CULTURE CONTACTS AND THE MAKING OF CULTURES

Papers in Homage to

Itamar Even-Zohar

Edited by

Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Gideon Toury

Unit of Culture Research, Tel Aviv University

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Culture Contacts and the Making of Cultures: Papers in Homage to Itamar Even-Zohar

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WHY SO MANY MATERNAL UNCLES IN SOUTH ASIAN LANGUAGES?*

Panchanan Mohanty

Maternal uncle is the dearest kin in the Indian society as he helps his sister and her children in all possible ways. There is a separate word for it in all languages belonging to the four language families of India, i.e. Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Munda, and Tibeto-Burman. Interestingly, the tiger, the moon, the sun, the jackal, the mouse, the monkey, and the policeman are also addressed as maternal uncle in various Indian languages. So I intend to discuss the following three major points in this paper on the basis of evidence taken from these languages:

(i) Why maternal uncle became the dearest kin term even for the speakers of Indo-Aryan, a branch of the patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal Indo-European people.

(ii) Why the tiger, the moon, the sun, the jackal, the mouse, the monkey, and the policeman are called maternal uncle.

(iii) Why Kamsa, maternal uncle of the Indian mythological hero Krishna, was the latter's arch enemy.

1. Introduction

By 'other maternal uncles' I mean those human or non-human beings that are designated as maternal uncles. Data from various Indian languages reveal that the term 'maternal uncle' is used for the tiger, the moon, the sun, the jackal, the mouse, monkey, and the policeman. Apparently it looks quite strange, because there does not seem to be any similarity among these seven entities, and there is also no reason why they should be called maternal uncle. I intend to discuss this problem and give a plausible explanation for it in this paper. But we must have a clear idea about the term for maternal uncle used in various Indian languages and his role in the social life of the Indians in order to under-

* In this paper [T, Th, D, R, N, L, S] have been used for the voiceless unaspirated retroflex stop, voiceless aspirated retroflex stop, voiced unaspirated retroflex stop, unaspirated retroflex flap, retroflex nasal, retroflex lateral, and retroflex sibilant respectively.

stand the problem in its proper perspective. So I will first deal with these things, and then come to the central problem in what follows.

2. The 'Maternal Uncle' in Indian Languages

It is well known that kinship terms are resistant to change and so are kinship systems. For this reason, languages like Hindi and English show striking similarities with respect to the consanguinal kin terms, i.e. father, mother, brother, sister, son, daughter, etc. though their predecessors got separated almost four thousand years ago. But there are noticeable differences in the affinal kin terms between the said languages. One can ask a question here as to why there are such differences. To answer such a question we will have to take the changes in the societies which have taken place during these four thousand years into consideration. First, let us have a look at the proto-Indo-European (PIE) kinship structure which was "patriarchal, patrilocal, and patrilineal," (Friedrich 1979: 207). Again, after having analysed the PIE social structure Friedrich (1979: 229) has concluded: "Bride-capture, bride-wealth, polygyny, dominance of the husband, concunbinage, and the 'appointed daughter status', all articulate functionally with the patrilocal family and patrilineal descent." Not only that, these people also practised exogamy and each member was supposed to marry a stranger from another society. Again, after marriage the married woman ceased to be a member of her family and was treated as a member of her husband's family. These are the reasons for which we find a lot of variations in the affinal kin terms in the Indo-European languages. The most significant example is PIE */awos/ which exhibits wide semantic variations, i.e. from 'grandfather' to 'mother's brother'. In Latin, it is retained as /avus/ 'grandfather', and mother's brother in this language is /avunculus/ which is the diminutive of /avus/. Scholars have tried to explain that /avus/ originally meant 'maternal grandfather', and that is why maternal uncle was called /avunculus/. But Benveniste (1973: 182-3) rejects this position as there is no evidence to show that /avus/ refers to 'maternal grandfather', rather all of them connect it with the paternal lineage on the one hand; and a specific expression like /avus maternus/ is used to designate maternal uncle. A piece of supporting evidence comes from Hittite which uses /huhhaś/ (< *awos) for paternal grandfather only. Again, he argues that in a classificatory kinship system, like

that of PIE, mother's father must not get any special importance. His contention is that in agnatic relationship father and father's father are significant whereas in uterine relationship mother's brother is taken into account. So he envisages that a man's father's father is also his mother's mother's brother due to cross-cousin marriage, and this is how he resolves the problem in Latin. Other scholars have also tried to account for this problem in different ways. But as it is not really concerned with this paper, I will not dwell upon it here.

However, Sanskrit uses /ma:tula/ for mother's brother and it is different from both /ma:ta:maha/ 'maternal grandfather' and /pita:maha/ 'paternal grandfather'. Greek has /me:tro:s/ for 'mother's brother' which is an analogical creation after /pa'tro:s/ 'father's brother'. According to Benveniste (1973: 212), Sanskrit /ma:tula/ and Greek /me:tro:s/ "are recent substitutes for an Indo-European designation which disappeared when the mother's brother ceased to have a privileged position with respect to the father." It is significant and interesting to note that in the Indian society, mother's brother is the dearest kin for all people and he is the one who always helps his sister's children at the time of the latter's needs. Krishna's bringing up of his sister Subhadra's son, Abhimanyu in the great Indian epic *Maha:bha:rata* is a good example of it. So it can be argued that the cordial relationship between mother's brother and sister's son is at least as old as the *Maha:bha:rata.* It should be taken note of here that on this account the society represented by Sanskrit is different from the societies represented by other Indo-European languages. In other words, it is an innovation in the Indo-Aryan society. But the question that one can ask is: What is the source of this innovation? We will get the answer if we look at the words for mother's brother in other Indian languages belonging to the Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Munda stocks. These languages normally use /ma:ma:/ or its variants for mother's brother. Let us take examples from two languages of each group.

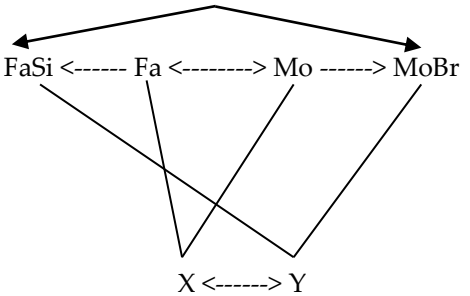
Indo-Aryan	Dravidian	Munda
Oriya: ma:mu	Telugu: ma:ma	Bonda: ma:mu, ma:mun
Hindi: ma:ma:	Tamil: ma:ma:,	Kharia: ma:mu
		ma:man

Among the Tibeto-Burman group of languages, some use the term derived from /ma:ma:/ whereas others use different terms. For example,

Bodo uses /ma:y/, obviously due to its close contact with Assamese; but Aka, spoken in Arunachal Pradesh, uses /as/ for maternal uncle. What is interesting is that except Indo-Aryan, in all other stocks, the word for mother's brother also denotes "father's sister's husband'. Only in Dravidian it refers to 'spouse's father' alongwith 'mother's brother' and 'father's sister's husband'. Thus, a hierarchy can be established among these stocks with reference to the meanings of the above said word.

Dravidian Munda/Tibeto-Burman Indo-Aryan
mother's brother= mother's brother= mother's brother
father's sister's husband father's sister's husband
= spouse's father

In other words, the Dravidian society allows exchange of sisters and cross-cousin marriage; which can be represented diagrammatically as follows:



The Munda and the Tibeto-Burman societies allow only the exchange of sisters. Thus they form a part of the Dravidian system, and it can be schematized as follows:

Finally, the Indo-Aryan society allows neither of these.

It will not be out of place to discuss an important aspect of the practice of marriage among the Dravidians. Even though a Dravidian male has an option to marry either his mother's brother's daughter or his father's sister's daughter, the former is invariably preferred. The question is: Why is it so? We all know that giving a daughter in marriage is

considered to be an act of religious merit for her parents or those who officiate on their behalf. This is popularly known as *kanya:-da:na* or 'bride-gift' which was originally practised by the Brahmins only and its sole motive was to earn *dharma* or piety. Later it spread to other castes through the brahminisation process. Thus, it is clearly a religious gift and "… the bride's people must accept nothing in return; the slightest gift from the groom's side would be construed as the "price" of the daughter, to accept which would constitute sale. The groom and his people can expect gifts, hospitality, and acts of deference from the bride's people, but must not reciprocate. … The groom's party are the superiors and benefactors of the bride's." (Trautman 1995: 292). For this reason, it is considered unethical and irreligious on the part of the bride-givers to accept anything from the bride-takers. Many bride-givers do not drink water in the bridge-groom's house even to-day. On the other hand, they regularly keep sending gifts and presents to the latter and treat him and his family members with humility and respect. In fact, "The idiom of *kanya:da:na* is the patrilineal idiom of complete dissimilation of the bride from her family of birth and her complete assimilation to that of her husband" (Trautman 1995: 291). Though it is a typical Indo-European custom inherited by the Indo-Aryans, it is prevalent especially among the upper caste Hindus all over India including the Dravidians. Actually, as pointed out by Trautmann (1979: 170), the root of preference for mother's brother's daughter over father's sister's daughter lies here. Because after one's sister is given in marriage to another person, presents and hospitality always flow from the former to the latter. Then, if the former's son marries the latter's daughter the flow has to be reversed; and this will lead to a conflict of interests. On the other hand, if one marries one's mother's brother's daughter the question of such a conflict does not arise as the flow of presents and respect which was coming from the latter for his sister earlier will flow to his daughter. This is the most obvious reason for which the Dravidian males prefer to marry their mothers' brothers' daughters to their fathers' sisters' daughters.

The other point to be noted here is that all the Dravidian languages use /ma:ma:/ or its variants. The present Indo-Aryan languages also use the same instead of the Sanskrit /ma:tula/ or any term derived from it.

So it can be argued that Indo-Aryan has taken the term for maternal uncle from Dravidian, and this indicates that a deeper cultural convergence has taken place in this subcontinent over the millenia.

3. Relationship between Brother and Sister

A comparison between brother and his married sister among the Aryan and Dravidian stocks shows that there is a marked difference. Following the line of the Indo-Europeans, the Indo-Aryans treat the married sister as an outsider as she is transplanted in her husband's family by breaking away from her natal kins upon marriage. But the scene is different among the Dravidians where sister acts as a binding force between her brother's and husband's families. However, whether an Indo-Aryan or a Dravidian, a brother has to send gifts and presents to his sister and her son(s) at the time of festivals and convivial occasions. It is both amazing and interesting that though usually a brother fights with another brother for a share in the paternal property, he gives gifts to his sister and her son(s) on his own regularly. Let us try to determine its cause now.

There are two words to denote 'sister' in Sanskrit, i.e. /swasa:/ and /bhagini:/. The former is inherited whereas the latter is an innovation in this language. For this reason cognates for /swasa:/ are found in other Indo-European languages, like *soror* in Latin, *heor ~ eor* in Greek, *sestra* in Old Slavonic, *siur* in Old Irish, and in Old High German, etc. But amazingly this inherited term went out of use right in the Middle Indo-Aryan stage, and the other term /bhagini:/ took over after that. This is the reason for which Neo Indo-Aryan languages show only the terms derived from /bhagini:/. For example:

MIA : sasa:, bhagini:, bahini:, bhaini:
Assamese : bhani
Bengali : bon
Gujarati : ben
Hindi : bahan
Kashmiri : benni:
Marathi : bahi:N
Nepali : bahini
Oriya : bhauNi
Panjabi : paiN
Sindhi : bheNi:

Now the question is: What is the source of Sanskrit /bhagini:/? And also what is the possible cause of its retention in the New Indo-Aryan languages? Scholars are of the view that the PIE **swesor* consisted of *swe-* 'own' and *sor* 'woman'. Thus, it was a classificatory term denoting 'own woman' or 'a woman of one's own clan', e.g. sister or any patrilateral female cousin (Friedrich 1979: 212, Benvineste 1973: 173-174). So the Indo-Aryans preferred a more concrete and definitive term /bhagini:/ which consists of bhag+in+ŋi:p (Wilson 1979: 528). The meanings of /bhag/ are good fortune, happiness, welfare, prosperity among others (Monier-Williams 1976: 743). In other words, /bhagini:/ was an embodiment of fortune, welfare and prosperity. It is significant to point out here that in the ancient Indian society, both brother and sister had an equal claim over the paternal property (Karve 1965: 355). Even Manu, the law-maker of ancient India, had declared that "according to law the right of inheritance belongs to both children (the son and the daughter) without any distinction (whatsoever)" (Sarup 1967: 40). This is most probably the reason for which prosperity and fortune have been associated with /bhagini:/. Not only that, in those days, after sister's death her son was entitled to inherit the paternal property due to her (Karve 1965: 355). So it is not at all surprising that a man would send gifts and presents to his married sister and her son in order to please them so that he can enjoy the property on which they have a claim. For this reason, right from the olden days, we notice a very cordial relationship between maternal uncles and their nephews or sisters' sons. For example, in the *Maha:bha:rata* the advisor of the Kauravas is their maternal uncle Shakuni. On the other hand, in the absence of maternal uncle, his son Krishna has acted as the advisor to the Pandavas. Not only that he has looked after his sister Subhadra and her son Abhimanyu when the Pandavas were in exile for twelve years. I strongly believe Ram, the crown-prince of Ayodhya and the son of Kaushalya who hailed from Koshala, decided to come to Central India on being banished from his kingdom simply because it was the land of his maternal uncle. This must be one of the major reasons for which he got an overwhelming support from the masses while in exile. This is something not peculiar to India. In many other societies, the relationship between maternal uncle and his nephew is very intimate and cordial. In fact, this relationship is so close that on the basis of his study of the peoples in South

Africa and Polynesia, Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 19) described maternal uncle as a "male mother". A discussion from this perspective will make it clear as to why the tiger, the moon, the sun, the jackal, the mouse, the monkey, and the policeman are addressed as the maternal uncle.

4. The Other Maternal Uncles

4.1. The Tiger

First, let us consider the tiger. It is called maternal uncle in the states of Orissa, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, and Nepal. What needs to be mentioned here is that there are very strong Tibeto-Burman and Munda sub-strata in West Bengal and Orissa (Chatterji 1970, Mohanty 1997, 1999). It is reflected in the facts that West Bengal has eight Tibeto-Burman and six Munda languages each of which are spoken by more than one thousand speakers whereas out of a total of about twelve Munda languages ten are spoken in Orissa. The reason for mentioning all these is that the tiger has an important role to play in the lives of the peoples belonging to the Tibeto-Burman and Munda stocks. To be specific, it is treated as a god in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. For example, we find folk-tales regarding the origin of tiger among the Adi, Tagin, and Tangam Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. It is the son of the god Kaddong Battey and goddess Peddong for the Adis. The Tagins believes that the supreme lord and creator Abotani is the ancestor of both men and tigers. The Tangams consider it a son of the mythical mother Pedong Nane. When a tiger is killed they perform certain rituals with a moral teaching to the tiger at the end which is as follows: "you have been killed because you have been bad and have done wrong to us and so you should not take it ill. Now go back to your home in the jungle and try to live a good life. Do not harm anybody and nobody will harm you."(Ghosh and Ghosh 1998a:58). According to the Angami and Rengma Nagas, the man and the tiger (along with the spirit) are the sons of the same mother, but the Konyak Nagas treat them as friends and kinsmen. (Ghosh and Ghosh 1998b). In Manipur the people "…put a high premium on the role of tigers in folk tales and literature, and analogies. The tiger is always compared with a brave man. … It is considered as a dangerous animal." (Singh 1993:49). The Lakhers of Mizoram are quite superstitious about the tiger as it "… has the power to cause sickness or ill luck. Therefore, when a tiger has been

killed, a special ceremony called chakei ia is performed where laughter is forbidden." (Chattopadhyay 1978: 235). There are quite a few Naga tribes like the Mara:ms, Quoirengs, and Kabuis for whom to see a tiger "…means an attack of sickness due to some evil spirit." (Hodson 1974: 130-131). About the Sema Nagas, Hutton (1968: 77) reports as follows: "The dead body (of a tiger) is treated much as that of an enemy, at any rate in many parts of the Sema country, the head being taken back with the village and hung up outside it where the heads of enemies are hung." Also "Eclipses are said to be caused by a tiger eating the sun or the moon, as the case may be, and in the case of the former they foretell the death of some great man within a year." Thus, the speakers of the Tibeto-Burman languages accept the tiger as a god, a kin, and a friend; and at the same time they are also very much afraid of this dangerous animal. A similar trend can also be noticed among the Munda tribes. For example, the Soras call it *kinnasum* or tiger-god, and at the same time they are mortally afraid of it. The following statement of Elwin (1955: 525) proves this point: "It is further taboo to speak or make any kind of noise throughout the rites for someone killed by a tiger." There is a group of Santals who also worship it when "… in Ra:mgarh only those who have suffered loss through that animal's ferocity conscend to adore him. If a Santa:l is carried off by a tiger, the head of his family deems it necessary to propitiate the 'Ba:gh Bhu:t' (tiger devil)" (Dalton 1973: 214). Though tiger is the *va:hana* or vehicle of Goddess Durga, the embodiment of power in Hindu mythology, there is little doubt that it was the most dangerous among all the animals in the olden days. For this reason the compound 'man-eater' refers to the tiger only, and not to any other animal. Again, the forests of the North-Eastern and Eastern India were full of tigers. In fact, fear for the tiger is so deep in the minds of the people of North-Eastern and Eastern India that 'tiger-clubs' are found in the villages of Manipur, a North-Eastern state, to protect people from its attack and the fifth day in the dark fortnight of the Hindu month of *Bha:drava* (August-September) is observed as the *RakSa:pancami:* 'protection fifth-day' in Orissa. In the evening of this day the Oriya people worship Lord Shiva and his sons Kartikeya and Ganesha; write a mantra, which is a prayer for protection, on a palm-leaf and put it at the main entrance of the house, and shut the door after throwing out a portion of the food offered to the abovesaid gods for

the tiger. It is clear that the purpose of all these is just to please the tiger by giving it food so that it will not kill them and also to pray to Lord Shiva and his sons to protect if and when the tiger attacks them.[1] Not only that, expressions like tiger-like strength, tiger-like ants, tiger-like bee, tiger-like flies, and tiger-like moustaches are noticed in day-to-day conversation of the people in these areas. No other animal has the privilege and distinction of being used like the tiger in the above expressions. In Himachal Pradesh, people use /ba:gh/ 'tiger' for the wolf. Its name is a taboo and it is not uttered in the evenings because it is believed to bring bad luck during night, especially a death news. Children are also dissuaded from behaving in a cranky manner by taking its name. It is so dreadful an animal for the people of Himachal Pradesh that they call it /ma:ma:/ just to meliorise its frightening effect. Though its voice is very harsh, they refer to it as /ku:kNewa:Li:/ literally 'cuckoo'.[2] The point to be noted here is that /ku:kNewa:Li:/ is feminine, which means that it is transformed into feminine in the process of meliorisation. So I want to argue that the reason for addressing the tiger as maternal uncle lies here. In other words, love and respect on the one hand and fear on the other hand have elevated the tiger to the status of maternal uncle. It has been discussed above how the tiger is loved and respected as a kin and as a god. So it is quite natural if an endearing term is used for it. Let us now consider the evidence wherein an endearing kinship term is used out of fear. This kind of evidence can be adduced from folk-tales and also from the *Ja:taka* stories, which are supposed to have been written in Eastern India. In a Bengali folk tale entitled 'The boy with the moon on his forehead', the boy met a gigantic demon while going to his uncle's place in the north of a forest, and addressed him as uncle. In return, the demon said, "… I would have swallowed you outright, had you not called me uncle, and had you not said that your aunt had sent you to me"(Day 1969:422). It is also reported that in Nepal "… neither gun, bow, or spear, had ever been raised against him (tiger). In return for this forbearance, it is said, he never preyed on man: or if he seized one would, on being entreated

[1] I owe gratitude to Prof. K.K. Mishra, University of Hyderabad for this information.

[2] I am thankful Dr. Kaushalya Verma, Himachal Pradesh University for this information.

with the endearing epithet of "uncle", let go his hold" (Crooke 1993: 324). There are quite a few tribes in India belonging to different linguistic stocks, e.g. the Dravidian Oraons and the Tibeto-Burman Nagas who claim their descent from the tiger. In a Manipuri folk-tale entitled 'The tiger and the heron' when the tiger threatened to eat an old man, he said, "Grandpa, what good in eating me. I am too weak.", and the tiger went away. The old man's son also saved himself from the tiger addressing it as 'grandpa' (Singh 1993: 17). It should be pointed out that most tribes in the North-Eastern India have relatively less kinship terms. So they tend to use one term, which is classificatory in nature, to express a number of relationships. So the term 'grandpa' here actually does not mean either father's father or mother's father, but all male relatives. To take an example, in Purum, spoken by an old Kuki tribe of Manipur, *kapu* means father's father, all male agnates belonging to and above his generation, and all male members of mother's father's and wife's father's families including mother's brother, his son, wife's elder brother, and his son (Das 1945: 142). But 'grandpa' has been used in the translated text because he is the eldest male resident in a house-hold. If we take the *Ja:taka* stories, in the *Baka Ja:taka*, the crab calls the crane maternal uncle in order to get mercy when it comes to know that the latter has an intention of killing it. Again, in the *Ga:maNicaNDa Ja:taka*, Ga:maNicaNDa is addressed as maternal uncle by a horse-keeper, by the village headman and by a prostitute so that he would do favours to each one of them. Then, after coming face to face with the tiger in *Di:pi Ja:taka*, the lamb decides to convey its mother's regards to the former and tries to establish a relationship with the former by calling it maternal uncle.

It is widely known today that the Egyptians universally observed animal worship, and these animals were either the most benevolent or the most malevolent. The same is also true of India, though there is a difference in degree: "Every living creature that can be supposed capable of effecting good or evil in the smallest degree, has become a sort of divinity and is entitled to adoration and sacrifice" (Dubois 1817: 445-446). So I want to argue that the tiger, that is very dear and at the same time has potentials of causing harm to others, was addressed as maternal uncle so that this address would soften its heart when it tries to cause harm and as a result, it would not do so. This was the reason for

using the term maternal uncle for the tiger. It is interesting to note that its seed lies in the Tibeto-Burman and Munda stocks which had a close contact with each other in the pre-historic times. (Bhattacharya 1976, Dalton 1978). Oriya and Bengali have appropriated it from these languages and developed it in a way which is Dravidian.

4.2. The Moon

The moon is called maternal uncle for a very similar reason. But before discussing that I must mention that the moon, according to the Hindu mythology, was born from the churning of the milk-ocean along with Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Since Lakshmi is worshipped as the mother-goddess by the Hindus, one may argue that the moon, being her brother, automatically becomes maternal uncle. But such an argument is not at all convincing, because if it is accepted then what will follow is that all the other things or beings like the stars, the Uccaiśrava: horse, the Kaustubha gem, and Dhanvantari, the heavenly doctor, who were born from the said churning, should have also been addressed as maternal uncle. Actually the case is not so. The moon is considered a source of life as it refreshes the vegetable and animal kingdoms at night. Again, there are a lot of folk-songs and folk-tales found in various Indian languages in praise of the moon because of its soothing light. Not only that, there is a festival in Orissa called *Kuma:rapu:rNima:*, which is observed by the unmarried girls for a fortnight and it culminates on the full moon day of the Hindu month *Ka:rtika* (October-November). The main aim of observing this festival is to request the moon-god to get them grooms who are very handsome, rich, and good.

It is also well known that the waning moon in the dark fortnight is considered inauspicious and harmful by various peoples. This is the cause for which words for the moon have changed from time to time in different languages. For example, the early Greek word for the moon, i.e. *me:ne:*, which was there as an inheritance from the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) parent, became obsolete very quickly, and *sele:ne:*, occupied its place. It should be noted that *sele:ne:*, literally meaning 'radiant', was derived from *śelas* 'radiance'. Interestingly, this substitute also fell under taboo in course of time, and was replaced by *phenga'ri* which literally meant 'that which shines'. Latin, another Indo-European lan-

guage, has retained the said PIE word only in the word for 'month', i.e. *me:nsis*. For the moon, it uses *lu:na* which literally means 'that which glitters'. Sanskrit, the other cognate Indo-European language, has dropped the said PIE word altogether. The most commonly used word for the moon in it is /candra/ which literally means 'shining'. It is derived from the verb root /cand-/ 'to shine' and has cognates like *candeo, candidus, incendo* in Latin. Again, English words candid, candle, cinder, etc. have also come from the same source. However, /candra/ of Sanskrit has been inherited by many Neo Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, and Marathi, etc. But some other Neo Indo-Aryan languages, such as Oriya, Assamese and Nepali use /jahna/, /jonba:i/ and /ju:n/ respectively, not the words derived from /candra/. There is little doubt that these words have been derived from /jyotsna:/ 'moonlight', and these languages have opted for a replacement obviously due to the tabooing of /candra/.

It should be pointed out that /candra/ has also been subjected to taboo partly in Sanskrit in course of time. It is evidenced by the Hindu tradition that no one should look at the moon on the *Vina:yaka-caturthi:* day, which falls some time in late August or early September. Not only that there is even a ritual of /candra-darśana/ 'looking at the moon', observed by the traditional Hindus, on the day following the /ama:ba:sya:/ or the no-moon day. The Sema Nagas believe that even "Seeds sown at the wane of the moon do not sprout" (Hutton 1968: 220). Further, "There is a widespread belief that the light of the full moon turns humans who are so disposed into were-wolves and causes lunacy if one sleeps in its beams. Very common in Europe and America is the idea that, during the night of the full moon, more crimes are committed, more children are born, and more patients committed to mental hospitals than at other times" (Eliade 1987: 90). So I want to contend here that because of the love discussed above and the fear that it will be harmful unless its bad effects are warded off, the moon is addressed as the maternal uncle in many Indian languages, the only exceptions being Assamese from the Indo-Aryan stock, and the Munda and the Tibeto-Burman languages. It is certainly surprising and interesting that when other NIA languages treat the moon as the maternal uncle, Assamese does not do so. As has been mentioned above Assamese uses /jonba:i/ for the moon and it means 'moon-sister'. In other

words, the moon is female in Assamese, and therefore, there is no scope for it to become maternal uncle.[3] The same is found in the Munda languages. All these languages treat the sun as their Supreme Deity or His visible symbol. Further, in most of them the moon is the sun's wife (Das 1945: 33; Elwin 1955: 80, 96; Dalton 1973: 186). But it is treated the sun's sister by the Bonda speakers (Elwin 1950: 141) and as the sun's younger brother by the Pa:uRi Bhũiya:s (Roy 1935: 279). On the other hand, there is a chaos in the Tibeto-Burman languages, which surround Assamese, regarding the relationship between the sun and the moon. For the Purums, the sun or *Ni* is the wife of the moon called *Hla* (Das 1945: 200). According to the Khasi and Jaintia tribes, the sun (*Ka Sngi*), water (*Ka Um*), and fire (*Ka Ding*) were three sisters; and the moon (*U Bymai*) is their younger brother (Barkataki 1970:149). In Adi, the sun (*Donyi*) and the moon (*Polo*) were identical and both had equal light and heat (Ghosh and Ghosh 1988a: 85). Similarly, the ballad of *Nu:mit Ka:ppa* tells us that long ago there were two sun gods in Manipur (Hodson 1975: 111). But in all these languages, the moon has been portrayed as a wicked character. For example, in the Khasi and Jaintia folk-tales, the moon tried to make love to his sister, the sun, who in turn threw ashes on his face and he became pale.[4] The Adi community decided to kill the moon so that they could have night to rest. The Lepchas of Sikkim also have a similar tale. (Stocks 1925: 363-365). In Meitei, the Moon-God Pakhangba is reported to have three hundred names, the most frequent ones of which are "*Harava* (destroyer), *Leithingai* (trouble-maker), *Leinung longa* (one who hides in a place)" (Singh 1993: 201). From all these, it is clear that there was a negative attitude towards the moon among the Tibeto-Burman people. These are the most probable reasons for which the moon is not addressed as maternal uncle in Assamese and in the Munda and Tibeto-Burman languages.

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[3] In some parts of Bengal, the moon is also treated as a mother who gives food and life-span (See Bhattacharya 1962: 178). Again, the tantric and yogic texts, according to which yoga is the unification of the sun and the moon, treat the sun as the eater as well as the father's seed and the moon as the food as well as the mother's ovum (see Dasgupta 1962: 235-236).

[4] Tyler (1964) reports that a very similar tale exists in the Polar regions.

4.3. The Sun

The sun is addressed as maternal uncle only in Bengal though it is not as frequent and popular as the moon. The reason for it seems to be that there is a long tradition of sun-worship in Bengal (Bhattacharya 1977) which may be ascribed to the Tibeto-Burman and Munda influence on the Bengali society. Then, according to the tradition mentioned above, the moon and the sun are treated one and the same. So as the former is called 'maternal uncle', the latter automatically becomes another 'maternal uncle'.

4.4. The Jackal

The jackal is also called /ma:ma:/, i.e. /śeya:l-ma:ma:/ or 'jackal-maternal uncle' in Bengal. Indian folk-tales and folk-lore are full of incidents which attest that the jackal is the most shrewd among all animals. In Manipur, Assam, and West Bengal, it is portrayed as a wise and learned animal. It is called /śeya:l paNDit/ 'jackal, the learned one' in Bengali and Assamese. It also helps and assists others at the time of their troubles. In Bengali folk-lore, it is the most significant of all animals. It is portrayed as a teacher as well as a match-maker. For example, let us take the following rhyme (Bhattacharya 1963: 47):

ek je chilo śeya:l,
ta:r ba:p diyeche deya:l,
śe karechilo pa:Thśa:la:,
paRto śetha:y a:Rśula:.

(There was a jackal.
His father constructed a wall.
He started a school.
The cockroach used to study there.)

Here the jackal is portrayed as a teacher who educates other animals. The cockroach is just symbolic and it has found a place here most probably due to the demand of rhyming with /pa:Thśa:la:/ 'school'. Regarding match-making, there is a tale "The match-making jackal" in which the jackal with the help of its intelligence marries a very poor weaver with a princess (Day 1969: 407-413). As discussed above, under the Dravidian influence, the maternal uncle is the dearest and the most important kin in Eastern India and this is what he normally does for his

nephew. So it is quite natural for the Bengalis to honour the jackal by addressing it as maternal uncle.

4.5. The Mouse

The mouse is called maternal uncle mainly in the states of Maharashtra and Gujarat. It is clear from the use of the expressions like /undirma:ma:/ and /undarma:ma:/ 'mouse-maternal uncle' by the Marathi and Gujarati speakers respectively. The reason for which the Marathi and Gujarati speakers do so is similar to that of the tiger among the Eastern Indians. The mouse is the vehicle of Ganesha, the god with an elephant head, who is the most popular god of Maharashtra. There are also some Marathi folk-tales in which the mouse is portrayed as an intelligent animal. For example, in the folk-tale entitled "His tail for a song," a mouse makes a fool of five persons, i.e. a carpenter, a potter, a gardener, a herdsman, and an oil-merchant. At the end, it buys a drum and two sticks and sings the whole story in the form of a song (Dexter 1938: 70-76)[5]. At the same time we know that a mouse can consume so much of food grains in a day that it is enough for a meal for six people. Thus, the mice cause the greatest harm to people by creating shortage of food. Sen states that "…mu:Saka has been derived from the Sanskrit word Mu:Ska denoting 'the stealthy one' or destroyer…" and "It is the destroying habit of the rat which brought the animal in contact with GaNeśa, the 'Vighnara:ja' and turned it in to his mount. … Even Manu advises the kings not to select 'Mahidurga', a fort which was made with brick-ramparts around as it is infested with rats or mice. Such was the dread associated with the creative among the ancient people who considered it as a 'vighna' or trouble"(Sen 1972: 26).[6] So my contention is that the Marathi and Gujarati speaking people have established the relationship of maternal uncle with the mouse so that it would not cause any *vighna* or trouble to them. Most probably this is the reason for addressing the mouse as the maternal uncle in Marathi and Gujara-

[5] For a similar tale where the rat has been replaced by a monkey see 'Monkey losing the tail' in Seethalakshmi (1969).

[6] For a comparison see Frazer (1954: 530-531) who mentions about an ancient Greek treatise on farming that contains a piece of advice to farmers as to how to propitiate the mice and rid their lands of them.

ti. It will not be out of place to mention here that mouse-worship is prevalent in the western parts of India.

Another important point to be noted here is that the Dravidian speakers including the Dravidian tribals normally use /ma:ma:/ for an elderly and respectable male stranger. Clearly under this influence a stranger is also called /ma:ma:/ in rural Maharashtra and in parts of Gujarat; though throughout North India, the supposedly abode of the Indo-Aryans, /ca:ca:/ 'father's brother' is used for such a person. In the urban areas of Maharashtra and Gujarat those people who do not employ the English word 'uncle' prefer /ka:ka:/ 'father's brother' to /ma:ma:/; and it is essentially due to a process which we can call 'secondary aryanization' or the influence of the New North Indo-Aryan languages, particularly Hindi. However, coming back to the main point, the elderly and respectable men in rural Maharashtra are addressed as /ma:ma:/ in contradistinction to /ca:ca:/ in North India (For example, /ca:ca:/ Nehru is used for Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India). The village people, during difficult times, go to them for help; and the latter oblige the former. There are also a few important persons in Maharashtra for whom the Marathi speakers have used /ma:ma:/ out of love and respect, e.g. Shelar *ma:ma:*, *ma:ma:* Varerkar, and *ma:ma:* Kane. Shelar was a contemporary of the great Maratha Shivaji, and the people of his area sought his advice when there was a necessity. For this reason, all those people including Shivaji used to call him /ma:ma:/. On the other hand, Varerkar was a socially committed dramatist whose plays were very popular among the masses of Maharashtra during the first half of the 20th century, and Kane was a pioneer of the hotel-industry in Maharashtra. Kane's hotel in Bombay was quite famous for serving people with home-made type food. It is said that even Sardar Ballabhabhai Patel, the veteran freedom-fighter and the first home minister of independent India, was a frequent visitor to Kane's hotel. People liked Kane's food so much that they called him /ma:ma:/ out of affection and endearment.[7]

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[7] Thanks are due to Professors Padmakar Dadegaonkar, University of Hyderabad and Bharati Modi, M. S. University of Baroda; and Dr. G. Uma Maheshwara Rao, University of Hyderabad for these pieces of information about Marathi, Gujarati, and Dravidian languages respectively.

4.6. The Monkey

Regarding the monkey, it is called /ma:ma:/ mainly in the Bhojpuri-speaking areas of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.[8] In every version of the *Ra:ma:yaNa* it is Hanuman, the chief of the monkey-army, that helped Rama in each step when the latter was in exile. It should be mentioned here that Rama is worshipped in almost every household in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and being his greatest devotee, Hanuman is also worshipped along with him. But Wolcott (1977: 657) has pointed out that "Stories about Hanuma:n's adventure and prowess, rather than about his service to Ra:ma, appeal to Bhojpuri men." Not only that, "When men gather to share pipe, tobacco, and the prepared betel leaf preparation called *pa:n*, they are most likely to discuss not the feats of Ra:ma or LakSmaN, but those of Hanuma:n." (Wolcott 1977: 657). It is because for them "Hanuma:n is a doorway to God" (Wolcott 1977: 655) and "Hanuma:n is important as a protector" (Wolcott 1977: 656). For this reason, he is called *sankaT-mocan* 'danger-shield' and many men wear a "protective medallion" carrying the Hanuma:n image round their necks. They believe, "…strength of limb and body and virility are dependent on Hanuma:n-*pu:ja:* (worship of Hanuma:n); safety and well-being in this life are dependent on Hanuma:n-*sm◡ti* (remembrance of Hanuma:n)" (Wolcott 1977: 658). Again, in certain areas, e.g. in Ranchi, men seek Hanuman's grace and blessings by invoking his name during the traditional Indian sports like "bowmanship, swordsmanship, stick-fighting, and wrestling" (Narula 1991: 23). Women also worship him for "the cure of barrenness", though its importance is secondary.

On the other hand, in Bihar, if a monkey is killed somewhere, it is believed that nobody can live there. "His bones are exceedingly unlucky, and a special class of exorcisers in Biha:r make it their business to ascertain that his bones do not pollute the ground on which a house is about to be erected"(Crooke 1993: 53). Also in the Mirzapur area of Uttar Pradesh, though seeing his face is considered to be lucky it is a common belief that taking his name "…in the morning brings starvation for the rest of the day" (Crooke 1993: 215). So people call it /hanuma:n/ euphemistically in the morning. Most probably due to the-

[8] This fact was brought to my notice by Drs. Kamal Swroop, Azamgarh (Uttar Pradesh) and Maheshwar Mishra, Barauni (Bihar).

se reasons the monkey is referred to as the maternal uncle in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

4.7. The Policeman

The reason for addressing the policeman as maternal uncle is not very different, and it is a late 19th century or early 20th century phenomenon. The word 'policeman' gained currency in India only after the advent of the British. A cursory glance on the administrative systems of India in the past as well as at present reveals that the policemen were and still are extremely powerful and capable of causing all kinds of problems. Prior to independence, Indians were mortally afraid of them, because they could put anybody behind the bars and also torture him in various ways. The situation is not very different after almost five decades of independence. However educated, influential or rich one may be, nobody wants to go the police-station or get involved in a police case unless it is absolutely necessary even to-day. From all these, it follows that the fear the people have for a policeman is no less than that for a tiger and he is no less harmful than a mouse. In fact, this fear for the policeman and his mischief potentials have prompted people to make an effort to lead a peaceful life by addressing him as maternal uncle. It is also true that a person having a policeman as a relative gets respect from others because of the latter. Thus, this is the most probable reason for calling a policeman as the maternal uncle. Actually the policemen lost the respect they used to get from the masses only after they started misusing their power and became thoroughly corrupt; and for this reason people started making fun of them. Oriya uses /polisma:mu/ only to indicate contempt for the policemen; and this is the reason for which in some other languages, like Gujarati and Marathi, /ma:ma:/ is also used in a derogatory sense. However, this disrespect for the policemen in general and the use of /ma:ma:/ in a derogatory sense, have nothing to do with the maternal uncle status of the policeman.

5. The Kamsa Episode: an Exception

Kamsa, the maternal uncle of Krishna, is the most popular metaphor for maternal uncle in the Indian tradition. Though I have argued above that the relationship between maternal uncle and his nephew is very close and the former is like a 'male mother', Kamsa was Krishna's arch

enemy and he tried his best to kill the latter by all means. So the Kamsa episode demands an explanation so that the hypothesis put forward in this paper is not at stake.

The Kamsa episode has been described in detail in *Maha:bha:rata, Harivamśa* and *Śri:madbha:gavata.* But interestingly each description is different from others in certain ways, and these differences hold the clue as to why Kamsa was so cruel to Krishna. According to *Śri:madbha:gavata,* Kamsa is the brother of Krishna's mother, Devaki. But as per the descriptions of the *A:diparva* in *Maha:bha:rata,* Ugrasena and Devaka are brothers; and Kamsa is the former's son whereas Devaki is the latter's daughter. In other words, here Kamsa is Devaki's cousin, not brother. Again, according to the same description, Kamsa is not the real son of Ugrasena. He was born after a demon had forcibly enjoyed Ugrasena's wife, Pavanarekha. *Harivamśa* has also portrayed him as an illegal child of Ugrasena. There are two important things which have to be taken note of in these descriptions. Firstly, Kamsa was not Devaki's real brother; and he was made the latter's brother at a later period. Secondly, he was a demon, not a normal human being. It is further corroborated by the facts that the well-known demon Jarasandha was his father-in-law and Shishupala was his bosom friend. Therefore, it is highly unusual to expect human-like behaviour from him; and there is nothing surprising if he tried to kill Krishna instead of being affectionate towards him. There is also another reason for which Kamsa had a strained relationship with Krishna. Krishna's father Vasudeva was King Ugrasena's prime minister. After growing up, Kamsa started opposing his father in every step. But on such occasions Vasudeva always used to support Ugrasena and in this process incurred Kamsa's wrath. So it is quite natural on Kamsa's part to be revengeful on Vasudeva's son, Krishna.

6. Conclusion

From what has been discussed above, the following conclusions can be drawn: (i) Maternal uncle was not an important kin for the Indo-Europeans. That he is quite important in the Indo-Aryan kinship system makes it clear that they have converged with the non-Aryans, or the Dravidians to be specific through contact and convergence. It is evidenced by the fact that they use the term that the Dravidians do.

Speakers of the Munda family also use the same term which is indicative of convergence of Munda with Dravidian. (ii) The relationship between maternal uncle and his nephew is very close in Indian society. (iii) The *Ja:taka* stories provide evidence for the argument that alongwith the people who help at the time of need, those who have the potentials to harm and those whom people are afraid of are addressed as maternal uncle in Indian languages. In the latter case, people try to soften the potentially harmful person's heart and establish kinship with him by elevating him to the status of maternal uncle. This is the reason for which the tiger, the moon, the sun, the jackal, the mouse, the monkey, and the policeman are called maternal uncle in Indian languages. (iv) Kamsa is not a representative maternal uncle in the Indian tradition and there are obvious reasons for which he was so cruel towards his nephew, Krishna.

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