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Q3(a)

Discuss how the rules of descent contradict the principles of residence in matrilineal society, mentioning suitable examples?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Anthropology GS 1 · 20 marks · Family

2.4 Family: Definition and universality; Family, household and domestic groups; functions of family; Types of family (from the perspectives of structure, blood relation, marriage, residence and succession); Impact of urbanization, industrialization and feminist movements on family.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss how the rules of descent contradict the principles of residence in matrilineal society, mentioning suitable examples?
- Write about 250 words for 20 marks

Revision summary

Matriliny assigns membership through women.

Residence may send the husband or the heir to another house.

Richards named this the matrilineal puzzle.

Nayar taravad, **Trobriand** avunculocality, and **Khasi** uxorilocality are the teaching cases.

Repairs include mother's-brother authority and visiting marriage, not a simple matriarchy.

Introduction

Matriliny traces group membership through women. Residence often still places husbands, brothers, and children in houses that pull against that rule. The contradiction is structural, not a mistake of the people.

Body

The mismatch

- **Descent** in a matrilineal system makes a child a member of the mother's clan. Property and office may pass to the sister's son, as **Malinowski** recorded for **Trobriand** chiefs.
- **Residence** after marriage may be avunculocal, duolocal, or even patrilocal. The husband then lives among his own or his wife's people, while the heir belongs to another house.
- **Audrey Richards** called this the matrilineal puzzle: men hold authority in the sister's group but live as husbands elsewhere.

Cases

- **Nayar** of Kerala, in the older **taravad** described by **Kathleen Gough**, had visiting husbands. Children belonged to the mother's house; genitor and pater were split.
- **Khasi** of Meghalaya are matrilineal and often uxorilocal. The youngest daughter keeps the house, yet men still seek political voice outside the hearth, which is why **Nongbri** and others stress gender politics inside matriliney.

- **Minangkabau** of Sumatra and **Ashanti** of Ghana show the same pull between the mother's lineage and the husband's compound.
- **Garos** and some **Nairs** after legal reform moved toward neolocal houses, which further splits descent from everyday residence.

What follows

- Contradiction does not mean chaos. Cross-cousin marriage, mother's-brother authority, and visiting marriage are working repairs.
- **Lévi-Strauss** read alliance as another logic. The ethnographic point remains: matriliney is not matriarchy, and residence can undo what descent writes.

Flow diagram

Matrilineal descent -> Child in mother group
Residence -> Husband in other house
Child in mother group -> Richards matrilineal puzzle
Husband in other house -> Richards matrilineal puzzle

Conclusion

In matrilineal societies, the child belongs to the mother-line while the married man often sleeps in another residential group. **Trobriand**, Nayar, and **Khasi** cases show the puzzle and its repairs.

Facts & figures

Richards

Stated the matrilineal puzzle: male authority in the natal lineage versus residence with the wife.

Nayar taravad

Matrilineal joint house with visiting husbands; children stayed with the mother-group.

Trobriand

Malinowski: sister's son as heir; husbands living in the wife's village created split loyalty.

Khasi

Matrilineal uxorilocal house; youngest daughter as custodian; men still contest public authority.