social organisation of this type entails exchange of actual or classificatory sisters for marriage, and therefore a man's wife is his mo-br-da and his fa-si-da at the same time.

As soon as more than two clans participate in the system, brother and sister exchange can be prohibited, or at least avoided. A society with three matrilineal clans, A,B, and C, or another with three patrilineal ones, 1, 2, and 3, would give us the following picture if they avoided brother and sister exchange and demanded a man's marriage to his fa-si-da :

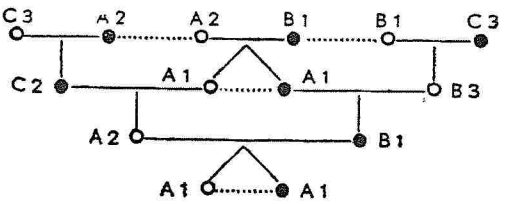



Diagram II.

Now there is no longer a truly symmetrical connubium, but, taking matrilineal clans as an example and using the same symbols as above, the situation is :

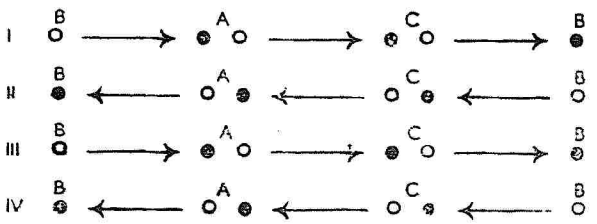



Diagram III.

In the second generation (horizontal line II) clan A receives its brides from clan C, but gives its own girls in marriage to men from clan B. In the following generation, III, the position is reversed ; and

in this way each clan functions alternately as bride-givers to and bride-takers from one other clan.

Using the same type of diagram, but assuming mo-br-da marriage, the situation is like this :

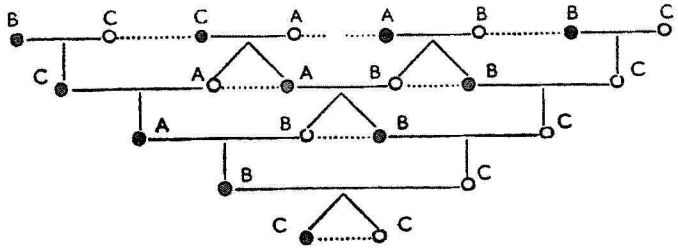



Diagram IV.

The connubial relations in a matrilineal society are now:

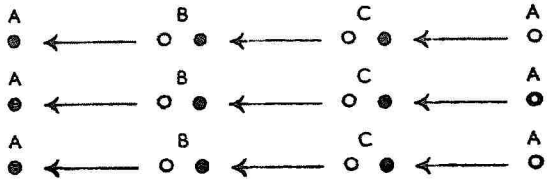



Diagram V.

Here we find a true asymmetrical connubium : clan B is always bridegiver for clan A and always bridetaker from clan C, there is no longer an alternation per generation.

Now in all preceding cases we have assumed a unilateral organisation, but now we must also take double descent in consideration.

In any society whatsoever we can, of course, draw up genealogical tables for any member of that community, based on double descent, for the same reason that we can draw up tables of kinship. The question is whether or not descent is socially recognized [1], and, if so, whether the recognized descent is patrilinear, matrilinear, or double. Cultures with double descent do not necessarily attach equal importance to both types of descent, in other words, not every culture with double descent lays equal stress on both lineages. In double descent, a man becomes member of the patri-lineage [2] of his father and the matri-lineage of his mother; and the patri-lineages are, as it were, perpetuated by the men, their sons, sons' sons, etc., the matri-lineages by the women, their daughters, etc. In societies with double descent it may be observed that

material or spiritual "goods" of one type are inherited patrilineally, of another type matrilineally. Supposing that in a society social position (family name, rank, social prestige) is inherited matrilineally, but place of dwelling patrineally; and supposing that for some reason or other the culture in question gradually began to attach less importance to place of dwelling, then the importance of the patri-lineage would also dwindle, so that a contemporary study of this culture would show a system of double descent, with matrilinear descent functionally more important than patrilinear. The hypothetical example we have given does certainly not mean to say that we hold an historical sequence as supposed there, to be a necessary development. We do mean that in a culture study we should take the possibility into account of a culture recognizing both lines of descent, and *casu quo* should consider the function and importance of each lineage. As an example of such a study, in this case of a society with a certain recognition of double descent but with heavy stress on patriliny, we may mention F o r t e s' publication on the Tallensi.

A genealogical table for a social system as outlined on p. 37, but taking into account both matrilineal and patrilineal descent, would be:

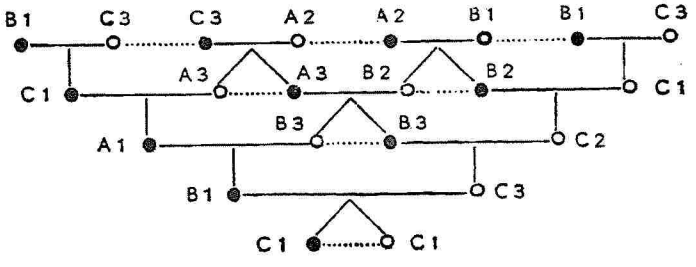



Diagram VI.

In this case there are at least three matrilineal clans participating (A, B and C), and at least three patrilineal clan, 1, 2, and 3. It will be noticed that here, with e.c.c.m., not only the matrilineal, but also the patrilineal clans maintain asymmetrical connubial relations :

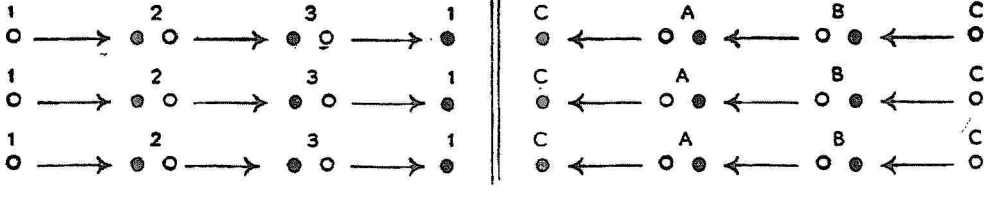



Diagram VII.

We shall now work out this system on a larger scale, again for a mo-br-da marriage, and with four matrilineal and four patrilineal clans:

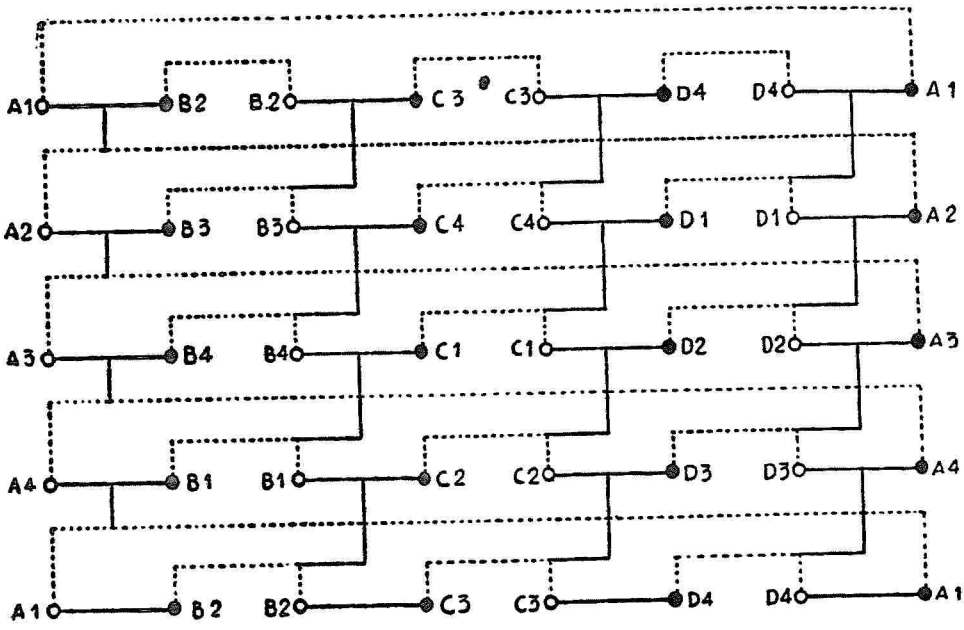
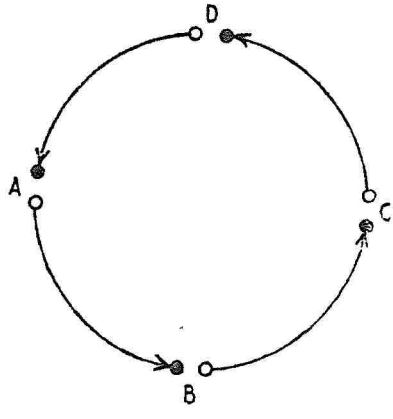


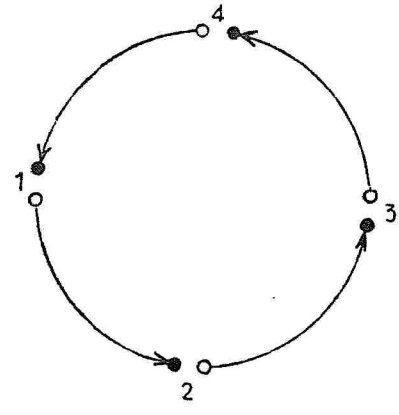

Diagram VIII.

The four matri-clans, A, B, C, D form vertical lines on the diagram, the members of the consecutive generations of the patri-clans 1, 2, 3, 4 can be traced diagonally, from top right to bottom left.

The connubia are :




and




The system also allows exogamous (and therefore intermarrying)

phratries * to be recognized : AC ⟷ BD, or, from a patrilineal point of view : 1—3 ⟷ 2—4.

Here we should add that, if we have a social organisation of four patri-clans in asymmetrical connubium, the introduction of just four matrilineal clans is not arbitrary choice, but is an inavoidable consequence : "beside the four patrilineal clans four exogamous matrilineal groups ... must exist" [3].

Likewise, if we have four matri-clans to begin with in a system of this kind, this automatically entails the existence (not necessarily recognized by the society itself) of four patri-clans.

Taking both forms of descent into account, we see that in every patri-clan successive generations of males marry females from each of the matri-clans in turn : clan 1 men marry women first from clan D, the next generation from C, then from B, then from A, and so back to D again. As the children from such marriages inherit their patri-clan from their father and their matri-clan from their mother, they themselves are respectively D 1, C 1, B 1, A 1, and then D 1 again. Likewise successive generations of children belonging to matri-clan A are A 1, A 2, A 3, A 4, A 1, etc. Each patri-clan combines itself with each matri-clan in succession, and the same combination turns up again after as many generations as there are unilateral clans participating in the system. In our case, with four unilateral clans, the same combination recurs after four, i. e. in the fifth, generation.

We have by now introduced various genealogical units : patri- and matri-clans, and phratries based on patrilineal or matrilineal descent. A society may or may not name all of these units, but even if unnamed they may well be seen to function. If each combination of patrilineal and matrilineal clans has its own name, the society clearly recognizes again a new type of unit, which is purely double-unilateral, the marriage class.

For a long time it was not clear how classes could function with e.c.c.m., that is to say, with an asymmetrical connubium.

Even Radcliffe-Brown, in his otherwise masterly article in "Oceania", did not, in our opinion, sufficiently take into account the fundamental difference between symmetrical and asymmetrical connubium. Van Wouden, in 1935, was the first to tackle this problem

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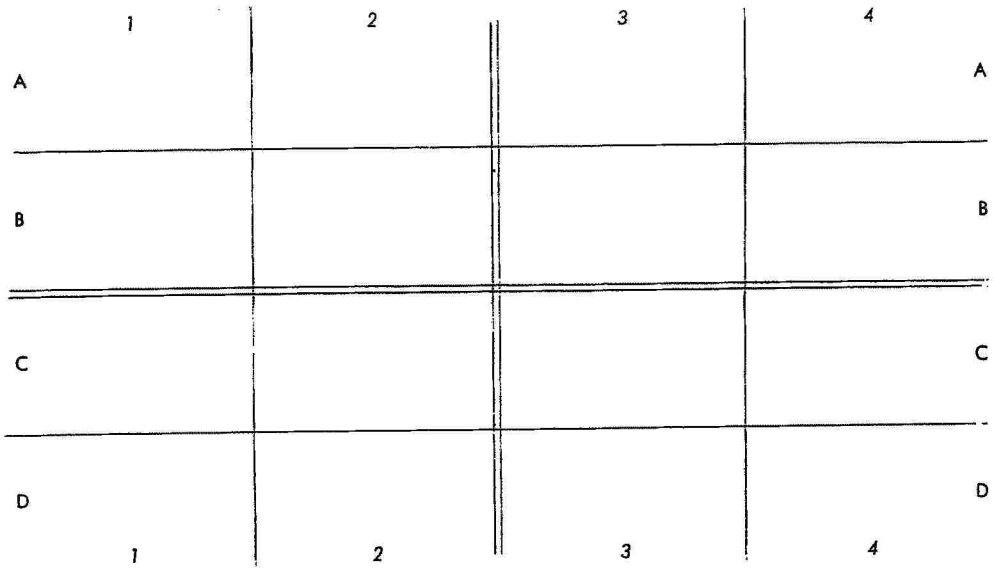
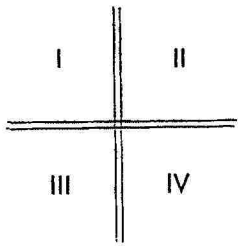
* We use the term "phratries" here instead of "moieties", as clans A and C do not together form one descent group, nor B and D together. In diagram I, on the other hand, each of the clans A, B, 1, and 2 are moieties.

satisfactorily [4]. Working on data from eastern Indonesia, he found several facts which led him to the conclusion that the ideal type of marriage in that area was the mo-br-da marriage, which could only be adequately explained by an asymmetrical (circulating) connubial system. Such a system demands at least three participating unilateral clans. If one theoretically assumes *four* unilateral clans, let us say four patrilineal clans, to have participated in such a system, it becomes clear that four other, matrilineal, clans also come into play. The result is a 16-class system, and so here we have a class system combined with an asymmetrical connubium. If we also assume the four patrilineal and the four matrilineal clans to be grouped, two by two, in patrilineal and matrilineal moieties, the resultant over-all picture can be presented as follows :




The numbers denote the patrilineal clans, grouped in the patri-moieties 1 + 2 and 3 + 4, the letters the matrilineal clans, forming matri-moieties A + B and C + D. The moieties cut the whole society into quarters, I, II, III, and IV.



They are related to each other by symmetrical connubia (I⟷IV and II⟷III), and behave just like the classes in a "classical" four-class system. V a n W o u d e n's theoretically constructed sixteen-class system differs from a four-class organisation, by the fact that its clans are connected with one another through *asymmetrical* connubia, and its classes only contain members of one single generation.

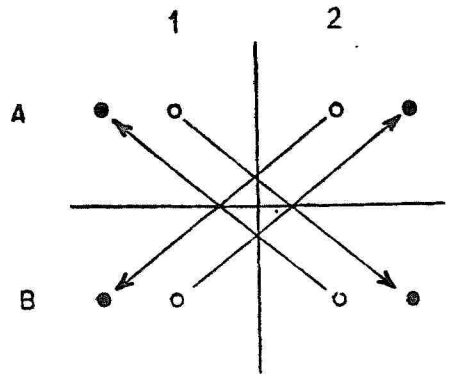
V a n W o u d e n then studies some other implications of various systems permitting asymmetrical connubia, which need not concern us here. The salient feature of his studies is this, that he brought forward the essential importance of the asymmetrical connubium, and demonstrated how it could occur in conjunction with a class-system. In the area he described he did not, however, find any society in which the system he showed to be theoretically possible, was actually functioning. This was due largely to the fact that the East-Indonesian social systems he reviewed were all more or less in a state of change, or even disintegration, and partly to the often very incomplete descriptions he had to use as sources of information.

Since 1935, of course, ethnographical literature has been enriched by descriptions of societies where marriage-classes actually do occur in combination with asymmetrical connubium; an example of such a society is the Murngin, who have a circulating connubium in an eight-class system. The Murngin data have recently been re-assessed in the important work by L é v i - S t r a u s s, which we have already mentioned in an earlier chapter.

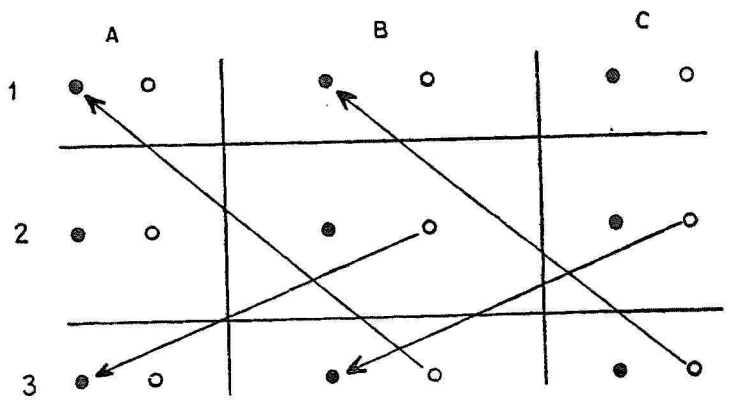
At the moment we need not follow this author in his theory on the historical development by which he explains the Murngin social system but as later in this study we shall again come to speak of L é v i - S t r a u s s's theories, when they touch upon our own Minangkabau problems, it was appropriate to introduce his publication in this chapter, in its theoretical setting.

We would like to make one more remark on marriage-classes.

It will be observed that the relationship between classes, and indeed their nature, in systems with circulating connubium differs quite considerably from the position with brother and sister exchange, as found in the Aranda and Kariera types of social organisation. Taking a four-class system as an example, and using the letters and numbers of diagram I, we can diagrammatically express the classes' interrelationship thus :




But in a society with asymmetrical connubium, like that of diagram VI, the relationship between classes is (expressed in terms of that diagram) :




We may formulate the difference by saying that in cases of symmetrical connubium, classes as a whole (the men and the women of each class together) stand in relationship to one another, but in systems with asymmetrical connubium the classes split apart, the women going one way (B 3 women marrying A 1 men, for instance), the men another (B 3 men marrying C 2 women).

As we have now introduced the main constituent elements of any kinship and marriage system, we may here terminate the discussion on a theoretical basis and turn to the study of an actual society, the Minangkabau.

## Chapter references.

[1] Radcliffe-Brown (1), 50.
[2] for this expression, see Murdock (2), 69 and footnote.
[3] Van Wouden, 96.
[4] Van Wouden, esp. Chapter III.