

Block

5

KINSHIP, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

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BLOCK 5 KINSHIP, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

Introduction

The character and quality of social relations based on kinship, marriage and family are of paramount importance in all societies. The primary reason for this is that kinship, marriage and family play a dominant role in social systems.

Kinship refers to human relationships by blood or consanguinity affinity with relations brought by marriage. Kinship relations are actually or fictiously traced through parent-child or sibling relations, and recognised for social purposes. The first unit delves into the basic concept of Kinship. In each kinship system, a set of terms are used in addressing or speaking of relatives. In the kinship systems more usually associated with simpler societies the terms used in addressing or speaking of relatives are termed as ‘classificatory terminology’. Lewis Henry Morgan developed the distinction between ‘classificatory’ and ‘descriptive’ kinship terms (i.e. between merging or distinguishing lineal and collateral). The three related aspects of kinship – ‘lineage’, ‘clan’ and ‘descent’ are also being discussed in this section.

The second unit on Descent and Alliance Theories reflects upon these defunct theories. In the contemporary scenario though not functional, the theories give an insight into the constitution of family, sib, clan, moiety, marriage, exchange etc.

Unit 3 on Marriage provides the preliminary definition of ‘marriage’. Marriage confers acknowledged social status of the offspring, a matter of great importance in regard to such matters as inheritance and succession. This unit details the different types of marriages. ‘Monogamy’ is the custom of being married to only one person at a particular time. Polygamy may be ‘polyandry’ (plural husbands) or ‘polygyny’ (plural wives). Laws of prohibition and injunction that regulate marriage are being dealt with herein. Under prohibition, sex relations between individuals related in certain prohibited degrees of kinship is considered as ‘incest’. This unit gives an anthropological insight on marriage.

The family is the smallest and most basic social unit based on descent and filiation. The fourth unit on ‘Family’, explores the kin based relationship and how extending outward from the circle of family, people operate as a member of larger kin groups which too have descent and affinity as their constituent bases. The elementary or simple family is a group consisting of a father and mother and their children, whether they are living together or not. The compound families are of three types: a group consisting of a man and two or more wives and their children (polygynous); a group consisting of a woman with two or more husbands and her children (polyandrous); and a group formed by the remarriage of a widow or widower having children by a former marriage. The notion of physiological parenthood and socially recognised parenthood is present in the context of the family and forms a part for discussion in this unit.

Finally, the last unit in this block, ‘Kinship, Marriage and Family in India’ summarizes the earlier units with examples from India. This unit discusses in depth the rules of kinship, family and marriage as prevalent in the caste and tribal societies of India.

UNIT 1 KINSHIP

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- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Idea of Kinship
 - 1.2.1 What is Kinship? Concept and Definitions
 - 1.2.2 Definitions of Some Basic Terms Used in Kinship
- 1.3 A Brief History of Kinship Studies in Anthropology
 - 1.3.1 Morgan's Kinship System
 - 1.3.2 Contemporary Kinship Studies in the Late 20th Century
- 1.4 Summary

References

Suggested Reading

Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



This unit will help you to understand:

- what is Kinship all about?
- some of the terms used in kinship parlance. The different ways in which kinship systems categorizes the kins;
- the early studies related to kinship especially of Morgan; and
- the shift in focus in kinship studies in the 20th century.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Human beings are known as social animals even though many species have shown social behaviour, what sets humans apart is the complexity of our social organisation. This unit will introduce the students to the concept of kinship. The underlying factors that help a person trace his/her kinsman. The concentration herein would be in understanding the terminologies used in kinship and in tracing relations. We would also discuss in this unit the early studies in kinship and how with the changing times the focus of kinship studies have also changed and the addition of new kinship terminologies which were not studied till recent times.

1.2 IDEA OF KINSHIP

As soon as a human child is born it enters this world with some given characters like a system of beliefs, a language, parents and siblings and many other relationships and sometimes social positions, like a potential heir to a throne, a priestly position, an occupation or a vocation in life. Such are the ascriptive characters of what is understood as social personhood. Thus to be born is to have an identity as a member of a society and a receiver of a culture. But these social identities can only be reproduced through marriage or a socially recognised bond rather than by mere mating. To be human is to reproduce socially and not simply biologically. Every human is embedded in a network of relationships that can be called kinship relationships that are either based on the notions of putative blood connections or

of marriage as a socially recognised bond; what in anthropological terminology are known as **consanguineal** and **affinal** relationships; that is relations by blood and by marriage respectively. Relatives by blood are those who are recognised *culturally to be so* and not who are genetically connected, as with the case of adoption, fostering and step-relations.

The basic principle of kinship is to keep these two categories separate. In other words those who are supposed to be blood relatives can never be joined by marriage and in all human societies these rules appear as the fundamental rule of **incest taboo**. Apart from the basic relationships of parents and children and siblings, there is a wide variation in the rules of incest taboo, like the taboo on marrying within the same village in Northern India and the variations in rules of marrying children of one's parent's siblings. In a few historical instances like the Egyptian royal family, even the incest taboo between siblings could be broken, but such was very rare. The definition of who is a blood relative is not determined biologically but socially and thus kinship is about the social interpretation of putative biological relations. It is the concept of legitimacy that determines the social recognition of parent child relationships and not the fact of a biological descent.

1.2.1 What is Kinship? Concept and Definitions

The term kinship enfolds in it the various organisations of a society. Inheritance and property rights, political office and the composition of local communities are all embedded in kinship. In societies where ancestor worship was practiced, even religion was based on kinship. To understand the intricacies of the term kinship let's start with a few definitions of kinship.

Kinship and marriage are about the basic facts of life. They are about 'birth, and conception, and death', the eternal round that seemed to depress the poet but which excites, among others, the anthropologist. Man is an animal, but he puts the basic facts of life to work for himself in ways that no other animal does or can, Fox (1996 [1967]: 27). While, Godelier, (1998: 387) stated that Kinship appears as a huge field of social and mental realities stretching between two poles. One is highly abstract: it concerns kinship terminologies and the marriage principles or rules they implicitly contain or that are associated with them. The other is highly concrete: it concerns individuals and their bodies, bodies marked by the position of the individual in kinship relations. Deeply embedded in them are the representations that legitimize these relations through an intimacy of blood, bone, flesh, and soul. Between these two poles lie all the economic, political, and symbolic stakes involved from the outset in the interplay of kinship relations or, conversely, that make use of them. Stone, (1997: 5) recognised Kinship as a relationship between persons based on descent or marriage. If the relationship between one person and another is considered by them to involve descent, the two are **consanguines** ("blood") relatives. If the relationship has been established through marriage, it is **affinal**. Encyclopaedia Britannica in its webpage has defined Kinship as the socially recognised relationship between people in a culture who are or are held to be biologically related or who are given the status of relatives by marriage, adoption, or other ritual. Kinship is the broad-ranging term for all the relationships that people are born into or create later in life and that are considered binding in the eyes of their society. Although customs vary as to which bonds are accorded greater weight, their very acknowledgment defines individuals and the roles that society expects them to play. Tonkinson, (1991:57), stated in his work that Kinship is a system of social relationships that are expressed in a biological idiom, using terms like "mother", "son," and so on. It is best visualized as a mass of networks

of relatedness, not two of which are identical, that radiate from each individual. Kinship is *the* basic organising principle in small-scale societies like those of the Aborigines and provides a model for interpersonal behaviour.

From the above definitions of kinship it can be summed up that kinship determines the journey in a man's life. From birth to death it is the rules of kinship which governs the rites of passage. Kinship through its systematic organisation, rules of marriage and descent ascribes to a person whom he can marry, who would bear his children, who would inherit his property (either son or daughter) and ultimately at the time of demise who would conduct the last rites. These rules differ in different societies and in order to understand the rules of kinship in different societies the next section would help you to get acquainted with some of the terms frequently used in kinship.

1.2.2 Definitions of Some Basic Terms Used in Kinship

Before we embark on the history of Kinship, it would be beneficial to understand some of the basic premises and the definitions on which kinship relations are based.

Descent refers to a person's affiliation and association with his/her kinsman. In a patrilineal society a person traces his descent through father while in a matrilineal society descent is traced through the mother. **Descent Group** comprises of people having a common ancestor, the common ancestor can either be a living, non living or mythical being like an animal, tree, human being, thunder etc. Rules of descent can be divided into two distinct types a. Unilineal and b. Cognatic or Non-Unilineal descent. **Unilineal Descent** is a descent group where lineage is traced either through the father's or mother's side. Herein, only one parents descent is taken into account based on the type of society – matriarchy or whether patriarchy. In a patrilineal society it is traced through the father while in a matrilineal society it is traced through the mother.

Patrilineal Descent is a kinship system based on patriarchy where inheritance, status, authority or property is traced through males only. It is also known as agnatic descent. For example: sons and daughters belong to their father's descent group, sons' children both sons and daughters will be a part of grandfather's descent group, but the daughter's children would belong to her husband's descent group. Many of the societies of the world belong to this realm like the classical Romans, the Chinese and also the Hindu society of India. In the Hindu society, the rule of descent follows the transfer of authority and immovable property to the oldest son or the first born commonly known as primogeniture.

Matrilineal Descent is a kinship system based on matriarchy where inheritance, status, authority and property is traced through females only. It is also known as uterine descent. A matrilineal descent group comprises of a woman, her siblings, her own children, her sisters children and her daughters' children. The Ashanti of Ghana studied by Meyer Fortes, the Trobriand Islanders of Western Pacific studied by Malinowski, some of the societies of Indonesia, Malaysia, some Native American tribes like Navajo, Cherokee and Iroquois, and also some of the tribes in India like the Khasis of North East India and the Nayars of southern India are examples of societies with matrilineal descent. Among the Ashanti of Ghana, the authority lies with the mother's brother and a son inherits the property of the mother's brother, whereas among the Khasis of Meghalaya of North East India the immovable property like the ancestral house is inherited by the youngest daughter from her

mother's mother (grandmother) and is known as the *Kakhaddu*. Herein, the rule of descent lies in the ultimo geniture that is the youngest in the family.

Double Descent is a kinship system in which descent is traced through both the paternal and maternal side. In such a descent system for certain aspects descent is traced through the mother while for other aspects descent is traced through the father. Usually the distinction is that fixed or immovable property is handed down from father to son while the movable property moves from mother to daughter which may include small livestock's, agricultural produce and also items of cultural value like jewelry etc. As in the case of Sumi Nagas of Nagaland, which is basically a patrilineal society during marriage *Achiku* a traditional necklace is handed down from mother to daughter and moves in the same line. This necklace if acquired from the market has no value but is treasured as a family heirloom if passed on from mother to daughter (example related by one of the Sumi Naga participants in a seminar). Other example of double descent well described is seen among the Yako of Nigeria, Forde (1967:285-332).

Ambilineal descent is a form of descent wherein a person can choose the kingroup to affiliate with which he wants to affiliate with, either his father's kingroup or his mothers. Bilateral descent is a kinship system wherein a person gives equal emphasis to both his mother's and father's kin. **Lineal kinship** or the direct line of consanguinity is the relationship between persons, one of whom is a descendant of the other. Examples are like from father to son, grandfather to grandson etc. In a partilineal society, people tend to remember their ancestry for several generations like in the case of Tallensi of Ghana sometimes they could trace the lineal descent upto fourteen generations. **Collateral kinship** is the relationship between people who descend from a common ancestor but are not in a direct line. Examples are the relation between two brothers, cousin to cousin etc.

In Kinship studies Ego plays a vital role. **Ego** is the respondent through whom a relationship is traced. It can be a male or a female for example if the ego is (C) the son of a person (A) then all relations in this case would be traced through C. For better understanding please refer to the diagram below showing Ego (C's) family genealogy.

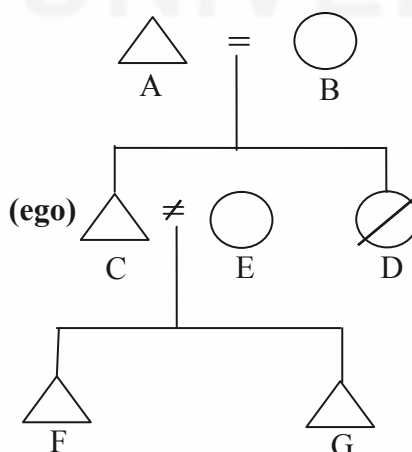


Fig. 1.1

As stated above in the diagram the EGO is C son of A. Let's, see how the relations would be traced in this situation if we start from the EGO. Ego is A's son that is father is A, and mother is B while D is his sister (sibling). E is ego's wife, and F and D are his two sons. Herein, for male the sign is Δ and the female is \circ , the = sign signifies marriage, while \neq stands for divorce, and \perp connects parents and children, — connects siblings while $\cancel{\Delta}$ or $\cancel{\circ}$ signifies death.

Reflection and Activity

Trace your line of descent and explain the category of descent it falls under: a. Unilateral or b. Cognatic descent group. To assist you below a representation of each group is given:

- a. Unilateral descent groups comprise of kingroups who trace their descent either through the male or female line.
- b. Cognatic descent groups comprises of kingroups who trace descent from both the male and female lines. Double descent, ambilineal descent and bilateral descent are types of cognatic descent groups.

Clan consists of members who trace their origin to a common ancestor which can be a living or non-living being without knowing the genealogical links to that ancestor. It is also defined as a unilateral exogamous group. **Totemism** is the belief that people are related to a particular animal, plant or natural object by virtue of descent from a common ancestral spirit. A totemic clan traces their origin to some particular non human object like the tiger, a bird, thunder etc. Examples of totemic clans are found all over the world like Africa, Asia, Australia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, and the Arctic polar region. Among the Kimberly tribe of Australian Aborigines one of the clans traces their origin to the butcher bird (*karadada*).

The term Phratry is derived from the Greek term *phrater* meaning brother. **Phratry** is basically a kin group comprising of several clans based on brotherhood mostly through common descent and is a consanguineous group. A **moiety** is the literal division of the society in two halves. A moiety consists of many phratries and it is a bigger unit than a phratry. All moieties have phratries in it but a phratry need not be a moiety. As per legends, northern Kimberley tribe of Australia has two moieties and is represented by two birds, *Wodoi* the Spotted Nightjar, and *Djungun* the Owlet Nightjar (<http://www.aboriginalculture.com.au/socialorganisation.shtml>, accessed on 29th March, 2010). The moieties are exogamous that is they marry outside of their moiety and never within the same moiety.

Endogamy and **Exogamy** are two concepts which we would be referring to in terms of marriage, which also follows the kinship rules. Endogamy is the practice of marrying within the group. In most of the tribes and caste based societies the rule of endogamy exists. For example among the Naga Tribe of North East India there are different Naga Tribes like the Semi, Ao, Sumi, Angami etc. The tribes rarely marry outside their own tribes. Likewise in the caste based system of India a caste group always marries within their own caste like a Brahmin would marry a Brahmin and not a Kshatriya. Exogamy is marrying out. Within the tribe and caste the system rule of exogamy is followed by which a person has to marry outside his own clan while in a caste based society one has to marry outside his gotra. Herein the moiety and phratry also comes into play. As stated earlier a moiety is exogamous and one has to marry into the other moiety.

1.3 A BRIEF HISTORY OF KINSHIP STUDIES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

The study of Kinship has its home in anthropology since the early 19th century. In the initial ages it emerged as a subject which became an integral part of social anthropology and the anthropologists engaged themselves in collecting data on genealogies. The terminologies used in describing kinship relation took centre

stage in social anthropological studies but by the turn of the century the new generation of anthropologists started questioning the relevance of collecting genealogies when it was looking at the society from Marxist and Feminist perspectives. Kinship studies were on the verge of collapse as the than anthropologists moved on to explore new avenues in anthropology. It was with the work of Schneider that there was a revival of kinship studies which tend to be historically grounded, focus on everyday experiences, and understandings, representation of gender, power and differences. Thus, under this section we would take up Kinship studies in two perspectives: i) Morgan’s Kinship system which laid the basis for the study of Kinship and ii) Contemporary Kinship studies how it emerged and what are the aspects under its consideration.

1.3.1 Morgan’s Kinship System

In Anthropological parlance Lewis Henry Morgan took up the initial studies on Kinship. Morgan’s idea of kinship was reflected in his two major works *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1870) and *Ancient Society* (1877) which consisted of ethnographic data collected from the Iroquois, an American tribe during his student days. Later he also acted on behalf of the Iroquois in cases related to land rights. As mentioned in Unit 1, Block 3 Morgan coined and described the terms **Classificatory** and **Descriptive** systems of kinship relationships. Morgan discovered that the Iroquois had two types of terminologies referring to their kinsman. He stated that in the classificatory system the Iroquois merged lineal kin with the collateral kins who were linked through the same ties (sex), like for example a father’s brother is classified as a father (both having the same ties through men) and a mother’s sister as mother (again both having same ties through female). While on the other hand distinguished lineals from collaterals who were not linked through the same ties, for example mother’s brother had a separate term of reference Uncle (being related differently-different sex) and father’s sister as Aunt. Likewise, parallel cousins (father’s brothers’ children and mother’s sisters’ children) were considered as siblings whereas cross cousins (father’s sisters’ children and mother’s brothers’ children) were not considered as siblings.

Morgan’s descriptive system on the other hand classified all collaterals together and kept them separate from the lineal kin. The descriptive system is commonly seen in the European societies where parents (father/mother) are distinguished from all collaterals, who themselves have common terms of reference regardless of the line of descent (uncle, aunt, nephew, niece). The **Iroquois Kinship System** clearly shows the distinction between the classificatory and the descriptive system.

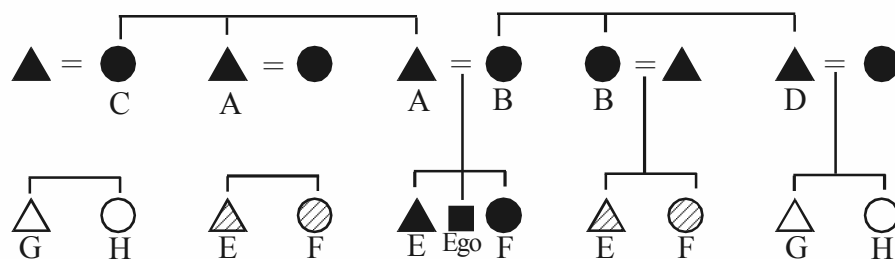


Fig. 1.2: Iroquois kinship system

Adapted from: Nanda, Serena and Richard L. Warms. 2010: 184

Herein, this figure we see that the Ego has the same term of reference for the kins with the same numbers. Under this system with unilineal descent mother’s side of the family (B and

D) is distinguished from father's side of the family (A and C), and cross cousins (△ and ○) from parallel cousins (△ and ⊙).

Morgan later discovered that Ojibwa Indians had the same classificatory and descriptive kinship terminology as the Iroquois, though the language spoken was completely different. Similarly, it was discovered that Tamil and Telegu populations of South India shared similar kinship terminologies as with the Iroquois and the Ojibwa Indians. The South Indian kinship later came to be known as **Dravidian kinship**. This part related to Kinship system in India would be taken up in detail in unit 5 of this same block.

The Eskimo's also had both classificatory and descriptive terms; in addition to sex and generation, and further distinguishes between lineal and collateral kins. Lineal relatives have highly descriptive terms; collateral relatives have highly classificatory terms. This kinship system came to be known as **Eskimo Kinship**.

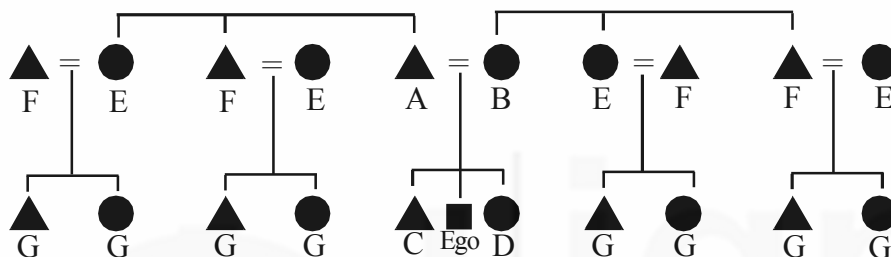


Fig.: 1.3: Eskimo kinship system

Adapted from: Nanda, Serena and Richard L. Warms. 2010: 184

In the Eskimo kinship a clear cut distinction is seen between the lineal and collateral relations. Ego uses one set of terms to refer to his lineal relations (A, B, C and D) and another set of term to refer to his collateral relations (E.F and G).

Even the **Omaha Kinship** is like the Iroquois, but further distinguishes between mother's side and father's side. Relatives on the mother's side of the family have more classificatory terms, while relatives on the father's side have more descriptive terms.

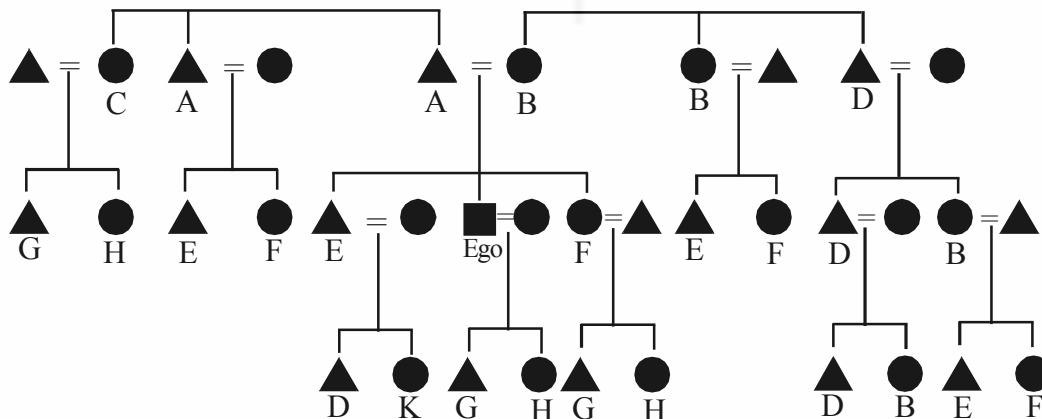


Fig.: 1.4: Omaha kinship system

Adapted from: Nanda, Serena and Richard L. Warms. 2010: 185

In the Omaha kinship a bifurcate merging system is seen among the patrilineal relations. Like in the Iroquois system it merges father and father's brother and mother and mother's sister. However, in addition it merges generations in mother's side. So, men who are members of Ego's mother's patrilineage are referred to by same term as for mother's brother, regardless of age or generation.

While the **Crow Kinship** is also like Iroquois, but further distinguishes between mother's side and father's side. Relatives on the mother's side of the family have more descriptive terms, and relatives on the father's side have more classificatory terms.

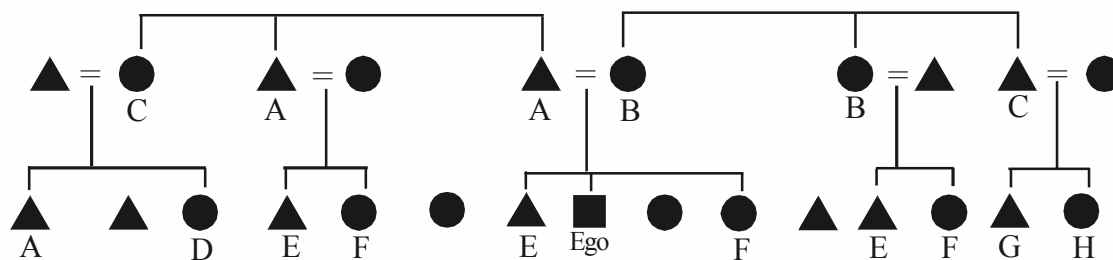


Fig.: 1.5: Crow kinship system

Adapted from: Nanda, Serena and Richard L. Warms. 2010: 185

The Crow kinship system is similar to Omaha Kinship system but is found among matrilineal society. Like the Omaha system it merges father and father's brother and mother and mother's sister. However, unlike the Omaha system, it merges generations on the father's side. So, all women who are members of Ego's father's matrilineage are referred to by same term as for father's sister, regardless of age or generation

Variations on the classificatory terminology was also observed by Morgan among certain groups called as Malayan but rephrased as **Hawaiian** or **generational** by later anthropologists. Under this kinship terminology mostly related to Polynesia each generation of males have one term while the females have another. Under such a system there is no distinction in terminology for relations from matrikin-mother's side and patrikin- father's side belonging to the same gender, lineal and collateral belonging to the same generation.

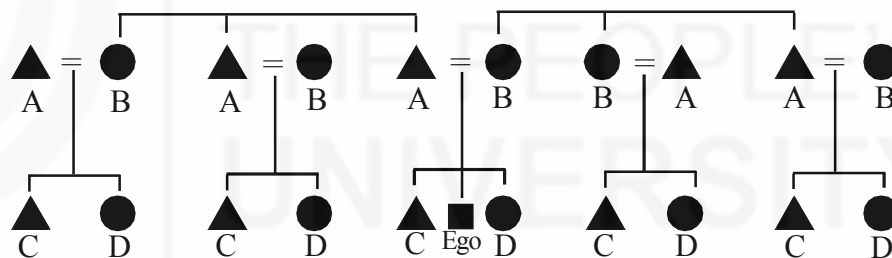


Fig.: 1.6: Hawaiian kinship system

Adapted from: Nanda, Serena and Richard L. Warms. 2010: 184

In the Hawaiian kinship the primary distinctions are between men and women and between generations. All members of the Ego's generation are designated by the same terms Ego uses for brother and sister. All members of Ego's parent's generation are designated by the same term Ego uses for mother and father.

Sudanese Kinship on the other hand was more descriptive that is no two relatives share the same term.

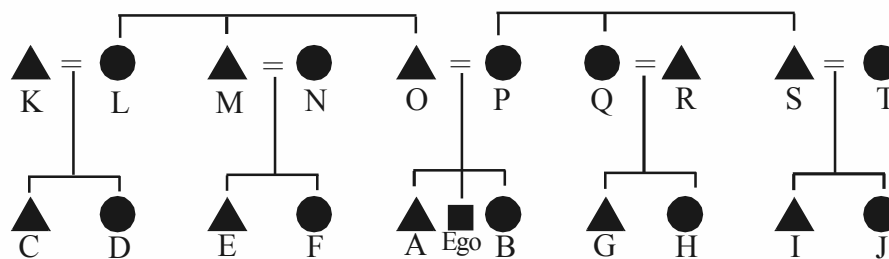


Fig.: 1.7 Sudanese kinship system

Adapted from: Nanda, Serena and Richard L. Warms. 2010: 185

The Sudanese kinship system occurs most frequently in societies with substantial hierarchy and distinctions of class. It includes a separate term for each relative.

Based on the above studies Morgan explained the evolution from a supposed form of primitive promiscuity. This was seen as a primordial situation in which the human population was divided into hordes with no form of marriage or restriction on sexual intercourse. Leading to a situation where children could identify their mothers only. Morgan related this state to the Malayan system of kinship.

Morgan's idea of Kinship was at par with the works of Johann J. Bachofen, a Swiss lawyer who postulated the theory of 'matriarchate' in which women ruled the society, later on followed by 'patriarchate' where marriage and family became a part of society. Scottish lawyer John McLennan working in the same lines postulated 'survivals' in terms of ritual expressions – of bride capture and female infanticides. According to McLennan for the early hunters and gathers a daughter was a liability whereas a wife was an asset. As daughters were killed off it led to competition for wives, which was eased by the practice for **polyandry** – a marriage where a woman can have more than one husband at the same time. While Sir Henry Maine (1861) a lawyer by profession from his experience of administrative work in India claimed that the earliest form of social organisation was the patrilineal family under the absolute authority of father-husband. Maine thus placed family at the start of social evolution followed by development of other social organisations as descent, clan etc. The conflict between historical priority of clan or family persisted into the 20th century. W. Robertson Smith (1885), Sir James Frazer (1910) and Emile Durkheim (1912) correlated the development of clans to early forms of religion involving blood, sacrifice and totemism. The association of religion with clan postulated by Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, (1912) was shown to be inappropriate by Alexander Goldenweiser a follower of Franz Boas. Although Radcliffe-Brown tried to revive the theory of Durkheim, an attempt which was put to rest by Levi-Strauss stating that clan is merely cognitive as it only provides an understanding of social universe.

An alternative approach was put forward by Malinowski, for whom nuclear family was the fundamental unit in society and dismissed kinship terminology as *kinship algebra* way to confusing to the understanding of ways of society. W.H.R. Rivers conceptualised the Genealogical method for collecting kin terms. The genealogical terminology used in many genealogical charts describes relatives of the Ego in question. Below a list of abbreviations is provided alongwith a diagrammatic representation which would help in tracing genealogical relationships. The abbreviations may be used to distinguish a single or compound relationship, such as BC for brother's children, MBD for a mother's brother's daughter, and so forth.

- B = Brother
- C = Child(ren)
- D = Daughter
- F = Father
- GC = Grandchild(ren)
- GP = Grandparent(s)
- P = Parent
- S = Son

- Z = Sister
- W = Wife
- H = Husband
- SP = Spouse
- LA = In-law
- SI = Sibling
- M = Mother
- (m.s.) = male speaking
- (f.s.) = female speaking

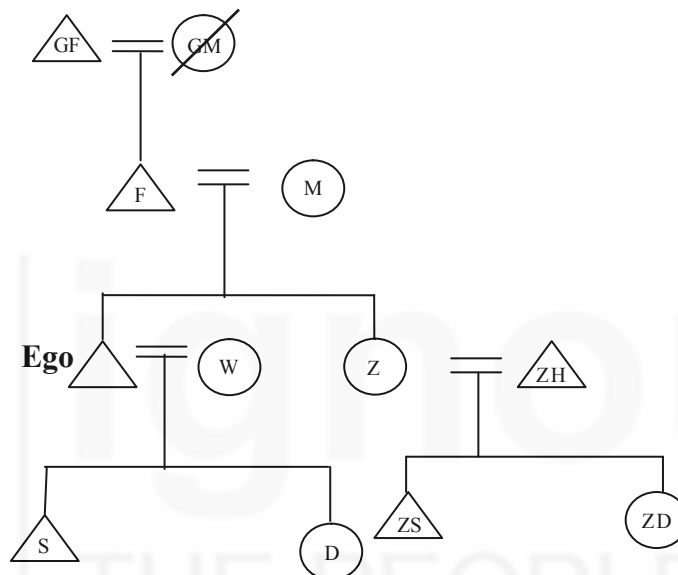


Fig.: 1.8

Reflection and Action

Trace the genealogy of your family considering yourself as the Ego. Also utilize the symbols to show the relations.

1.3.2 Contemporary Kinship Studies in the Late 20th Century

The shift of Kinship studies in terms of focus from emphasis on terminologies, tracing genealogies and usage was seen in Schneider’s work *American Kinship A Cultural Account*, (1968) which centered on symbols and meanings. It was an exemplary work in terms of interpretative anthropology. He was focused on representing American Kinship in terms of symbols and meanings rather than on kinship statuses, roles and institutions. He himself had stated that his book be considered as an “*account of what Americans say when they talk about kinshipthe symbols which are American Kinship*”. His work presented Kinship in a more lucid way pertaining to the symbols such as ‘family’, ‘home’ etc. which till date remains a significant insight to kinship in North America and Britain.

Levis- Strauss’s concern was mainly with the understanding of the underlying relationships among the constituent elements in kinship. His search for ‘deep structures’ capable of revealing the workings of the Mind was seen in his analysis of the structural significance of ties of marriage and alliance, the ways in which they link descent units of various kinds. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969) was a move from descent to alliance which redefined

the study from kinship, and marriage in particular to a critical reevaluation of the entailments of descent and various dimensions of unilinear groups. While under the same pattern of studying structures Kelly developed upon sibling ship as a principle of social order with principles of descent, filiations and affinity. Kelly's *Etoro Social Structure: A Study in Structural Contradictions* (1977) is a landmark work wherein the deviation was seen with the focus being on siblings rather than parent-child relations in kinship.

The early 70^s also saw a rise in Feminists writing and the influence was also seen in the works related to kinship. Some of the major works of the time were G. Rubin's, *The traffic in women: notes on the 'political economy' of sex*, (1975) and *Worlds of Pain: Life in the working class family*, (1976). Among other criticisms Levi Strauss's "exchange of women" came under strong criticisms in Rubin's works. Levi Strauss in his work has portrayed women as a means of exchange and a passage for political gains. In Evans-Pritchard's ethnography on the Nuers, he had also elaborated on the bride price/wealth of cattle exchange to show the wealth of a tribe, a means of establishing political ties between two tribes. Among the Nagas of North East India bride price is also a common practice. It's a system wherein a brides family is compensated for the loss of one earning member in the family.

Goody's work *Family and Inheritance: Rural Society in Western Europe 1200-1800*, (1976) was a departure from the study of kinship as structure, as it considered continuity and change in kinship and inheritance based on historic data as well. Le Roy Ladurie and others have during the time relied on legal records and archival material to discover the kinship ties in relation to peasant testimony on marriage, sexual division of labour etc. In relation to historical change Sahlin's work brings into focus the role of ambiguity and structural contradictions in historical change. Michael G. Peletz, *A Share of the Harvest: Kinship, Property and Social History Among the Malays of Rembau* (1988) and *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in Malay Society* (1996) focuses on the changes in kinship, gender and social structure in the Malays a matrilineal society associated with British colonialisation, coming in contact with globalisation and Islamic nationalism and reform.

The rise in societies with social class and social institutions saw the effects in the receding status of women in the context of breaking up of the kin-based societies. There was also a shift in the power and production system with the coming up of the states where the economy determines the mode of production as opposed to the kinship dominated mode of production in the segmentary societies. Meillassoux and Godelier showed the relation of lineage and production in a society. Herein these studies the Marxist tradition is seen.

In the present era we are also concerned with complex kinship related questions due to the new means of reproductive technologies such as sperm banks, in vitro fertilization (IVF) and surrogate motherhood. Herein the question lies with maternal rights whom to be considered as a mother- the biological mother who donates an egg, in such cases a husband's sperm is fertilized in controlled laboratory atmosphere with a woman's egg besides his wife (as she is not able to produce eggs due to various medical reasons) and then implanted into another woman's womb for gestation, or the surrogate mother who carried the child in her womb for nine months? Kinship studies have also encompassed the Kinship relations based on choice and not 'blood'. Weston's, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, (1996) relates the present day gay and lesbian relationships and the legalization of

the same in some countries thereby creating new types of families and marriages. These would be further taken up in the units on Family and Marriage in the same block.

1.4 SUMMARY

To sum up we can state that Kinship is one of the integral avenues of study in social anthropology. Kinship as we had seen is a social recognition of the biological ties and it takes into its fold adoption also. Kinsman cannot change their kinship ties and one has to follow the rules of kinship in descent and marriage. A man has two types of kin groups those related by blood ties, his cognates and those related by marriage- affines. One shares different types of relationship with his kinsmen based on the type of society either patrilineal or matrilineal. In a patrilineal society all relations are traced through his father while in a matrilineal society the ties are traced through the mother. Inheritance, descent and authority are based on the type of society patriarchy or matriarchy. In the history of Kinship we had seen that kinship study has been enveloped in controversies. In the late 20th century there were times when anthropologists had negated the relevance of kinship studies as ethnocentric and build upon certain western ideas about kinship. In the words of Malinowski kinship is 'kinship algebra' and the collection of genealogies had no meaning. Kinship studies however, in the late 20th century came up with a new vision and it moved beyond the realms of collection of genealogy. With the coming of modernism and feminism kinship studies ventured to new avenues and also took into its fold the study of latest trends that is of the gay and lesbian kinship. Thus, we can say that kinship studies are very much prerogative in the study of social anthropology and would remain so in the long run. In the upcoming unit, we would discuss about the theories of descent and alliance which helped in shaping kinship ties.

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Sample Questions

- 1) What is kinship?
- 2) What is the relationship between kinship and descent explain with examples.
- 3) What is matrilineal descent?
- 4) Give examples of patrilineal descent.
- 5) Discuss critically Morgan's classificatory and descriptive kinship.



UNIT 2 DESCENT AND ALLIANCE THEORIES

Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
 - 2.2 Descent Theory
 - 2.2.1 Development of Descent Theory
 - 2.2.2 Main Exponents and Critical Evaluation
 - 2.2.3 Counter Theories
 - 2.2.4 Conclusion
 - 2.3 Alliance Theory
 - 2.3.1 Development of Alliance Theory
 - 2.3.2 Main Exponent
 - 2.3.3 Analytical Assessment
 - 2.3.4 Conclusion
 - 2.4 Summary
- References
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



From this unit we will be able to:

- know about the theories (descent and alliance) which explain kinship;
- see how the existing theories have motivated many scholars in the formulation of new theories; and
- how various kinship ties shaped these theories.

Also comprehend that though these theories are defunct in the contemporary scenario, they still provide an insight into the constitution of family, sib, clan, moiety, marriage, exchange etc.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will deal with two theories which sought to understand kinship relations in an elaborate way. As we have already learnt in the last chapter, kinship is the relationship between individuals who are connected through genealogy, either biologically or culturally. When relationships are created through birth it leads to descent groups or consanguineals and when relationships are created through marriage, it forms affinal groups. Based on these relationships, two theories of kinship were advocated, the first as early as the 40s and the second was discussed in the 60s. These theories, descent and alliance are in today's anthropological enquiry considered almost defunct for various reasons which we will try to decipher in this unit. However as these theories formed an important part in kinship studies it is important for the student to have knowledge about these.

2.2 DESCENT THEORY

2.2.1 Development of Descent Theory

Descent theory also known as lineage theory came to the fore in the 1940s with the publication of books like *The Nuer* (1940), *African Political Systems* (1940) etc. This theory was in much demand in the discussion of social structure in British anthropology after the 2nd World War. It had much influence over anthropological studies till the mid-60s but with the downfall of the British Empire and its loss of colonies, the theory also sort of fizzled out. However its presence in certain works even now, like descriptions in ethnographic monographs, or its use by French Marxists to understand the lineage mode of production etc. makes it eligible enough for some intellectual enquiry.

Descent theory when it first became popular, it seemed to be a new idea, a revelation, but deeper studies exhibit that it was actually a part of the ongoing changes in ideas and notions which took place in the study of anthropology.

Descent theory, in order to be explained clearly can be divided into two periods, the classical and the modern. Both these periods have three stages each. The first phase of the classical period involves the creation of the new models of descent which was done by Henry Maine and Lewis Henry Morgan. These models were revised and given a new form by some anthropologists of that time, more notably by John F. McLennan. Finally in the third stage these models were empirically made use of in field studies by students of Franz Boas. The classical phase reached a low and remained mere speculations after this but were revived all of a sudden by British Africanists, and the modern phase of descent theory came up. The main issues in both the periods however were the same even though the approach applied to study them differed. The issues were relationship between blood and soil, kinship and territory, family and clan etc.

2.2.2 Main Exponents and Critical Evaluation

Henry S Maine formulates and discusses the patriarchal theory in his work *Ancient Law* (1861) which postulates how society was formed and grounded by families ruled by the eldest surviving male in it. He also talked about how families formed aggregations. With the death of the father, the sons stay behind together creating extended ties of kinship and a broader polity of sorts which formed the basis of societies. It was much later that attachment to territory created rivalry among blood ties, which became a matter of study of social organisation. This extended patriarchal family is known as a unilineal development. It allowed jural stability and endurance. His opposition towards concepts of societies based on kinship and those based on territory became the accepted norm in his subsequent generation. It was McLennan and Morgan who deliberated that human societies are fundamentally promiscuous rather than being based on family. In fact promiscuity only led to matriliney first instead of patriliney as it first created the mother/ child bond. Patriliney developed much later with the introduction of marriage and legal paternity.

The descent model of society developed in two ways, one in which theorists rearranged the fundamentals in a new way to produce assumed patterns of historical development. The second way was by using the model to cultural sources and to ethnographic work of native communities. For example, McLennan and Morgan stressed about the importance of exogamy in clans or totemism, was found to be

a common factor in kin groups. Emile Durkheim, in his *Division of Labour in Society* (1893) tried to understand how clan based societies operated in reality. For him, they would be together through mutual solidarity which he named mechanical solidarity. Clans however also created territorial segments. According to him this comes out from division of labour and the complex groups thus formed were united by function. This is what he termed as organic solidarity.

Another development in this theory took place in the early twentieth century where Boas' students made use of Morgan's model in reference to studies they conducted among American Indians. For Example, John Swanton wrote on the social organisation of American Indians. He questioned the historical validity of matrilineal clans as postulated by Morgan. His work showed that many North American tribes were not matrilineal and if at all matrilineal than they were not advanced than family based units as deduced by Morgan. Another ethnographer, Frank Speck demonstrated in 1915 that the Algonkian hunter-gatherers have families and they are also associated to territories. This evidence too refuted Morgan's claims.

R.H. Lowie summarized the critique of Morgan by noting that all data showed that family has been present in all stages of culture. He also noted that there is no fixed succession of maternal and paternal descent. Both higher and lower civilizations in many cases give importance to paternal side of the family. His final postulation was, family (bilateral) and clan, sib, moiety (unilateral) are rooted in local and consanguinal factor.

The prominent British anthropologists of that time, like Rivers and Radcliffe-Brown were clearly associated in their views with their American counterparts, more so with Maine and McLennan than Morgan. The debate about the historical superiority of 'father right' or 'mother right' was done away with. Family as a group and its existence from a very early time was accepted. Clans for the British anthropologists were associated with territories though for Rivers clans are based on common descent than on territory. Morgan had identified the classificatory kinship terminology, though initially was connected to forms of group marriage, later on got linked to the presence of exogamous clans. Rivers too supported this notion later on, in relation to studying kinship relationships in America, India, Africa, Australia etc.

The British and American scholars only differed from each other when Rivers and Radcliffe-Brown started investigating the corporate role of descent groups. Rivers talked about 'descent' in terms of the way in which membership of a group is recognised and also for modes of transmission of property, rank etc. but the second notion was not accepted as these processes do not correspond to each other all the time. Radcliffe-Brown's essay on "Patrilineal and Matrilineal Succession" gave Rivers' points a concrete basis. He noted that social organisations needed endurance and finality. Hence societies required corporations which can be either based on territorial ties or kinship ties. Such kin based ties are unilineal descent groups which describe group membership on a descent criterion. Radcliffe-Brown based his ideas from his work on *The Social Organisation of Australian Tribes* (1931).

It was A.L. Kroeber who however put forward a critique of Radcliffe Brown's study. His critique was mainly on descent theory of Radcliffe Brown, where he disagreed to his claim of placing descent groups at the centre in Australia. For Kroeber, moiety, clan and any other unilateral descent groups play secondary parts in many societies and are not central. Family or clan did not actually have

any historical character about who followed whom. In societies where clans played an important role, they were always found with basic family units.

The clan model did not die away but came back to the forefront as a functional model known as lineage model. It was basically used for the understanding of contemporary relationships between institutions, more so to study particular African example of segmentary lineage system. The field studies associated with this functionalist model was aimed at analysis of living societies. Hence relationship between territorial group and descent groups or between families and lineages were with the help of this model deciphered as real problems rather than historical issues.

Works on the Nuer by Evans-Pritchard and the Tallensi by Meyer Fortes developed theoretical explorations and definition of typologies. In Fortes "The Structure of Unilineal Descent Groups" (*American Anthropologist*, 1953) he submitted the segmentary lineage model as an important offering of British Anthropology of his times. His formulation suggested that the structure of unilineal descent group could be generalised and its position in the complete social system can be viewed. For example he particularly talked about the existing continuous nature of such lineages in Africa and their political role specially where political centralisation was not strong. Thus the social structure would exhibit how territory and descent would connect with each other.

During that time, more classificatory studies continued. They tried to look at the variety and types of descent groups, how corporateness could be recognised and the importance to be devoted to unilineality. Leach however, was against typologizing and even spoke against basic categories like matrilineal and patrilineal. There were others who supported the pattern of sets of variables rather than the increase of types and subtypes.

2.2.3 Counter Theories

Considering that so much of effort and time was used for creating the perfect descent theories, it nevertheless faded out in the 1960s because of the many complicacies and misunderstandings created by the ideas postulated by the thinkers. In the 1960s in fact it faced the main challenge from a model which was designed by Levi-Strauss based on the primitive social structure. It was referred to as the Alliance theory. This model too agreed to the existence of segmentary organisation of unilineal descent groups but posited the main arena of the system in exchanges of marriage between such exogenous groups.

This alternative also critiqued Radcliffe-Brown by offering another interpretation on the relationship between family and clan. For Radcliffe-Brown the universal family created sentiments which took solidarity among siblings to a larger grouping while Levi-Strauss stated the siblings can be linked through the exchange of sisters in marriage. Similarly Edmund Leach argued on Fortes' complementary filiation. For Fortes, ties of affinity while generating importance to ties of descent came under the expression, which Fortes called complementary filiation. For Leach both segmentary lineage systems and primitive states could be identified by the system of preferential unilateral marriage alliances which finally is linked to local descent groups.

A neo-Malinowskian model was introduced during the same time which was called the Transactional theory. In his study of a village named Pul Eliya in Sri Lanka, Edmund Leach postulated that the reasoning behind social action was to

be seen at the level of individual management of resources for personal gain. This was in contrast to the segmentary lineage model. Human beings and the community's action are based on kinship and descent principles. For him human beings are dependent on a territory for their livelihood. Thus the conflict between territory and descent was brought up again in Leach's work. However Leach did not distinguish between kinship relations and between individuals though it works as a significant critique of descent theories.

2.2.4 Conclusion

In contemporary anthropological study of social systems, the descent model has no credibility. It does not look into the local models or notions that societies possess in their own realm. And it is not a 'repetitive series' of descent groups which are essential for organising political and economic events. It however helps in the study of kinship in anthropology, as it gives us ideas about how earlier societies were made up. It also helps in moulding itself into other boarder models of society. Beyond these Descent theories offer no significant contribution in anthropology today.

Reflection and Action

Delineate the features of the Descent theory.

2.3 ALLIANCE THEORY

2.3.1 Development of Alliance Theory

The alliance theory in the study of kinship is also known as the general theory of exchange. It bears its roots to the French structuralist Claude Lévi-Strauss and hence is also known as the structural way of studying kinship ties. The alliance theory was first discussed in Lévi-Strauss' monumental book named *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1949). Its English version is known as *Elementary Structures of Kinship*. Alliance theory was quite popular during the 1960s and went on to be discussed and deliberated till the 1980s where the issue of incest taboo was taken up by not only anthropologists but also by psychologists, political philosophers etc. Alliance theory tries to enquire about how inter-individual relationships are woven and how finally they constitute society.

The theory developed to study those kinds of kinship systems which exemplify positive marriage (cross-cousin marriage) rules. However besides providing conjectures on marriage, it also provides a general theoretical awareness about kinship. The study of marriage rules have been used from the initial days of kinship studies to comprehend kinship terminologies. Scholars like W.H.R. Rivers also used marriage (symmetrical cross-cousin marriage) and terminology (bifurcate merging) and tried to exhibit a relationship between each other. For him the marriage rule is the cause and the terminology is the effect. Australian kinship system, which is quite perplexing, was also studied elaborately by anthropologists to be familiar with their descent system. They too made use of marriage alliances for this. Most scholars agree with each other on the notion that in symmetrical cross-cousin marriage pacts, double descent is always seen, directly or indirectly.

However exponents of descent theories tried to go on about this through various instances, like for example B.Z. Seligman's tries to convert types of marriage to forms of descent or Radcliffe-Brown's extra stress upon descent where he finds it worrying that the Australian kinship system has a core matrilineal exogamy along

with what he mentions as classic Australian patrilineal system. Radcliffe-Brown did accept that relationship between individuals and marriage rules are more important than descent groups. However, coming back to alliance theory and its development, Lévi-Strauss' alliance theory was in complete defiance to Radcliffe-Brown's functionalist theory.

2.3.2 Main Exponent

Alliance theory was categorically created by Claude Lévi-Strauss, though analytical assessment has been also offered by Rodney Needham and Louis Dumont. Lévi Strauss studied and observed the connections formed between consanguinity and affinity in his investigation of non-European societies. These two are both opposed and complementary to each other. Due to this rules of preferential marriage and marriage prohibitions are an incorporated part of this theory. Such rules in fact rise due to the connection between blood ties and affinal ties. It is the marriage ties, according to Levi Strauss and many of his contemporaries which create interdependence between families and lineages.

According to Levi-Strauss alliance theory is based on incest taboo and the prohibition of incest is recognised universally. It is viewed as a fundamental condition of human social life. A man is not allowed to make a woman his wife who is his immediate kin and in fact he has to give her away to another man. It is this prohibition of incest that led human groups to follow exogamy. Lévi-Strauss says this prohibition is beyond any sociological explanation and clearly shows a difference between consanguinity and affinity as the basis of kinship system. For him incest taboo is thus seen as a negative prescription and it is only because of this that men had to move out of the core kinship group or come in from another group to it. This theory has much similarity with Sigmund Freud's work *Totem and Taboo* (1913).

This process of incest taboo where a daughter or sister is sent to a different family commences a circle of exchange of women. Strauss views marriage as primarily a process of exchange (between one men and other men or between one domestic group and others). He observes positive marriage rules from the negative prescriptions of prohibition. The main notion of alliance theory is then a reciprocal exchange which creates affinity. It is the positive marriage rules which regulates this exchange and thus gives rise to what Strauss call 'elementary' structures.

For Lévi-Strauss, there are two models of structure in the study of kinship and exchange in marriage. When women in the ego's group are proposed to another group which is eligible for such exchange then such a situation may be called as elementary structures of kinship. Similarly if the group of possible spouses for the women are not known and kept open in the ego's group, excluding particular kin people like the nuclear family, an uncle, an aunt etc, this Strauss terms as complex structures of kinship. This is easily seen in the western scenario.

In a society, keeping in mind incest prohibition, a kinship system is made up of a combination of many traits, like inheritance, affinity, descent, residence etc. and an understanding is reached by the combination of these features as a whole. If all the transmission between these features takes place systematically between generations in one and the same line it is known as harmonic while it is said to be disharmonic if some of it is passed patrilineally and some matrilineally. It was observed that the rules of cross cousin marriage where it exists is associated with this. Theoretically from this, three types of affinal relations can exist, bilateral,

matrilateral and patrilineal. In bilateral cross cousin marriage, the spouse is mother's brother's child and father's sister's child. It forms a self sufficient unit as two intermarrying groups exchange women as wives. Lévi-Strauss calls this closed or restricted exchange. He also connected it with disharmonic transmission.

In contrast to this, he talks about the implications of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage. Here a man marries his mother's brother's daughter. So to elaborate if a given line A gives their women to Line B and themselves take women from C, finally at the end a circle is formed where Z after receiving from Y, will give back to A. This is what Levi-Strauss class generalised form of exchange. It is opposed to the closed type as it first consists of three groups and can accommodate any number of groups. This type has similarities to harmonic transmissions, which are either matrilineal or patrilineal.

It is the network of relationships which shows the identity of the intermarrying group. Relationships that come out of different generations within the same group of affines are terminologically compared. It is due to intermarriage being directionally adapted to, hence a group does not receive wives from a group to which it gives its daughters, as has been mentioned above. A possibility of disparity in status is noted between wife-givers and wife takers. Levi-Strauss' third type, the patrilineal type has been superficially dealt with. It seems to be there in his discussion as a failed hybrid of the other two.

Lévi-Strauss' model tried to offer a proper description of cross-cousin marriage, exchange of sisters, rules of exogamy etc. He postulated that it is the marriage rules which after a certain period generate social structures. This he says is because marriages are a coming together of not just two individuals but also of two groups. With his root for such relationships as based on incest taboo, he formulated that it was because of it that natural impulses were kept under check and it also created the division of labour based on sex. We have discussed the former notion in the above paragraphs about how women are exchanged and the latter idea prescribes work for women at a domestic level. As noted this exchange of wives are arrangements which advances inter-group alliances and helps in creating structures of social networks. The kinship structures that Levi-Strauss proposed were of three kinds, which are created out from two types of exchange. They are elementary, semi-complex and complex structures.

The first i. e. elementary structures are centered on rules of positive marriage which indicate whom an individual can marry. Elementary systems work on two forms of exchange, direct exchange or restricted exchange between two groups of people which is symmetric. In restricted exchange, father's sister and mother's brother marry and the children born out of them become bilateral cross cousins. Then to maintain the continuity the two lineages marry again. Restricted exchange structures are not very common.

Elementary structures have another form of exchange which is called generalised exchange. Here a man can marry either his mother's brother's daughter, which is a matrilineal cross-cousin marriage or his father's sister's daughter, which is a patrilineal cross cousin marriage. These forms of exchange give rise to asymmetry between three groups. According to Levi-Strauss matrilineal cross cousin marriages are common in Asia, especially among the Kachin.

Compared to restricted exchange, generalised exchange was considered to be finer as it permitted the incorporation of innumerable numbers of groups. Levi-Strauss gave the example of Amazonian tribes who followed restricted form of

exchange. They were considered to be unstable as they usually were made up of moieties which broke quite regularly.

Generalised exchange on the other hand allows more amalgamation but exhibits hierarchy. The wife – givers are superior to wife takers and the last wife taking group is much inferior to the first wife giving group. Such disparities can weaken the complete structure of society. Levi Strauss gave the example of the Kachins, in *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, to show such behaviour. Levi-Strauss noted that the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage was better than the patrilateral one, from the structure point of view. As the exchange sequences are not very long as the direction of wife exchange is inverted every successive generation, hence it has less probability to create social integrity. As has been mentioned earlier patrilateral cross-cousin marriage is very rare and hence not clearly touched by Levi-Strauss. The peril that matrilateral cross cousin marriage faces is that group A as a giver has to wait to get a wife from a group which would be very far from the line and not much obligated to give a woman for marriage. A delay which might be caused is not found in restricted exchange system.

Between Elementary and Complex structures, Levi-Strauss contributed to a third structure, the semi-complex structure. It is also known as the Crow-Omaha system as it is found among the Crow and Omaha native Indians of North America. It is in many instances like the elementary structures, as for example it also contains negative marriage rules and almost have rules like prescribing marriage to some groups.

2.3.3 Analytical Assessment

Levi-Strauss' alliance theory is not without its flaws. His arguments are based on societies about which he has given examples of, which are clearly viripotestal and also that his ideas of marriage was simple. The fundamental character and explanatory value of exchange as defined by Levi Strauss faced some extreme criticism. For supporters of consanguinity as a self-explanatory system, the prohibition of incest as the basis for the difference in consanguinity and affinity is redundant. Marriage as been seen as a form of exchange was also questioned, one because women were seen as possessions, private properties and also because exchange was used in too wide a sense that it lost its meaning. Strauss' main confronter, R. Needham tried to make clear cut distinction between prescription and preference in rules of marriage. For Needham, prescription on its own has structural involvements in the whole social system. He states that if prescription rules are seen not only as a marriage rule but as significant in the entire system, then the danger arises in underrating the importance of other types, like preferential marriage. These too have structural elements and the distinctions are sometimes not visible at all.

The main development in the alliance theory which was observed was that there was a refinement of the concept of alliance and to make to more empirical, it was given a more structural identity. Initially the theory was mostly concerned with the exchange of women between greater exogamous components of the society.

Needham tried to improve the notion that matrilateral marriage rules would result in groups intermarrying in a circle. It was suggested that the marriage circle was too limited in number and the people involved should be aware of them. Needham further asserts that such alliance cycles do exist, and that too implicitly, however their existence does not bring to an end the function or meaning of marriage

alliance. Levi-Strauss himself noted that conscious rules were to be considered more important than their results in terms of exchange. In the absence of cycles, the fundamental relationship can be formed from one of the many types of consanguinal relationship between paired local descent groups. Louis Dumont points out that where marriage alliance does not result in a system of exchange at the level of group as a totality, it remains an integral part of the system of categories and roles as understood by the people studied.

Needham further criticizes Levi-Strauss' structuralism by calling the mediating concepts of reciprocity and exchange as facing distinctive opposition. The basic assimilation is not of groups but of categories as is viewed by the social mind, where marriage rule is nothing but a gamut of ideas. Social relationships are demarcated by classification and Needham perceived that asymmetrical intermarriage, though could not function with less than three alliance groups, can be dualistically theorized. This was in accordance to a complete dualist arrangement.

Louis Dumont like Needham states that structural entailments which are observed are diverse from the group scheme on which attention was initially given. The phrase marriage alliance hence includes both a generic phenomenon of intellectual assimilation and a particular fact of group integration. Dumont further states that this structural theory in its limited arena on its own rises above the prejudices in our own culture. For him words like cross-cousin marriage maybe useful in theory but in real life is deceptive. A concrete comprehension can be reached according to him when the marriage rule which is known as marriage alliance is viewed as offering a diachronic aspect which is only connected to descent or consanguinity. If this can be done then it will be possible to go beyond our margins of thought built upon our own society and make evaluations and appraisals on the basis of the key perceptions involved, in this case consanguinity and affinity.

2.3.4 Conclusion

Alliance theory though quite categorical did not continue to work as a speculation which bore definite fruits. A lot more was anticipated from the theory. The inference of marriage alliance for status, economy, and political organisation was never clearly explained. The etymological investigation remained defectively structural. The study of terminologies did not finally help in comprehending or bettering this theory. Though alliance theory had much greater explanatory value than descent theory, yet in today's contemporary anthropological setting, investigations have minimized their interest in kinship studies to understand the diversity of kinship systems. Hence the question of universal kinship structures remains unanswered due to which the debates between descent and alliance theories have shrunk.

2.4 SUMMARY

To summarize the unit, we may say that in the study of kinship, two theories – the descent theory and the alliance theory were proposed by anthropologists. This was to work out the different structures of kinship through the models based on birth and marriage ties. However these theories though intricate and complex in their description and a matter of much debate while they were animate, lost their significance and worth as they were in reality and in today's understanding of society, not enough persuasive or credible. These theories are obsolete in the present scenario yet their knowledge is necessary for the student as it did play an important role in the development of kinship studies in anthropology in the past.

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Suggested Reading

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Sample Questions

- 1) What are the two theories in the study of kinship?
- 2) Give a detailed analysis of descent theory.
- 3) Explain how Levi-Strauss designed alliance theory. What were its main deliberations?
- 4) How clearly did these theories help in the study of kinship?

UNIT 3 MARRIAGE

Contents

- 3.1 Introduction
 - 3.2 Concepts, Meaning and Definitions
 - 3.2.1 Prescribed and Preferential Marriages
 - 3.2.2 Types of Marriages
 - 3.2.3 Ways of Acquiring a Mate
 - 3.2.4 Divorce
 - 3.3 Functions of Marriage
 - 3.4 Changing Dimensions of Marriage
 - 3.5 Summary
- References
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



After reading this unit, the students should be able to:

- define the different rules and types associated with marriage;
- outline the various functions of a marriage; and
- discuss changing aspects of marriage in the contemporary times.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a phenomena found in all types of societies though the pattern of marriage differs in different societies. The first section of the unit would introduce the students to the concept, definition and meaning of marriage, the various types of marriages that are prevalent in different societies. Herein, we would be able to answer the question as to why marriage rules though not similar among the different societies yet have almost the same functions. With the changing times, marriage too has come under the hammer and the institution itself is going through various changes. These would be discussed in the last section of this unit.

3.2 CONCEPTS, MEANING AND DEFINITIONS

Marriage by most anthropologists has been described as a universal phenomena yet the debate continues as to how marriage came into existence. In the early year's social thinkers and anthropologists basically the followers of the theory of evolutionism were of the opinion that human beings lived in a state of promiscuity where individual marriage did not exist. In such a society all the men had access to all the women and the children thus, born were the responsibility of the society at large. This slowly gave rise to group marriages to bring regulation and general order in the society where either many men were married to several women or several men were married to a single woman and vice-versa. However, later in

the day the natural instinct of jealousy imbedded in human beings has been assumed as the reason behind single marriages to restore harmony in a society. So far in the theoretical part Block 3 unit 1 Classical Theories, and also in Block 1 unit 2 Philosophical and Historical Foundations of Social Anthropology, we have discussed that the earlier societies were nomadic and the rule of the age was anarchy, so it is impossible to state exactly where and when marriage first originated. While anthropologists like Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht* (1861), McLennan *Primitive Marriage* (1865) and others were of the view that society emerged out of mother right, there were others like Sir Henry Maine through his work *Ancient Law*, (1861) postulated that since the emergence of society the rule was patriarchy. So far this goes, the debate continues. Leaving this aside let's start with understanding what the term 'marriage' stands for, instead of trying to focus on how marriage originated, through some of the definitions provided by anthropologists who had worked in this field.

George Peter Murdock (1949) has defined marriage as a universal institution that involves residential co-habitation, economic co-operation and the formation of the nuclear family. While Westermarck had emphasised on marriage as a recognised union between a man and a woman, that the spouse live together and that the couple have clearly recognised mutual sexual rights. These definitions could not be considered as universal definition of marriage as it failed to encompass types of marriages such as polygynous and polyandrous marriages. Such definitions also did not take into account marriages where the spouses lived in separate residences and societies where the responsibility of the child lies with the mother's brother rather than with the biological father. These are some of the aspects which we would take up in later part of the unit.

Kathleen Gough (1959) in her study of the Nayars has defined marriage as a 'relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons, which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship, is accorded full birth-status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum'. This definition of marriage by Gough took into consideration polyandry which was missing in the earlier definitions. While, Edward Westermarck in a later edition of his book, *The History of Human Marriages*, fifth edition rewritten 1921 due to the criticisms levied redefined marriage as a social institution which may be defined as a relation of one or more men to one or more women that is recognised by custom or law, and involves certain rights and duties both in the case of parties entering the union and in the case of the children born in it. However, among the Azande of Sudan where marriages based on homosexuality is a prescribed norm it does not find a place in the above definitions of marriage.

William N. Stephens defined marriage as 'a socially legitimate sexual union, begun with public pronouncement undertaken with the idea of permanence, assumed with more or less explicit marriage contract which spells out reciprocal economic obligations between spouses, and their future children'. This definition also fails to take into consideration the taboos that exist in various societies related to marriage. Thus, for the convenience of anthropological discourse we would refer to the definition of marriage as in Notes and Queries (given below) to understand the types of marriages acceptable and practiced in 80% of the societies across the world. The other forms of marriages would be taken up as variations from the prescribed norm as they are acceptable only in a few societies.

“Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are recognised as legitimate offspring of both partners” (Notes and Queries on Anthropology 1951: 111).

3.2.1 Prescribed and Preferential Marriages

Societies have their own norms when it comes to marriage whom to marry and who is out of bounds. In certain societies there are certain rules of suitability based on which a person has to acquire a mate. While selecting one's mate one has to follow certain rules and choose the bride/groom within these norms. A man/woman might be prohibited from acquiring a mate who does not fall under the suitable category as for example in the Hindu society a woman belonging to a higher caste cannot marry a man belonging to a caste lower than her. Such, rules when strictly followed even though when very few members of the suitable category are available is termed as prescribed norms. The rules which are preferred but not strictly followed are known as preferential norms. Cross cousin marriage in many societies is seen as a preferential norm.

Incest taboo is a universal norm for almost all societies, which pertains to restrictions in marriage and sexual relations among certain categories of close relatives generally related by blood like father and daughter, mother and son and sometimes also parallel cousins. Though, incest taboo was not prevalent among the earlier Greek and the Hawaiian royal families where it was a prescribed norm for marriage. In these ancient royal families it was believed that royalty could only be passed down to the child of two royal family members, usually a brother and sister. The Tallensi of Ghana also does not strongly prescribe to the norm of incest taboo between brother and sister while a relationship between a man and the wife of a lineage mate is an unpardonable sin (Mair, 1997).

The rules of either endogamy or exogamy are also prescribed norms in many societies to which a man has to adhere while acquiring a mate. **Endogamy** refers to marriage within a group, while **exogamy** means marriage outside the group. Endogamy encompasses marriage within the believers of the same faith or religion, caste in Hindu society and within members of the same tribe.

In societies where endogamy is prevalent parallel cousin marriage is the preferential norm. Among such societies marriage between first cousins is permitted, though where the rule of lineage exogamy is practiced cousin belonging to different lineage is preferred. For easy understanding; the children of siblings of opposite sex (brother- sister) - are called **cross-cousins**; while the children of siblings of the same sex (brother-brother) are called **parallel cousins**. In many of the Islamic societies a man marries his father's brother's daughter known as **parallel cousin marriage** which is a very rare form of endogamy. The Kurds of eastern and southeastern Turkey still continue with the practice of parallel cousin marriage.

Cross-cousin marriages are the preferential norm in societies where the rule of exogamy is adhered to. A man's lineage is traced either through his mother's or father's side. If the lineage is traced through the father than marriage with his aunt's (father's sisters) daughter is the preferred norm and when lineage is traced through the mother than the preferred norm for marriage is mother's brother's daughter. When a man marries a daughter of his mother's brother it's a **matrilateral cross-cousin marriage** while if he marries a daughter of his father's sister then it's a **patrilateral cross-cousin marriage**.

Matrilateral cross cousin marriages are common in many of the matrilineal societies like the Kachins and the Purum as described by Edmund Leach in his work '*The Political System of HighLand Burma: A Study of the Kachins Social Structure*' (1970), while Meyer Fortes had described the Ashanti and Tallensi of Ghana. In such societies the rules of descent and authority lies with the mother's brother and as such marriage to his daughter puts an end to all such questions of inheritance, authority and it is a way to avoid conflicts which we would discuss more fully later.

Besides the above mentioned prescribed and preferential marriages, levirate and sororate at times form a prescribed norm for widows and widowers in a few societies. *Levirate* is a marriage form, in which after the decease of an elder brother the younger brother is obliged to marry the widow. The term levirate is derived from the Latin word *levir* meaning husband's brother. This is a type of marriage often seen in societies where exogamy is not prevalent. *Sororate* on the other hand is a practice in which a widower marries his dead wife's sister.

Reflection and Action

Find out the various preferential and prescribed norms for marriage in your own society and also reflect upon the reasons for the same.

3.2.2 Types of Marriages

Depending on the type of society, the marriage pattern and style also vary. Before going into the depth of the topic let's outline the types of marriages universally found which are (a) Monogamy and (b) Polygamy. **Monogamy** is a form of marriage in which the practice is to have only one spouse at one time. In the western world the divorce rate is increasingly higher and serial monogamy is witnessed. **Serial monogamy** pertains to a state where a man has a series of wives one after the other, but only one wife at any given point of time. Thus, in the United States where divorce rate is high but only monogamy is legal, serial monogamy is widely noticed. In societies like the Hindu society of India monogamy pertains to **non-serial monogamy** where a man has a single wife throughout his life. In such societies the divorce rate is rare and as such it is the preferred norm.

Polygamy is a term derived from the Greek word *polys gamos* meaning often married. It is a form of marriage in which an individual has more than one spouse at any given time, or married to more than one individual. In polygamy when a marriage involves one man with many women it is known as **polygyny**. The wives of a man if sisters or related then such a marriage is known as **sororal polygyny**. In many of the Islamic countries this practice is prevalent. In some Australian Aboriginal societies, the elder brother often marries the two eldest sisters. While the younger sisters of the wives' would also marry their sisters' husband's younger brother or brothers. This is said to create a clear advantage in power and self-sufficiency in these societies. The Swazi society of Africa practice sororal polygyny. In societies practising sororal polygyny it is believed that two sisters have better chances of getting along with one another rather than two unrelated women who have not grown up together. It is a resilient approach because sisters are assumed to have less of a competitive approach towards their husband's affection because as sisters they would be more inclined towards maintaining harmony and live in mutual understanding.

The rules of residence in sororal polygyny differ from society to society. In some societies the wives co-habits like among the Zulus of South Africa, while in the Swazi society each wife sets up separate residence. Upon death of a husband, the marriage does not come to an end. A blood relative of the husband assumes full

responsibility of providing domestic, economic, and material support for the women. If the wives of a man are not related such a marriage is known as *non-sororal polygyny*. In the Comoro islands non-sororal polygyny is practiced (Madan & Majumdar, Mair et.al).

Polyandry derives its name from the Greek word *poly* ‘many’ and *andros* ‘man’. Thus, in this type of marriage a woman is married to more than one man. Societies where polyandry has been found are Tibet, Canadian Arctic, northern parts of Nepal, Nigeria, Bhutan, parts of India and Sri Lanka. It is also encountered in some regions of Mongolia, among the Mosuo people in China, and in some societies of Sub-Saharan Africa such as the Maasai people in Kenya and northern Tanzania and American indigenous communities. Polyandry has been practised in several cultures — in the Jaunsar-Bawar region in Uttarakhand, among the Nairs, Theeyas and Todas of South India, and the Nishi of Arunachal Pradesh. Indian examples would be detailed in Unit 5 Kinship, Marriage and Family in India, of the same block. The Guanches, the first known inhabitants of the Canary Islands, practiced polyandry until their disappearance.

Fraternal polyandry refers to a marriage in which a woman is married to two or more brothers also known as *adelphic* polyandry. The term fraternal has its origin in the Latin term *frater*- ‘brother’. Account of Fraternal polyandry in Indian Hindu society is seen in the great epic Mahabharata where the five Pandava brothers were married to princess Draupadi. Polyandry is found in certain regions of Tibet and Nepal as a socially accepted practice.

The type of marriage where a woman is either married to a number of non-related men or related kinsmen (clan brothers) such a marriage is known as *non-fraternal* polyandry. In the recent past the Todas’ of southern India practiced both fraternal and non-fraternal polyandry where the husbands were either brothers or related kinsmen but with the changing age monogamy has made inroads into this society and is fast becoming a part. Though among the Nayars of Malabar Coast of Southern India the husbands were not related they had to belong to a social strata equivalent to that of the woman as prescribed by the society. In societies where polyandry is practiced, when a woman becomes pregnant the paternity is not ascribed to the biological father (genitor) but is accepted through a ceremony wherein any one of the brothers as sociological father (pater) can assume social responsibility of the child by paying the midwife, as in the case of the Nayars of Southern India. While in some cases the eldest brother assumes the responsibility of the child in case of fraternal polyandry (Gough 1959, Mair 1997).

When the husbands of a woman are father and son such a marriage is known as *familial polyandry*. It is a very rare form of polyandry and has been found prevalent among the Tibetians. There are many speculations for such a marriage and one of them relates to the small population size of the Tibetians and the high altitude in which they live. A wife if taken from other communities who live in the low lands, it becomes difficult for her to adjust to the harsh climatic conditions and as such sharing a wife by father and son is taken up as an option.

Polygynandry another variety of polygamy pertains to a marriage where several men are married to several women or a man has many wives and a woman has many husbands at any given time. Such marriages were prevalent among the Marquesans of Polynesia and also among the Todas of the Nilgiri hills and the Khasas of Jaunsar Bawar of India.

3.2.3 Ways of Acquiring a Mate

Marriage as the term implies has a lot of connotation in different societies. It does not just mean a man finding a girl to be his wife. Even when a man chooses a mate for himself he has to ascribe to the norms of the society while claiming his bride. Herein, we would outline some of the prescribed customs in societies through which a man can acquire a mate.

Marriage by negotiation is a very frequently practised way of acquiring a mate. It is found in most of the simple societies like the Ituri of Congo region in Africa, Siwai of Soloman Islands, the aboriginals of Australia, Andamanese of Andaman Islands and also in complex societies like the Hindu society of India, China, Japan, Europe and America. In such a system either the girl's family or the boy's family (as per the custom) puts forward a proposal for marriage through a third party or mediator. This third party is generally someone known to both the would be bride and groom's family. In Indian context it is also known as *arranged marriage*. In earlier times the bride and groom meet each other only during the wedding, but this rigidity is being relaxed now a days. In such a system bride price, bride wealth, dowry also has an important role to play and it is usually a long drawn process where consensus of the bride and groom's family is all done by the mediator.

Bridewealth is usually the compensation given upon marriage by the family of a groom to the bride's family. Varieties of currencies and goods are used for paying the bridewealth depending upon the societies. Mostly the bridewealth is movable property given by the groom's family. For example reindeers are given as bridewealth by the reindeer-herding Chukchee, sheep by the Navajo, cattles by the Nuers, Maasai and Samburu of Africa, spears in Somalia etc. The amount of bridewealth to be paid is based on various factors of which some are related to the status of the groom's family and others on the bride and her social acceptance as prescribed by the society. For example: if a woman has given birth to a pre-nuptial child than her bridewealth is very low whereas among the Kipsigis of western Kenya if the distance of the bride's natal home is very far away from the marital home than the bride wealth is very high as she is able to spend less time at her natal home and devote more time to the domestic chores in the husband's home. In some cases if the groom's family is not able to pay the bridewealth than compensation is made in the means of bride service in the form of labour wherein the groom goes to the bride's house and helps in the hunting, farming and other related activities. The time span of the bride service varies from society to society and it might last from a few months to several years (Nanda et.al). *Dowry* on the other hand is the transfer of goods and money from the bride's family to the groom's family. Previously a practiced norm in the Hindu society, the tradition of dowry was prohibited in 1961 under Indian civil law and subsequently by Sections 304B and 498a of the Indian Penal Code. The move was made to protect the women from dowry related harassment and domestic violence.

Marriage by exchange also forms a part of the marriage by negotiation system. Herein, such a system the bride price or bride wealth, whichever is applicable to the society, is waived off by marriage through exchange. This happens generally if there are daughters or sisters for exchange for the grooms. This helps in not only forming an alliance but also strengthens the bond between groups. Examples of such exchange is seen in societies of Australia, Melanesia, Tive of Nigeria and also in some of the tribes in India- Muria Gonds, Baiga of Bastar and the Koya and the Saora of Andhra Pradesh. (Majumdar 1986, Jha 1994 et.al)

Marriage by service is found among some of the tribes in North East India. Among the Naga's of North East India the bride wealth forms a part of the marriage negotiation and if the groom's party is not able to pay the bride wealth then the compensation is through service. The boy works for the bride's family and only when the bride's family is satisfied that the marriage is solemnised.

Marriage by probation involves the consent of the bride's parents along with the girl's consent wherein the groom stays at the bride's place on a trial basis. Herein, the groom is allowed to stay with the girl so that they both get to know each other's temperament and if the girl likes the boy the marriage takes place, else the boy has to pay compensation in cash to the girl's family. Among the Kukis of Manipur of India such a marriage is a practised norm (ibid).

Marriage by capture is found in many societies. The capture can be a physical capture or a ceremonial one. Among the tribes of Yahomamo of Venezuela, Northern Brazil and the Nagas of Nagaland in India during raids the men from one village capture and take home females of the other village and marry them as wives. Such a situation is ascribed as physical capture. In ceremonial capture a boy desiring to marry a girl propositions her in a community fair or festival and makes his intentions towards her known by either holding her hand or marking her with vermilion as in the case of Kharia and the Birhor of Bihar (ibid).

Marriage by intrusion is a type of marriage wherein a girl forces her way into the boy's house and forces him to accept her as his spouse. Such marriages are seen in Birhor and Ho of Bihar and also among the Kamars of Madhya Pradesh.

Marriage by trial is a process in which the groom has to prove his strength and valour while claiming his bride. In the two great Indian epics Mahabharata and the Ramayana we have examples of how Draupadi and Sita were claimed by Arjuna and Lord Rama after they proved their skills in the *swayamvar* (a gathering where the eligible males are invited to prove their strength to claim the bride). Such marriages by trial are still found in many societies in India and some of the examples are the Bhils of Rajasthan and the Nagas of Nagaland.

Marriage by Elopement is a customary marriage in some societies whereas looked down in others. In societies where a huge amount of wealth is required for the marriage rituals and which is usually difficult for the families to bear in such societies marriage by elopement has come up as a customary practice. Such marriage is quite in vogue among the Karbis of Karbi Anglong district of Assam. In other cases marriage by elopement takes place when either of the prospective groom or bride's family does not approve of the wedding or when marriage is fixed with a distasteful partner. In such a case, the would be bride elopes with the partner of her choice. Such marriage by elopement is seen in almost all parts of the world (ibid).

3.2.4 Divorce

Divorce is the situation wherein the husband and wife separates and gives up the vows of marriage. It can happen due to many reasons and the most common one is incompatibility of the two partners. Divorce is a situation which can be unpleasant and painful for both the parties as it leads not only to physical separation of two people, but all that has been built up during the time together like family, children and material objects. Divorce is also a universally accepted norm as marriage but still it is looked down in many societies more so in the case of the wife in a patrilineal society.

3.3 FUNCTIONS OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is a sanction for two people to spend their lives together and it has many implications and functions related to it. Some of the functions are mentioned herein.

Biological Function

The most important function of a marriage is to beget children. The society gives recognition to children born out of wedlock and the children thus born are ascribed status as per the norms of the society. A society basically channelizes the sexual rights through the institution of marriage and it helps in mating within the rules and regulations as ascribed by a society. This helps in maintaining the norms of incest taboo also.

Economic Functions

In order to do away with the discrimination of labour by sex, marriage comes in as a protective measure wherein the men share their produce with the wives. Marriage leads to an economic co-operation between men and women ensuring the survival of every individual in a society.

Social Function

Marriage is the way to forming a family. A marriage sanctions the status of both husband and wife in a society and thus, they are also collectively accepted by society as husband and wife. In many societies there are norms where only a married person can take part in the rituals. For example in the Hindu society there is a ritual during wedding in which the bride is blessed with oil. In this ceremony atleast seven married women hold a ring with the tip of their right hand forefinger on the brides head. Oil then is poured on this ring by the married women. It is believed that the oil which pours down from the head to below takes away all the evil and brings in good luck to the would be husband and wife. Normally, widows and divorcees do not take part in such rituals. Marriage helps in forming new kinsmen and widening his network.

3.4 DEVIATIONS IN MARRIAGE

Till now we have discussed the general trend that we had seen in the societies so far that has been observed and written by anthropologists at different times. Herein this section we would discuss about the deviations in the marriage rules and the coming up of new types of kinship and family due to a change in the pattern of mate selection. In the present era two new types of relationship has emerged which were not prominent in the earlier days – lesbian and gay relationship. A lesbian relationship is based on the liking of a girl for another girl instead of a man as it happens in the normal course. Anthropologist Gill Shepherd explored female sexual relationships among Swahili Muslims in Mombasa, Kenya, and found that relationships between females were perfectly acceptable, as were relationships between men. Women were allowed to choose other women as sexual partners after they are married; so many such women also have a husband at home, or are widowed or divorced (http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Cultural_Anthropology/Marriage,_Reproduction_and_Kinship#Lesbianism_in_Mombasa accessed on 23rd March, 2011). In other cases in the present day a women has sanction by law to take up another women as legally wedded. Such marriages are certified by law in a few American States like Connecticut, Iowa, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, plus Washington, D.C. and the Coquille Indian Tribe in Oregon. In 2005

Canada through the enactment of the civil marriage act became the fourth country in the world to accept same sex marriages.

On the other hand a 'gay relationship' is based on a man having a liking for other man commonly known as homosexual relationship. In Nicaragua, the ideal for masculinity is "machismo", and being described as a man who is dominant, active, and violent. While, in the U.S., the term machismo refers to a man dominating his female partner, often described as male chauvinism. However, in Nicaragua, this can also be applied to the sexual relationship between man. Greek mythology and Greek history is galore with reference to homosexual relationships. One example is the story of Apollo and Hyacinthus; Apollo fell in love with a mortal boy, Hyacinthus, and became a mentor to the youth. He taught Hyacinthus the art of war and sports and visited him often. Other Greek gods and Greek heroes have stories attributed to them about their same-sex relationships, Zeus and Hercules among them.

When talking about movements for homosexual rights Brazil emerges as the first country to take up this issue. What sets them apart however is the prominence with which same-sex rights is being fought for in their culture. SOMOS was the first organised homosexual group formed in 1979 in Brazil. As of today there are over 70 groups that are interested in gay rights operating within the country. The São Paulo Gay Pride Parade is also one of the largest in the world, with over 2 million participants a year. Even the Brazilian President, Luiz Lula, has been fighting to pass a 'homophobia law' which would count criticizing homosexual behaviour as a crime (http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Cultural_Anthropology/Marriage_Reproduction_and_Kinship#Homosexuality_in_Brazil accessed on 25th March, 2011). Nepal on the other hand has accepted same sex marriage and thus, many same sex people from different countries come to exchange their marriage vows, which otherwise is banned in their own country.

3.5 SUMMARY

We can sum up the unit by stating that marriage is a universal phenomena ascribed and preferred in all human societies. The type of marriage and ways of acquiring a mate varies from society to society. Marriage has a legal sanction to it and the children born of wedlock are always accepted by the society. It is the means of achieving economic and social security for the wife and the children. In course of time marriage has seen many changes like the lesbian and gay weddings but till date it is very much a part of society, though at times debates have arisen for the need of marriage when two people are willing to live together.

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Sample Questions

- 1) What is marriage?
- 2) What is prescribed and preferential marriage?
- 3) What is fraternal polyandry? Illustrate with the help of examples.
- 4) What is the difference between bride wealth, bride service and dowry?
- 5) Examine the functions of marriage.

UNIT 4 FAMILY

Contents

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Concepts, Meaning and Definitions
- 4.3 Functions of a Family
- 4.4 Changing dimensions of Family
- 4.5 Summary
- References
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions



Learning Objectives

After reading this unit the students should be able to:

- define the different forms of family;
- outline the various functions of a family; and
- discuss changing aspects of family in the contemporary time.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

When a child is born, he/ she is born into a family which is known as the smallest social unit. Family is the social unit which endows the child with social norms, values, rules and regulations through the process of **enculturation**. This unit would help the students understand the social institution of family, how it emerged, its concepts, definitions and functions as a social unit. The focus would also be on the changing dimensions that have taken place in the family structure.

A family is established through marriage which is known as the **nuclear family**; the unit of one set of parents and children, is often embedded in larger groupings like joint families, lineages, clans and domestic groups of various kinds. The relatives connected through the father or the patriline are called as **agnates** and those connected through the mother or matriline are called as **uterine**, a combination of these or all relatives from side of both parents are called as **cognates**. The basic family also presupposes a monogamous marriage while in actuality there can be a polygamous marriage by virtue of which even the basic unit may be differently constituted. Since the incest taboo makes the family discontinuous over generations, every adult belongs to two families, one in which he/she is born and another that is established through marriage; these are known respectively as the family of orientation and the family of procreation. Let us now consider each of these aspects in details.

4.2 CONCEPTS, MEANINGS AND DEFINITIONS

How has the concept of family emerged? Was family always a part of society? These are certain questions which would be taken up in this section alongwith the various definitions of family postulated by anthropologists. The word family has its origin in the Latin word *familia* derived from *famulus* meaning servant. Familia

must have been used to refer to all the slaves and servants living under one roof, including the entire household that is the master, on the one hand, and the wife, children and servants living under his control. Today when we use the term family it covers all the various groups of relatives representing a *household* (all the individuals living under one roof), *gens* (all those descended from a common ancestor), *agnatic* (relatives on the father's side) and *cognatic* (relatives on the mother's side, and then by extension all blood relatives).

The family though considered universal in nature found in all types and levels of societies and cultures, yet it is difficult to trace the origin. In the early years of the anthropological history the origin of family, how it emerged in society was much discussed and debated. Followers of the evolutionary theory were of the opinion that family as an institution has evolved just like the society. Lewis Henry Morgan in his work *Ancient Society* (1877) stated that in the early societies the concept of family was not prevalent. Such societies were nomads and promiscuous where free sex relations were prevalent thus, the role of the father was not important and the mother-sib was the earliest form of grouping. He stated, 'The principal institutions of mankind originated in savagery, were developed in barbarism, and are maturing in civilization. In like manner, the family has passed through successive forms, and created great systems of consanguinity and affinity which have remained to the present time. These systems, which record the relationships existing in the family of the period, when each system respectively was formed, contain an instructive record of the experience of mankind while the family was advancing from the consanguine, through intermediate forms, to the monogamian' (1877:18). Though today, Morgan's evolutionary scheme is not followed, his work is important as he gave the first classification of five forms of family based on five different types of marriage.

- 1) The *Consanguine* family was founded upon the intermarriage of brothers and sisters in a group. Evidence still remains in the oldest of existing systems of Consanguinity, the Malayan, tending to show that this, the first form of the family, was anciently as universal as this system of consanguinity which it created.
- 2) The *Punaluan family* its name is derived from the Hawaiian relationship of *Punalua*. It was founded upon the intermarriage of several brothers to each other's wives in a group; and of several sisters to each other's husbands in a group. But the term brother, as here used, included the first, second, third, and even more remote male cousins, all of whom were considered brothers to each other, as we consider own brothers; and the term sister included the first, second, third, and even more remote female cousins, all of whom were sisters to each other, the same as own sisters. This form of the family supervened upon the consanguine. It created the Turanian and Ganowanian systems of consanguinity. Both this and the previous form belong to the period of savagery.
- 3) The *Syndyasmian* or pairing of family founded upon the marriage of single pairs, without giving the right of exclusive cohabitation to any person over the other. The term Syndyasmian is derived from syndyazo, meaning to pair. It was the germ of the Monogamian Family. Divorce or separation was at the option of both husband and wife. This form of the family failed to create a system of consanguinity.

- 4) The *Patriarchal* family comprising of marriage of one man to several wives, each wife being secluded from every other. The term is here used in a restricted sense to define the special family of the Hebrew pastoral tribes, the chiefs and principal men of which practised polygamy. It exercised but little influence upon human affairs for want of universality.
- 5) The *Monogamian* family was founded upon marriage between single pairs, with the married couple having exclusive cohabitation with one another the latter constituting the essential of the institution. It is pre-eminently the family of civilized society, and was therefore essentially modern. This form of the family also created an independent system of consanguinity (Morgan, 1877: 40-41).

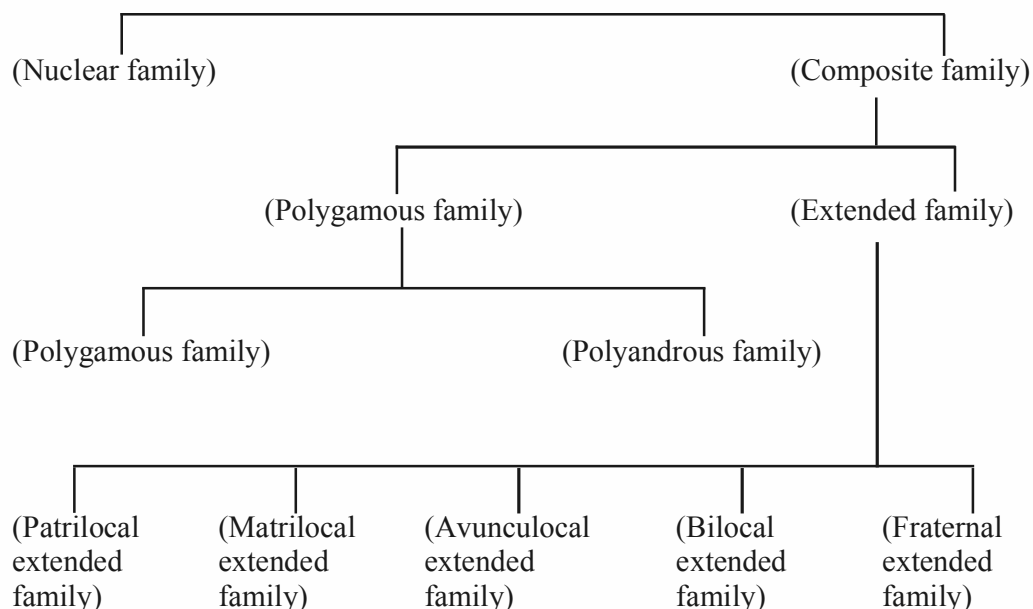
Westermarck (1853-1936) who had done a detailed study of the institution of marriage concluded that the family emerged due to male possessiveness and jealousy. In his work *The History of Human Marriage* (1922) he asserted that with the growing concept of property, males started the institution of family to protect and safeguard their property. This theory was a direct criticism of Morgan's theory wherein the origin of family was ascribed to the bonding of mother-sib. Westermarck though an adherent follower of evolutionism went a bit too far while postulating the origin of monogamy as he traced it to the mammals and the birds.

Activity

Before we move on to define a family let us start with a simple task. Please list down the names of the persons you would like to include in your family. Now if you have listed the names of your family members, I am sure there would be many variations to the list. Some of you might have included the names of your parents and siblings only, while others might have also added grandparents adopted brothers/sisters or cousins who stay with you. Likewise, the definition of family has variations as there are different types and forms of families. There has always been a universal problem in defining a family, so herein we would discuss some of the definitions which has tried to encompass the meaning of family in totality.

During the early 19th century evolutionary anthropologists had described family as a group based on marriage, common residence, emotional bonds and stipulation of domestic services. While in the early 20th century R.H. Lowie defined family as a group based on material relations, rights and duties of parenthood, common habitation and reciprocal relations between parents and children. Ralph Linton similarly defined family as a group that involves marriage, rights and duties of parents and children. George Peter Murdock, (1949) examined 192 societies and formulated a definition of family as 'the family is a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation, and reproduction. It includes both sexes, atleast two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted'. The chart presented below shows the different types of families as constructed by George Peter Murdock.

FAMILY



Adapted from Makhan Jha, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology* 1995 (reprint) pp 74.

Nuclear Family consists of a married couple (man and woman) with their children own or adopted. In certain cases one or more additional persons may also reside with them. This type of family is prevalent in almost all societies. Compact in nature this type is very popular in the present day world where there is a continuous struggle for economic subsistence.

Composite family is composed of two or more nuclear families which can be divided into *polygamous family* and the *extended family*. The polygamous family includes three variants based on marriage polyandry, polygyny and polyandrous (refer to Unit- 3 of the same block for details). An extended family consists of two or more nuclear families affiliated through extension of the parent-child relationship. Based on the post-marital residence, an extended family can be of the following types.

- *Patrilocal family* is composed of two or more nuclear families residing at the same house, it is an extension of the father son relationship. Such a family comprises of a man and his wife and their sons and the sons' wives and childrens.
- A *matrilocal family* is founded with two or more nuclear families affiliated through an extension of mother daughter relationship. It consists of a family comprising of a woman her daughters and the daughters' husbands and children.
- The *bilocal extended family* is a combination of patrilocal extended family and matrilocal extended family. The extended family consists of two or more lineally related kinfolk of the same sex and their spouses and offspring occupying a single household and under the authority of a household head.
- The *Avunculocal extended family* consists of two or more nuclear families affiliated through an extension of maternal-uncle and sisters son relationship. Such a family includes a nuclear family formed by a man his wife and daughters and the nuclear family formed by his sister's son and wife and children.

- The *Faternal Joint Family* is a family system, like a patrilineal extended family wherein the family comprises of a man and his wife and their sons and the sons' wives and children. We can say that in such a family three generations of kins live together. At times, such a family can be traced upto ten or so generations living in the same residence and sharing common hearth.

In the later half of the 20th century anthropologists tried to define family in terms of certain criteria important from the society's point of view. According to Edmund Leach a group to be called a family should comprise either one or several of the following criteria: marriage, legal paternity and maternity, monopoly of the couple over each other's sexuality, rights of the spouses to each others labour services, rights of both the spouses over property to establish a joint fund of property for the benefit of the children, and a socially significant relationship of affinity between each spouse and the relatives of the other. Evans-Pritchard also gave a classification of types of family based on his study of *The Nuers* (1940) of Sudan. His classification is more suited for the patrilineal society.

- The *simple legal* family comprising of a married couple and their children. This type of family is commonly known as a natural family.
- The *complex legal* family or the polygamous family where a number of separate families are linked by their relationship to a common father.
- The *ghost family* which consists of the ghost (pater), his wife, their children and the kinsmen who became their genitor in virtue of his duty towards the ghost. The ghost family is conceived when a young man dies who has not married yet. So a young man from the dead man's lineage marries a woman on behalf of the dead man and generates a family for the dead man. The children born out of such a marriage are known as the ghost's children and bear his name.

Variations in a Family System

From the above discussion we can describe the family as a domestic group in which a couple (parents) and children own or adopted live together. Yet there are societies where the same norms are not applicable. Meyer Fortes (1945) in his study of Ashanti of Ghana has described a society where the husband and wife after marriage continues to live with their respective family of orientation, a reason why the people of Ashanti like to find spouses in their own village. Lucy Mair (1997) discussing Fortes work reflects on the description of how an Ashanti village at sunset is full of young children carrying steaming dishes on their heads from mother to father- sometimes it also becomes an exchange between two houses. Thus, in such a family system the husband is a visiting husband and his role as a father is limited to procreation alone. The upbringing of his children lies with the kins of the wife's family whereas he is responsible for the upbringing of his sister's children. Likewise, among the Nayars of South India also, the same system of visiting husband is seen as discussed in Unit-3 of the same block and herein like the Ashanti of Ghana the responsibility of the child rests with the mother's lineage. The Khasis of Meghalaya and the Garos of Garo Hills of Meghalaya are two matrilineal societies where, in the first society the husband comes to live with the wife's family, while in the latter the husband is a visiting husband. While among the Hopi's of Southwest America a man after marriage moves on to live with his wife's family in which he has important economic responsibilities but few ritual obligations. In Hopi society also like the other matrilineal societies the man is

responsible and retains authority and leadership for his sister's son and is not responsible for his own children.

On the other hand among the matrilineal Trobriand islanders a practice is prevalent wherein a boy grows up in his father's family and after marriage when he sets up house he is expected to live in the village of his mother's brother. Herein, this system the domestic authority which lies with the father is fulfilled and also the *jurat* authority that is authority in matters of distribution of property etc. that lies with the mother's brother is also successfully fulfilled. The Trobrianders also practice the marriage of mother's brother's daughter and as such when a boy sets up house in his mother's brother's village the bride is not removed from the vicinity of her kin. Likewise, among the Yao and Cewa of Malawi a man immediately after marriage has to live in his wife's home and later he can setup house at the village of his own matrilineal kin. In such a case by the time his daughters are of marriageable age he becomes the head of the family to which the daughters' husbands come (Mair, 1977).

The ghost marriage as described by Evans- Pritchard in his study of the Nuers is also a variation in the family system as it is not found in all societies. Then there is also the practice of a woman usually a barren woman paying bridewealth and establishing the right to count another woman's children as her own. In such a case the barren woman is usually a diviner who thus, attains wealth to pay for the bride price. The woman-husband in this case can select a man to co-habitat with her 'wife' and produce children who would be than known as her own (Mair, 1997). Such a practice is seen among the Nuers, Zulus and the Yoruba societies.

Family types based on Residence

Family types can be categorized based on the type of residence also. In North American society it is customary for the newly wedded couple to take up residence in a place of their own, apart from the relatives of either spouse. This is known as *neolocal residence* (that is a new place). Thus, a new family basically known as nuclear family is formed with only husband and wife and later on their children, own or adopted. When the newly married couple takes up residence in the groom's father's house in a partilocal family such a residence is known as *patrilocal* or *virilocal* residence. On the other hand a *matrilocal* or *uxorilocal* residence is created when the couple takes up residence in a matrilocal family i.e, with the bride's family. In some societies like the Ashanti of Ghana a couple after marriage resides with the groom's mother's brother's family or maternal uncles house known as *avunculocal* residence. Again in some societies a married couple has the choice of living with relatives of either spouse (the husband or the wife). A residence thus formed is known as *ambilocal or bilocal residence*.

Reflection and Action

Analyse your family using the geneological method as discussed in Unit 1 of this Block. Describe what kind of a residence and family pattern it has.

Is Marriage and Family Universal?

In the earlier block also we have discussed marriage in length and we have come to the conclusion that marriage leads to a family. But there is an example from the Na society of China wherein there is no word for the term 'marriage' in their language (Blumerfield 2004, Geertz 2001, Harrell 2002). The institution in which the men and women are joined in sexual and reproductive partnerships is called *sese*. In this system a man spends the night in a lover's house and goes away in

the morning. The *sese* relationship does not hold any notion of fidelity, permanence, paternal responsibility for children born or any form of economic obligations (Shih, 2001). A child born is the responsibility of the mother and her sisters and brothers. A Na household comprises of mother and her sons and daughters, sisters and their children and the brothers.

Household and Family

Many a times there is confusion between the term family and household. So let's first try to understand the term household and what it comprises of. Household has been defined by Haviland (2003) as the basic residential unit where economic production, consumption, inheritance, child rearing and shelter are organised and implemented. The members of a household at times share a common hearth. Let's take the example of the Mundurucu of the Amazon who organise themselves around a household. They have a unique system by which all men and boys above 13 years of age live together whereas all the women and children below 13 years of age live together (Haviland, 2003). Herein, we see that household is an extension of family, a family can be a household but a household need not be a family. To make this statement clear let's take another example from the present day situation. We see a lot of students moving out of their native place and settling in some other city or going abroad for higher education. These students usually on a shoe string budget like to share accommodation with fellow students. Thus, two to three students take up residence and start sharing space and eating together. This makes them share a hearth but they are not necessarily members of the same family but belong to different families.

4.3 FUNCTIONS OF A FAMILY

The family as a social group is universal in nature and its existence is seen at all levels of cultures. Thus, the family having a status in society also has certain responsibilities and functions. The basic functions of a family are outlined below:

- **Satisfaction of biological need**

The family as an institution regularises the satisfaction of biological needs. It serves for the institutionalisation of mating a primordial need among all humans. Family helps in channeling of sexual outlets by defining the norms with whom one can mate and who are out of bound in the terms of incest taboo. Family thus helps in establishing a legal father for a woman's children and a legal mother for a man's children.

- **Reproduction and Inbibing Social Values**

A child as we have learnt is born into a family. As soon as a child is born into a family he is entitled to certain social position, system of beliefs, language, parents and kins as per the family system that he is born into. This family nurtures the child and imbibe in him the ways of the society through the process of enculturation preparing him to accept statuses of adulthood.

- **Economic**

A family as a social group is responsible for satisfying the basic needs of its members like food, clothes and shelter. In order to achieve this objective all the members of a family cooperate and divide the work among themselves and make contribution towards the upkeep of the family. Emile Durkheim in his book *Division of labour* has brought forth this fact and laid emphasis on economic satisfaction of the need of a family. It thus, serves as the

organisation of a complementary division of labour between spouses which at the same time allocates to each member of the family certain rights in the labour of the other and in such goods or property as they may acquire through their individual or joint efforts.

- **Educational**

A family provides for the linkage of each spouse and the offspring within the wider network of kinsmen. It establishes relationships of descent and affinity. Sociological fatherhood is determined to place the responsibility for the child on a specific adult. There must be jural fatherhood to regularise transference of statuses from one generation to the next. A cooperative division of labour makes for greater efficiency and skill in the work that need to be done. Each sex can perform many skills equally well, but each sex is likely to develop those skills it uses more often. The basic functions of the family may be performed with varying degrees of effectiveness from culture to culture. The way the details of the functions are carried out can produce remarkably different individual personalities of children and adult (Madan & Majumdar 1990, Jha 1995 et.al).

4.4 CHANGING DIMENSION OF FAMILY

Till now we have been focusing on the traditional norms and what comprises a family. We have been concerned with the classical terminology in which a family has been described and conceived but with the changing times the composition, meaning and definition of family have also undergone changes. The high divorce rate and remarriage in the present era leads to a tangled nuclear family leading to the creation of complex kinship relations also. Presently the blended family is coming up which comprises of networks which include previously divorced spouses and their new marriage partners and sometimes children from the previous marriages, as well as multiple sets of grandparents and other similar relations also. Then, again there is the surrogate motherhood as discussed in Unit 1 of the same block which also leads to a different type of family besides adoption. Divorces at times also lead to families with a single parent either the children staying with mother or at times with father. In the present day scenario single parenthood and a single parent household is fast overtaking the nuclear family due to the rise in divorces.

Society being dynamic, we see a lot of changes and such changes have occurred in the family system and the conception of the family itself. As we have learnt in the last section of the Unit 1 about lesbian and gay kinship, these new patterns have also arisen in the family structure – lesbian and gay family. In a lesbian and gay family the partners usually adopt kids of either sex. There has been a lot of debate in the recent past on whether or not a same sex couple should be allowed to parent children, whether artificially implanted or adopted. This debate has gone on for so long mainly because many religious groups believe that children can only be properly parented by a father and mother combination. As most of the religions do not sanction the union of same sex couples and also believe that the child will suffer if parented by the same sex (Nanda & Warms, 2011). While the upcoming feminist movement and many welfare agencies have strongly vouched for the competency of two people as adults regardless of gender to be allowed to adopt a child and care for the same. This fact is based on the idea that heterosexual couples often have problems raising children, too. Research has found no major differences in parenting or child development between families headed by two mothers and other fatherless families. In 2008, Judge Cindy S. Lederman overturned

a Florida state law that prevented homosexual couples from adopting children, stating no “moral or scientific reason for banning gays and lesbians from adopting”, despite the state’s arguments otherwise (CNN US website accessed on 31st March, 2011). While, on the other hand Arkansas has recently banned all unwed couples from adopting; a law aimed specifically at homosexual couples.

Lesbian and gay couples apart there has also been a trend of two people sharing a live-in-relationship and begetting children without confirming to the age old tradition of marriage. In case of live-in-relationship the partners stay as a family on their personal consensus without undergoing the rituals of marriage which pronounce a man and a woman as husband and wife. As in the case of family, cases of domestic violence and rape have also come up in these live-in-relationships. Presently, in India such cases of domestic household violence and rape in a live-in-relationship have been sanctioned by law to be addressed by the family court.

Reflection

Indian Law: Domestic Violence Act 2005

‘Different court judgments have discussed on different disputes pertaining to live-in relationships. Live-in relationships are now considered at par with marriage under a new Indian law pertaining to domestic violence. The provisions of the Domestic Violence Act, 2005 are now extended to those who are in live-in relationships as well. The amendments intend to protect the victims of domestic abuse in live-in relationships. Section 2 (g) of the aforementioned Act provides that a relationship between two individuals who live together or have lived together in the past is considered as a domestic relationship. A woman who is in a live-in relationship can seek legal relief against her partner in case of abuse and harassment. Further, the new law also protects Indian women who are trapped in fraudulent or invalid marriages.

<http://www.lawisgreek.com/court-judgments-live-relationships-and-related-disputes>, accessed on 14th March, 2011.

Live-in-relationships has been legalised in many countries and thus, falls under the purview of anthropological study of family. Students need to understand and evaluate the live-in-relationship pattern, how the emotional bonding takes place between parents and children, and the working of the kinship relations without a formal sanction (marriage).

4.5 SUMMARY

From the above discussion on family we can summarize that family has been a way of bringing together two people who stay with each other to continue the functions as administered by society. The question of when and how family as a social structure came into being is still debatable. Family like other institutions has also gone through many changes and we see a lot of variations in the family system in the traditional societies. But in the present era most of the traditional societies with polygamous and polyandrous family systems are turning into nuclear families. Likewise, a few changes have also come up in the developed societies. The blended families, live-in-relationships, gay and lesbian families are new entities in the developing world and though initially there were lots of resistences yet it has become an accepted norm in the present day scenario.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Define family.
- 2) Delineate the categorization of family as given by Morgan.
- 3) State in brief the different types of family as listed by Murdock.
- 4) Critically discuss the matrilineal and the patrilineal type of families.
- 6) Discuss the changing dimensions in family in the contemporary society.

UNIT 5 KINSHIP, FAMILY AND MARRIAGE IN INDIA

Contents

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Marriage
 - 5.2.1 Caste and Marriage
- 5.3 North and South Indian Kinship
- 5.4 Family
 - 5.4.1 Household Dimension of the Family
- 5.5 Summary
- References
- Suggested Reading
- Sample Questions

Learning Objective



At the end of the unit, you should be able to:

- describe the marriage patterns in the Indian scenario;
- explain the difference in North and South Indian kinship; and
- discuss the household dimension of family in Indian context.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit will introduce the students to the concepts of kinship, family and marriage with illustrative examples from India. We shall touch upon a few debates and also see that at times the representation of Indian society has been more idealistic than actual. We shall make an attempt to represent the family and marriage practices of all sections of Indian society rather than being confined to the sanskritic or textual norms. It must be emphasised that although marriage and family are universal for human societies the form and practices vary considerably across cultures and are also not static, and change with times and situations. As the definitions of kinship, marriage and family has been elaborated in the earlier units, they would not be taken up here.

5.2 MARRIAGE

There has been considerable debate about the definition of marriage given the huge ethnographic variations in what passes as marriage in various societies. The basic working definition of marriage appeared in the Notes and Queries (1951) “Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are recognised as legitimate offspring of both parents”. However such a definition of marriage as is obvious is highly Eurocentric and has limited cross cultural applicability. Among the Nuer for example, a rich widow with no children can enter into a ghost marriage with a young and fertile woman so that the children born to the ‘wife’ are socially considered as children of the dead man and become legitimate heirs. In India the practice of **Niyoga** enabled a young widow to achieve

the same end through a brother /classificatory brother or family priest. However as Kathleen Gough has pointed out the fact of producing legitimate children does remain the most important function of marriage. She was replying to scholars like Edmund Leach who were of the opinion that the Nayars of Kerala did not have a real marriage as the father had no role in the identity of the children who took on the mother's name and identity in a matrilineal system of inheritance. The society had no social role of father as the children were begotten through visiting husbands who were only sexual partners to the mother and had no rights over their children. The mother's brother wielded authority in households comprising of brothers and sisters and the sister's children. However Gough points out that every Nayar woman did undergo a marriage ceremony with a person of proper caste ranking and wore the *tali* (a kind of necklace worn as a sign of marital status). Although the husband did not have any social role, he did have a ritual status of legitimizing the woman to be socially sanctioned to bear legitimate children. A woman observed pollution rites at the death of this husband like a woman would of a regular husband. More importantly if a woman bore a child before this marriage ceremony the child would be considered illegitimate and the mother and child banished. Thus a Nayar marriage was a proper marriage in bestowing legal and social status on the child. She gave a often quoted definition of marriage as “—a relationship between a woman and one or more other person, which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules of the relationship, is accorded full birth status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum” (Gough 1959:32).

Gough's definition takes care of polygamy that is both **polygyny**, where a man may have more than one wife and **polyandry**, where a woman may have more than one husband. While polygyny was practiced in many parts of world and is often associated with horticulture and the practice of bride-wealth, polyandry is found only in South Asia. Polygyny is associated with those economies where women play a significant role in the economy, like in hoe cultivation and also where the number of wives signifies high social status as among the aristocracy of the East. However polyandry is confined to some rare geographical regions especially among some communities of the Himalayas, like the Jaunsaries and Kinnauries; also among some Tibetan and Bhutiya communities. In most such societies it takes the form of fraternal polyandry where a group of brothers may have a wife in common. In Hindu mythology polyandry is described in the Mahabharata where five Pandava brothers have a common wife in Draupadi.

Some scholars have criticized Gough's definition in that she does not take into account those societies where children from concubines may also have legitimate status.

Polygyny has often given rise to conflicts of succession between children, especially sons of co-wives, as depicted in the popular Hindu epic The Ramayana. According to law giver Manu, the son of a wife of proper caste ranking and who has been married in the most appropriate manner, that is gifted as a virgin by her father with proper ritual has more rights than the sons of other wives and concubines.

5.2.1 Caste and Marriage

In India caste and marriage are almost inseparable among the Hindu majority and except the indigenous populations, caste is found even among Muslims and Christians in India. Caste does not aptly describe the Indian social organisation based on two levels of differentiation, one at the abstract level of Varna, where all beings are

divided into four broad and ranked categories, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudra; plus a category that lies outside the varna system the untouchables (*asprcya* or *achuyt*). At the actual level of social interaction including marriage and kinship it is the 'jati' an endogamous and geographically localised group that is the effective social unit. Thus jati is an extended kin group as for any person all relationships of blood and marriage will lie inside one's own jati. However rules of exogamy were operative within the jati in the form of *gotra* exogamy and *sapinda* exogamy.

Gotra is a group based on socially constructed mythical ancestry, where some mythical divine being in the form of an ancient sage is considered the common ancestor of the group. Since only Brahmins could be the descendants of the *rishis* (ancient sages), all other varna had probably taken on the gotra of their presiding family priests. While gotra exogamy is found among all Hindus, the Sa-pinda (Sa=together, pinda= a ball of rice) rules are applicable mostly in North India. These include all those who have right to offer *panda* (ritual offering to a dead person) to a man. All those who share the same body, metaphorically the same flesh, belong to the *sapinda* category. It includes those who are putatively related by blood and excludes those who are related by marriage, thus a son and brother's son is *sapinda* but not a son-in-law.

Depending upon the community, the rule of *sapinda* exogamy was extended to all persons descended from certain generations from the father's and mother's side. The most common expression of this rule was that a person must not marry someone who may have a direct male ancestor in the direct male (father's) line up to seventh ascending generation and up to fifth ascending generation in the mother's line. This obviously excluded all collateral kin through the blood line.

In south Indian kinship the rule of Gotra exogamy is prevalent but not that of Sa-Pinda exogamy as certain persons in collateral lines are eligible for marriage.

Reflection

The Hindu marriage cosmologically evokes the analogy of the seed and the earth, rooted as it is in an agricultural economy. The three rules of marriage pertaining to the seed and earth analogy are:

- 1) Only those children are considered as equal in rank to the father, who are born of women of equal caste ranking who have been married as virgins. This will be true for all caste rankings.
- 2) It is acceptable for a man to marry a woman of lower rank than himself as the power of the male seed is superior to that of the earth; hence a man's progeny even if born of an inferior woman will have his qualities. Thus hypergamous or *anuloma* (in the direction of hair) unions are acceptable though not the best.
- 3) But the opposite is not true. A woman must not marry down, or hypogamy or *pratiloma* (against the hair) is not permissible. If a Brahmin woman marries a shudra the children are lowest of untouchables.

Thus in real terms it means that women of lower castes are accessible to men of higher castes and women of upper castes are kept out of bounds for all except men of their own caste and higher. Thus Brahmin women are the most secluded and shudra women the most accessible. However for a regular marriage, it is always preferred that the wife should not be of lower caste. But according to the laws of Manu an upper caste man can take as his secondary wives women of lower castes.

Hypergamy can take different forms in North and South India. Thus among the Rajputs of N-W India, the Patidars of Gujarat and the Rarhi Brahmins of Bengal the hypergamy means marriage between ranked groups of the same caste. Here the child gets the same rank as the father. In South India the hypergamous marriages take place between castes and the children are given the rank of the mother. A famous example is that of the Namboodri brahmins and the Nayar women. Only the eldest Namboodri son was allowed to marry a Namboodri woman and have children of his own rank, but the younger sons were compelled to go to the Nayar women as visiting husbands and their children were only identified as the children of Nayar matriclans. Although they both follow gotra exogamy and jati endogamy, there are some substantive differences between North Indian and South Indian or what is more popularly known in anthropological literature as Dravidian kinship system.

5.3 NORTH AND SOUTH INDIAN KINSHIP

In addition to the practice of polygyny and hypergamy, marriages in North India are marked by a higher status given to the bride receivers than the bride givers, thereby giving the man's family a higher social status than a woman's family that has resulted in a general degrading of women in society, where the mother of a son receives more prestige than the mother of a daughter and the birth of a daughter is viewed as a lowering of rank of her entire family. Among the status conscious Rajputs of North-Western India, it is this status consciousness that is one of the reasons for widespread female infanticide as the father of a daughter feels socially degraded. This is also the reason why there is no preference for women exchange, rather women preferably move in the same direction, that is it is preferred that sisters be married to a set of brothers rather than an exchange of siblings take place as it is done in Bengal, in the custom of *Palti Bodol*, where to save on dowry, siblings can be exchanged if they are otherwise properly matched. Since the practice of exogamy is done at the village level, entire villages stand in relations of bride givers and bride receivers with appropriate rankings and taboos. Thus a person from a bride giving village will not accept even water from a bride receiving village.

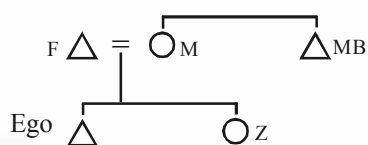
In South India there are two distinct differences, the first is the separation of the cross and parallel siblings of the parents and a merging of the grandparents generation in terms of kinship terminology that had led the south Indian kinship terminology to be labelled as 'bifurcate-merging', the second is the practice of what was referred to as the practice of cross-cousin marriage by those following the 'descent school' in kinship studies. In South India it is preferred that a boy marry his mother's brother's daughter or his father's sister's daughter, neither of which categories is referred to as a 'sister' and the father's sister and mother's brother are also referred to by the same term as used for mother-in-law and father-in-law.

Louis Dumont in his analysis of kinship on what he calls as the principle of affinity, takes a different theoretical stand. According to Dumont, where there exists positive marriage regulations, that is some categories of kin are earmarked for marriage, the following criteria apply;

- 1) Marriage becomes part of an institution of marriage alliance, which spans the generations. This is in opposition to the descent theorist's views that marriage relations are confined to one generation and only descent runs through generations.

- 2) The concept of affinity should extend so as to include not only those who are related to a ego by marriage, but also to people who inherit such a relationship from their parents. Thus a son will inherit an affinal relationship in the form of his mother's brother from his father who already has an affinal relationship of wife's brother to him. Thus where there is prescribed cross cousin marriage, the mother's brother and father's sister are never consanguines, but always affines, as inherited from the parents.
- 3) In terms of kinship terminology such relationships will have an affinal content.

Thus the Dravidian kinship terminology can be described as one where there is one term for all males and all females in the grand parent's generation. The two terms in father's generation, namely father and mother's brother are not simply different but denote two classes of relatives; one consanguineal and the other affinal. Thus father and mother's brother are brothers-in-law to each other, or linked to each other through the mother.



In the same way the relationship to father's sister is mediated through the mother, where the brother of one woman is husband to the other.

Such affinal relationships are continued in ego's generation, become weaker in ego's son's generation and disappear fully in the grandchild's generation. The basic structure of the system is of fathers on one side, including the father's brother and mother's sister's husband and father's affines on the other, including mother's brother and father's sister's husband.

According to Dumont we should differentiate between the immediate or synchronic affine and genealogical or diachronic affines who are affines by virtue of inheriting an affinal tie from the earlier generation. Dumont also demonstrated how the concrete expression to the abstract concept of alliance is given differently in different social systems taking the examples of the matrilineal Kondaiyam Kottai Maravar and the patrilineal and patrilocal Pramalai Kallar.

For the Kallar, the category of brothers is split into two, the brothers, one's own and the sons of the father's brothers who are part of one's local or residential kin group and the sons of one's mother's sisters, who are spread in various places, depending upon where the mothers were located after marriage. Thus although they are notionally consanguines, the relationship with such relatives is weak as it is spread over a large geographical area and tends to be forgotten over the generations, unlike the enduring ties with the patrilineal kin. The father's sister on the other hand is born and remains in the father's house till she gets married. Thus although terminologically she is an affine, she has an ambiguous position as a weak affine having been treated as a kin before her marriage. The mother's brother in a patrilineal situation is a strong affine.

The situation is just the reverse in the case of the matrilineal Kondaiyam Kottai Maravars, where the opposition between father and mother's brother is viewed differently. In the matrilineal situation the father would be an affine and the mother's brother a kin, therefore the ambiguity attached to the father's sister in the patrilineal case would be attached to the mother's brother in this case who will be considered a weak affine, while the father's sister would be considered a strong affine.

In other words as Dumont puts it, the foremost affine in the upper generation is the affine of the lineally stressed parent, the mother's brother in the patrilineal situation and the father's sister in the matrilineal one.

The distinction between the two categories of relative is also expressed in ceremonials and gift giving. F.G. Bailey in Orissa and A.C. Mayer in Malwa have noted that there is a lot of similarity in the ceremonial functions of relatives like wife's brother and mother's brother, even though the former is an affine and the latter a relative of blood connected through the mother. In a sense both the relatives are similarly situated as the wife's brother becomes the mother's brother in the next generation; gifts given by both are referred to as *mamere* in the local language so that culturally also the two relatives are put in the same bracket. In opposition to *mamere* is *dan*. These are the gifts given by those who have taken a woman from the group, the father's sister's husband and sister's husband, in contrast the *mamere* is given by those who have given a woman to the group. Thus Dumont has pointed out that essentially from the cultural point of view the real difference is between wife giver's and wife receivers and not between uterine and agnatic kin.

As an example one can take the case of the Sarjupari Brahmins of U.P. who ignore the sa-pinda rule. But adhere to the two rules that;

Firstly, a lineage does not 'take' a girl from a local lineage to which a girl has been given by them, as the bride receivers are in a permanent position of superiority symbolized in the ritual of '*pao-pujan*' (feet worship).

Secondly, a man does not marry his sister and daughter (including classificatory ones) into the same family; for this would mean matrilateral cross cousin marriage, not permissible in North India.

However among the lower castes such as Dhobis, such marriages are permitted. Among the upper castes the former rule prohibits reversal of marriage between larger units such as local descent groups and the latter prohibits the repetition of marriage between smaller units such as families. Among the lower castes such repetition leads to stronger community formation at the local level, so necessary for their survival. The lower castes may also practice bride exchange and widow remarriage.

In the study of south Indian kinship it is seen that ceremonial gifts are given by those relatives where the affinal relatives are passed down generations that is by the mother's brother, father's sister or father's sister's husband, wife givers in all cases by the rule of prescriptive marriage to the children of parent's cross sex siblings.

Among the high status Sarjupari Brahmins the first rule permits repetition of marriage between lineages but in the same direction, thus taking care of caste norms, but not particularly of kinship. In south India marriage rules reflect pure kinship norms. The Sarjupari Brahmins also have the rules of "three houses, thirteen houses, and one lakh (hundred thousand) and twenty-five thousand" houses arranged vertically. Similar rules are seen in Bengal among the Dakhin-Rarhi Kayasthas of the "three houses (Kulin), eight houses and seventy-two houses", similarly arranged hierarchically in order of preference. Such status is attributional while the status difference between bride-givers and bride-takers is interactional.

5.4 FAMILY

The form of family is both synchronically and diachronically determined. Among the upper caste Hindus the Mitakshara school of Hindu law is usually followed in which the Hindu Joint family is one in which all male agnatic members have a share from birth and they may demand a share in the property as soon as they reach the legal age of maturity. The male members along with their wives and children may share the same roof and hearth and are coparcenaries. In addition there may be other members in a joint household in the form of dependents like orphans and widows, usually related women born in the family. A joint family is symbolically united in common worship of some deity looked upon as the benefactor of the particular lineage or *kul*.

The head of the family is usually the eldest male member known as the **Karta**, who wields considerable power. However as the well known sociologist Arvind Shah points out the three generational joint family is only an ideal type and rarely realized in actual practice.

The biggest difference in family organisation is based upon caste, occupation and economic status. The large undivided joint households were usually found among the wealthy upper castes, who found it useful to stay together in a large household with supportive resources like a large house and many servants. It was functional for the management of large estates and businesses.

On the contrary the lower castes and poorer sections of the people rarely have enough resources to form joint households. Also their meagre earnings do not permit the setting up of larger units. If the family lives at subsistence level the daily earnings or food does not permit any accumulation or cannot be shared among large number of members, it is each to his own in such a situation. Similar situation is found among the tribal populations where the joint household is almost unknown.

Thus the projection of the majority of families in India being joint is only an upper caste, class and an ideal depiction.

With the use of the historical model many anthropologists have criticized this idealistic assumption. A.M. Shah, a well known sociologist highly regarded for his work on family, found in his social and historical study of a village in Gujarat that the kind of family assigned to tradition was not present even in the pre-colonial era. Let us see what he has to write about Radhvanaj, a village consisting primarily of upper caste Rajputs and Brahmins (Shah 1998).

“According to the Census of 1825 Radhvanaj had a population of 716 persons divided into 159 households and there were 25 castes” “73 % of the total number of households were very small or small in 1825. The ideal of the so-called joint family household was not very strong in the village and this was even before the beginning of industrialisation and urbanization”. But even though there were no joint families, the Rajputs, namely the Rathods of this region formed exogamous lineage groups. But in the very same village such lineage groups were not found among the other caste groups. “By and large, strong and elaborate lineage groups were associated with control over land”. As Shah has further elaborated land ownership provided stability of residence and facilitated growth of the lineages. Land ownership also provided power and therefore, lineages with the help of the unity provided by the kinship bond, tended to be repositories of power.

India joint living is not found at all, Channa (1985). As rightly pointed out by Shah land ownership often provides the economic base for joint living. For households who have to live off their daily earnings it is a difficult proposition to pool in the earnings at the end of the day and go for joint living. What the earlier authors had relied upon was an ideal basis for the family based on values and scriptural norms. But in reality the economic and political considerations determine at the actual level what shape is going to be taken by the household. The main resource of the dhobis for example are the households, referred to them as *grahak* (clients) from whose houses they get clothes to be washed. As a couple get older their capacity to wash and iron clothes decrease. When a son grows up he gets a few clients from his father but most of his clientele he can built up on his own depending upon the capacity for hard work, initiative and luck both of his own and that of his wife. Very soon after their marriage young couples prefer to set up their own *chullah* or hearth, in other words set themselves up as separate production and consumptions units separate from their parents. Because the young couple does not want that they should do all the hard work and the aging parents should share the fruits of their labour. Unless they get very old and disabled, their children rarely support parents.

According to Shah, among the upper castes and elite section families of society, the sentiments and bonds, both economic and social continue to operate even if the members are living in different locations because of necessities of work, or lack of urban space or any such factor; For example, children of middle class families who are settled abroad or in different places within the country, still consider the parental house as their own, returning for major ceremonies and events on a regular basis. Economically too the bonds of sharing and cooperation persist even from a distance. Thus the joint family as noted by Shah is acquiring a 'federal' multi-centred character.

However in some parts of India, apart from the joint families, or joint sentiments based on monogamous marriages, some different forms of families are also present. The polyandrous families are still found in some hilly areas like Himachal, where it is considered good to marry a set of brothers to a single woman so that scarce resources of land can be preserved and since these communities still depend upon sheep grazing and agriculture, the undivided household of several brothers and their wife leads to more prosperity.

Among the Khasis of Meghalaya, the family property and name is inherited in the female line with the youngest daughter inheriting the family house and property. The husband of the youngest daughter in a Khasi family comes to live with her and she is primarily responsible for the performance of all the household rituals. The family name also runs in the female line. Thus the patrilineal and patrilocal family is not absolutely universal in India.

The practice of resident-son-in-law, also called *ghar-jawai*, *ghar-jamai* or *mappa* is found among many communities of India. Among the Bhutiyas and other hill people it is a common practice with the son-in-law becoming like the adopted son of his parents in law and even performing their death rituals. Among the Tibetans and Bhutiyas the daughter has inheritance rights and even when the resident son-in-law performs the rituals like a son, it is the daughter who is socially recognised as the mistress of the property and remains dominant over her husband.

The Muslim households usually follow the Hindu pattern with the wealthy families living in large joint households and the poorer ones living mostly in nuclear families

along with the urban and educated families, which are also nuclear. Although polygyny is permitted for the Muslims the actual incidence is rather low and not any different from those of Hindus.

Values of education of women are often cited as factors for the break up of joint families as are business rivalries and clash of interests. In the traditional joint households the money was earned from a common estate or business, with modernisation, the various sons took up jobs according to their own capacities and conflicts could ensue over different incomes and contributions to the common pool. Women's education further complicated matters as they developed more individuality and resisted being dominated. Yet deference and respect for elders still persists and most children do not take major decisions without the permission or consent of their parents.

5.4.1 The House-hold Dimension of the Family

In addition to the class and caste based difference a family can be viewed in terms of its development over time and Shah has described the developmental cycle of the Indian family following the model given by Meyer Fortes. Even the simple of basic family may exhibit different structures depending upon the stage at which it is found. The basic household in India is called a '*chullah*' or *ghar*. The following possible compositions are possible

- 1) Husband, wife and unmarried children
- 2) Husband and Wife (when there are no children born or they have left the household by marriage or migration)
- 3) Father and unmarried children (when the wife is dead or divorced)
- 4) Mother and unmarried children (for same reasons as above)
- 5) Unmarried brothers and sisters (because of death of parents)
- 6) A single man or woman (for various reasons of death or separation or migration).

In the formation of the simple household, the terms "children", "father" and "mother" also include all step children and adopted children, step mothers and adoptive mothers and step father and adoptive fathers so that in reality a simple family may at times be a 'compound family'.

The actual power structure of the household may also vary. Thus widowed mothers may play a considerable significant role in the affairs of their sons even though by the rules of patriliney the son inherits the father's status. Similarly the role of women as wives and daughters may also be significant in certain situations.

As Shah points out the development process of the household is not random but may follow a pattern depending on the following factors.

- 1) The demographic factor, like birth, marriage and death and also the sex ratio and the actual number of persons who come to live in a household by what is known as the process of accretion.
- 2) The second depends on the norms of residence that may also vary; like for example the phenomenon of the resident son-in-law and the norms regarding residence of parents.

5.5 SUMMARY

In conclusion we can say that it is difficult to have a uniform description of kinship, family and marriage in India as there is considerable regional variation (Karve 1963, Kolenda 1987), and also across caste and tribal populations. Some significant regional works are that of Veena Das (1976) and Paul Hershman (1981) on Punjabi Kinship, Fruzzeti and Ostor (1976) and Ronald Inden (1976) on Bengali kinship, Dumont (1966) and Trautmann on Dravidian kinship, and Madan (1965) on Kashmiri kinship, to name a few. One may also refer to the significant contribution of Leela Dube (1997) to a gendered approach to the study of kinship. Some unique features such as of caste and kinship and polyandry are found in South Asia not found anywhere else. Significant differences exist across North and South India and among lower and upper classes. There have been changes also in family and kinship norms due to transformations in social and economic variables. Thus kinship is just not ideational but practical as well serving existing needs of society.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Describe the basic principles of South Indian Kinship and how it differs from North Indian Kinship?
- 2) Discuss the various forms of the household in India with specific reference to the developmental cycle.
- 3) Discuss the relationship between bride-givers and bride takers and its ritual and ceremonial expression among the upper castes of North India.
- 4) Discuss the various forms of lineality in India, with suitable examples.
- 5) Describe the changes in joint families and the nature of the changes.