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Ambedkar University
Lucknow

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New Delhi

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Telangana

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IGNOU, New Delhi

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Discipline of Sociology
IGNOU, New Delhi

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Discipline of Sociology,
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi
Discipline of Sociology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Prof. Rabindra Kumar
Discipline of Sociology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Dr. R. Vashum
Discipline of Sociology
IGNOU, New Delhi

Course Coordinators

Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi

SOSS, IGNOU

General Editor

Dr. Reema Bhatia, Delhi University



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COURSE PREPARATION TEAM

| | | Unit Writer | In-house Editor (Content, Format and Language) |
|----------------|---|---|---|
| Block I | Introduction to the Sociological Study of the Visual | | Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi |
| Unit 1 | Understanding Society Through the Visual | Dr. Reema Bhatia Miranda House, Delhi University | |
| Unit 2 | Making Sense of Visuals | Ms. Deepali Aparajita Independent Scholar | |
| II | Sociology and the Practice of Photography | | Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi |
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| Unit 4 | Photography, Self and Society | Ms. Moureen Kalita Independent Scholar | |
| Unit 5 | Photography as a Tool of Research | Ms. Moureen Kalita Independent Scholar | |
| Unit 6 | Representing Through Video and Film | Dr. Reema Bhatia Miranda College, Delhi University | |
| Unit 7 | Film and Video as a Research Tool | Dr. Shivani Rajput Miranda House, Delhi University | |
| III | Sociology, Multimedia and Hypermedia | | Dr. Kiranmayi Bhushi |

Unit 8 Society, Multimedia and
Hypermedia

Dr. RituparnaPatgiri
IP College, Delhi University

Unit 9 Multimedia and Hypermedia as
a Tool of Research

Dr. RituparnaPatgiri
IP College, Delhi University

Graphics /cover design

Print Production



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COURSE INTRODUCTION 109

Block 1. Introduction: Kinship is the most basic unit of the social system where an individual's socio-cultural universe is shaped. This universe is what has been called by the sociologists as a kinship system. This block has two units which introduce the learner to some of the basic ideas on kinship and to various concepts involved in the study of kinship. Unit-1 traces the development of kinship studies in the West and in India. Lewis Morgan, initiated a formal study of kinship. Subsequent anthropologists like Radcliffe-Brown were concerned about not only kinship terminology but also relationships and the method of analysis. It was Levi-Strauss who changed the way kinship was studied with his focus on abstract modelling and exchange of women. In India, the study of kinship was a part of the larger aspect of Indian society. Kinship was studied along with family and marriage and it is reflected in the works of Ghurey, Karve, Madan and Srinivas. Since kinship studies constitute an important part of sociological and anthropological studies, there are several studies on the key concepts of the idea of kinship. In this unit, we look at the basic concepts used in kinship, namely: family, marriage, descent and alliance.

Block 2. Approaches: Kinship relations can be understood through three approaches: 1) Descent approach- emphasis on blood/consanguine relations 2) Alliance approach- emphasis on marriage and 3) Cultural approach- focus on kinship as cultural aspects. The blood relation was considered as primary to the affinal relations that was secondary. In the alliance approach, the focus shifted from blood tied to relations formed as result of marriage. The core of the theory was the exchange of women for formation of groups. The alliance theory was criticised for focusing on women as object and treating the opposition between affine and consanguine as universal. Due to the limitation of both descent and alliance theory there was a cardinal change in the way kinship was studied. The cultural approach argued that kinship could not be understood only with reference to biology. The reference to biology was seen as nothing more than ethnocentric view of kinship, derived from European culture. Kinship was to be understood with reference to cultural practices of every society.

Block 3 Family, Household and Marriage: This block comprises of the three units which examine kinship system in the context of larger social structures and processes. The first unit of this block unit 6 examines the norms, rules and patterns shaping kinship system in different

regions of India. Even though, the unit tries to point out such cross-cultural variations, much of it has been subject to certain change, owing to the forces of modernisation, urbanisation and migration. Unit 7 of this block deals with caste, class and gender intersectionality. Unit 8 focuses on new ways to look at family. The unit starts by focusing attention on traditional understanding of family and its critiques. The unit reflects on feminist critiques and their questioning of many of the assumptions that underlie the traditional/conventional perceptions of family and kinship. Various alternatives like families based on ideology of love and live-in relationships may be seen as possible ways to negotiate with the traditionally sexually oppressive family forms and kinship patterns.

Block 4 Recasting Kinship: The four units of this block deal with new ways to look at kinship owing to technological changes, new and expanding sense of identities that is as much influenced by popular culture as it is reflection. Kinship studies in post 1970s took a new direction with cultural approach. Schneider was correct in challenging the centrality of procreation as assumed by anthropologists. Kinship is closely related to aspects of the social. This block deals with these aspects. Unit 9 deals with the concept of relatedness. The unit follows Carsten's work which shows that the separation of social from biological is not always clear cut. Relatedness is derived from procreation and eating and living together. Relatedness emphasises on the processual dimension of kinship. Anthropological studies on kinship have carried a gender bias through their reliance on primarily male informants as sources of information. It was only with the coming of feminist anthropologist that gender and kinship came to be bound together due to the realisation among both anthropologists and feminists that theorising kinship by discounting women as a contributing category would make kinship accounts incomplete and biased in favour of men. In unit 10, we will examine the gender, bias, feminist contribution that led to the re-examination of kinship. In unit 11 we have comprehended the meaning of new reproductive technology and how it has redefined the understanding of parenthood. The use of technology for reproduction has challenged the traditional understanding of motherhood and maternity. Unit 12 looks at popular culture as a reflective of the changes and continuities in the institutions of kinship and family.

UNIT 1 UNDERSTANDING KINSHIP STUDIES*

Structure

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction

1.2 Understanding Kinship Studies from Western Perspective

1.2.1 Lewis H. Morgan

1.2.2 A. R. Radcliffe-Brown

1.2.3 C. Levi-Strauss

1.2.4 Jack Goody

1.2.5 David Murray Schneider

1.3 Understanding Kinship Studies from Indian Perspective

1.3.1 Iravati Karve

1.3.2 T.N Madan

1.3.3 M.N. Srinivas

1.4 Gender and Kinship Studies

1.5 Let Us Sum Up

1.6 References

1.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you should be able to:

- Explain what is kinship
- Discuss kinship studies in terms of Indian and western perspectives

* written by Sushree Panigrahi, Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, (RGICS) New Delhi

- Discuss the gender dimension to kinship studies

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Kinship Studies has been an integral part of both anthropological and sociological studies for the past hundred years. Sociologist and anthropologist like Peter G. Murdock, Radcliffe-Brown, Levi Strauss, Edmund Leach, Iravati Karve, K.M. Kapadia, to name a few, have contributed immensely to this subject. Before we begin our discussion on kinship studies let us first understand what kinship is. Kinship refers to a relationship that is based on marriage (affinal) or blood ties (consanguineal). Apart from establishing relationship between people, the kinship system also assigns roles and status which regulates behaviour of people. The role and status are often related to gender and age. Murdock one of the pioneers of kinship studies defines kinship as, “A structured system of kinship in which kin are bound to one another by interlocking ties.” (Murdock, 1949:93).

In this unit we look at how kinship has been viewed by different scholars. The unit is divided into western and Indian kinship studies because the western society is organised much differently from Indian society and the body of work reflects this difference.

1.2 KINSHIP STUDIES: WESTERN PERSPECTIVE

Studies on kinship started about hundred years ago marked by Morgan's work in 1875. Several different ways of studying kinship have emerged over the years; from analysis of kinship terms to study of differences and similarities between societies across the world. In 1960s, kinship studies saw a shift towards study of rules of descent, marriage, kinship terminologies due to efforts of Schneider, Edmund Leach and others. But by 1970s, kinship studies did not occupy the same importance in anthropology as it did earlier because of which the study of kinship was subsumed under larger areas of study such as political anthropology, feminist anthropology, and social history. Let us now try to understand some of the main studies done on kinship.

1.2.1 Lewis H. Morgan

In his book *Ancient Society* published in 1877, Morgan traced the evolution of kinship and marriage (from promiscuity to monogamy). He believed that the kinship terminologies contained the key to unravelling the kinship system of any society. Hence, he collected huge samples of terminologies from American Indians tribes and compared them to Asian socie-

ties. Morgan's work *Ancient Society* was an attempt to explain the emergence of family, property and government as we know it today. Morgan's interest in kinship was largely due to his intensive research on the American Indian tribe of Iroquois. He believed that the kinship system was based on biological descent and that family and marriage were ways of ensuring the continuity of humankind. In *Ancient Society*, Morgan writes that marriage rules determine family organisation and the growth of family.

For Morgan, the terminologies used in a society reflect the social organisation. Morgan is also known for his contribution of classificatory and descriptive system of kinship.

Box 1. Classificatory and Descriptive Systems of Kinship

The classificatory system of kinship is that in which the same term is used for direct and collateral kin. By collateral kin, we mean father's brother or father's sister or mother's sister or mother's brother. The descriptive system, which according to Morgan, uses separate terms for lineal and collateral kin, that is mother and mother's sister are referred to by different kin terms.

In many kinship groups, different terms are used for parallel cousins (children of the same sex sibling of parent, for example father's brother's children are parallel cousins) or cross cousin (children of opposite sex sibling of parent; for example, children of mother's brother children are cross cousins). This distinction is important in societies where there is a custom of marriage among cousins. In India this is prevalent in some communities in South India

1.2.2 A.R. Radcliffe-Brown

Radcliffe Brown used the term kinship system to denote relationships that arose due to marriage and affinity. According to Radcliffe-Brown, the elementary family consisting of man, wife and their child/children; a compound family comprising of man with several wives (**polygynous**) or even by a second marriage. He also clarifies that there is no single pattern of a family as it may differ from society to society. He further adds that, "In any given society a certain number of these relationships are recognised for social purposes, i.e, they have attached to them certain rights and duties or certain distinctive modes of behaviour. It is the relations that are recognised in this way that constitute what I am calling a kinship system" (1941:2). The kinship system thus refers to a network of social relations that is expressed through the family, clan, lineage groups or moieties. He also speaks of the difference between clan and lineage. A clan is usually a group of people, who claim to belong to a kin group on

the basis of an ancestor who they may or may not have existed. This reminds one of the *gotra* system in India, of which we will speak in the next section. Lineage on the other hand consists of people who can trace back their ancestry to a common ancestor.

Radcliffe-Brown says that kinship nomenclature is an integral part of the kinship system and also a part of language. Nomenclature also indicates generation and relationship. He says there is an attitude of respect towards a particular generation (usually the first ascending generation) and also that of subordination. Another feature he mentions is certain categories within which several relatives of a single person can be grouped or in other words “a single term is used to refer to a category of relatives” (Radcliffe-Brown, 1974: 6). This is explained through the example of the category – Uncle. He speaks of the British usage of the word uncle for both maternal (mother’s brother) and paternal (father’s brother) uncle. In the Indian context, in some societies, Mother’s brother is referred to as *mama* and the father’s brother as *tauji*, *bade papa* (if elder), *chacha* if younger to father. Radcliffe Brown says the nomenclature of uncle is also reflective of the social relationship where there is no particular difference in the relationship of the nephew with his paternal or maternal uncle/aunt. Whereas in the Indian society, the father’s elder brother is considered to be like a father and the mother’s sister is like a mother, *Mausi*. Radcliffe-Brown refers to this as the classificatory terminology, where distinctions are created according to age, gender and seniority as we have seen in the case of father’s elder brother and younger brother in the case of India. Radcliffe Brown relates what he calls sibling solidarity to practices of **levirate** (marriage with brother’s widow), **sororate** (marriage with wife’s sister), **sororal polygyny** (marrying two or more sisters) and **adelphic polyandry** (marrying two or more brothers).

1.2.3 C. Levi-Strauss

Claude Levi-Strauss’ contribution to kinship studies is marked by his focus on studying the structural significance of ties underlying marriage and alliance (not descent). In his work, *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Levi-Strauss speaks of the principle of exchange of women through marriage. He believed that each society had its own distinct kinship system and the kinship system in each society was to be separated from other aspects of the society. He also wrote that, “Kinship systems, marriage rules, and descent groups constitute a coordinated whole, the function of which is to ensure the permanency of the social group by means of inter-twining consanguineous and affinal ties. They may be considered as the blueprint of a mechanism which “pumps” women out of their consanguineous families to redistribute them

in affinal groups, the result of this process being to create new consanguineous groups, and so on.” (Levi-Strauss 1967,a:302-303).

Also, for Levi-Strauss, the basic unit of kinship was siblingship, derived from the relationship between two siblings. For Levi-Strauss, the kinship system of societies is based on certain universal elements of organizational structures such as prohibition of incest, exogamy, residence after marriage etc. He sees marriage as the key in the system of kinship of which reproduction is an essential part. This is questioned by Schneider and Boon, in reference to societies such as the Zulu, where marriage takes place between two women even though they might be impregnated by a man. Similarly, among Plain Indians (Native Americans inhabiting the Great Plains of America and Canada) marriage often takes place between men and transvestites.

1.2.4 Jack Goody

In his work *The Oriental, the Ancient and the Primitive*(1990), Jack Goody focuses on kinship and marriage in preindustrial societies in Eurasia. He comments on the kinship systems in the Orient-China, Tibet, India Sri Lanka and parts of Middle East. Goody challenges the anthropological studies of nineteenth and twentieth century that have analysed Eastern kinship system from the lens of primitive societies and further reinforced the divide between East and West.

Goody revisits the idea of marriage and the role of women in agrarian societies in Asia. He says that the perceived role of women in these agrarian societies is seen to differentiate these societies from the western societies. He refers to Levi-Strauss’ exchange of women, to point out that theories such as these seem to suggest that women have no agency of their own and are merely pawns in building alliances through marriage. Goody argues that contrary to this view, married women in patrilineal societies in the East (China, India and Middle East) have moral and material rights in their natal home. He writes that the complete assimilation of women into their marital kin groups implies separation from their natal kin group which is not a true account by Western anthropologists. He acknowledges that gender inequality does exist in Asian patrilineal societies but the differences between them and the western societies are not so wide.

Goody’s own work is seen as a critique of Levi-Strauss and Morgan, who according to him apply models and concepts meant for the study of primitive societies to complex, heteroge-

neous societies as found in the East. Goody's writes that any analysis of kinship system is incomplete without examining it in the context of mode of production, influence of state and judiciary and religion of the society under study. Peletz (1995) writes that it was Goody and his new approach which gave a new lease of life to the study of kinship system. He further adds that Goody's method of study is useful in explaining the variation in kinship systems due to class, caste and religion. In addition to this it can also be used to understand practices of infanticide, polyandry, polygyny, adoption etc.

1.2.5 David Murray Schneider

American anthropologist, known for his monograph, *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (1968), provides insight into the kinship system of North America and Britain. Schneider calls his work a cultural account because for him the kinship system is a system of symbols and meaning and not just roles and status. Schneider collected and analysed data based on the question: What is the distinctive feature which makes someone a relative. He used cultural symbols like: the home, family and love to categorise relations based on blood and marriage. Needless to say, that Schneider's approach was much criticised for delinking kinship from household organization, divorce and sexuality. He says the American kinship system is a single system across gender, class and even other ethnic groups.

Check Your Progress 1

1) What according to Radcliffe-Brown is the difference between clan and lineage ?

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2) According to Morgan the study of holds the key to understanding kinship

3) Affinal relationship is based on while consanguineal is based on

1.3 KINSHIP STUDIES: INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Kinship studies in India represent the diversity of India as a country and how kinship organization vary from region to region. Indian anthropologists were influenced by the work of

western anthropologists like Malinowski and Rivers. Between 1940s and 1970s, kinship was one of the key areas of research led by Ghurye, Srinivas, Kapadia, Shah, Gore and Karve to name a few. Kinship was studied within the context of the village, caste and religion and rarely in isolation.

1.3.1 G.S. Ghurye

G.S. Ghurye in his book *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture* (1955), compares the kinship terminology and associated behaviour in Indo-Aryan, Greek, and Latin cultures. It is noteworthy that the initial work on kinship, family, marriage was based not much on field work or ethnography but on the basis of literary, mythological, and religio-legal sources, also referred to as the Indological framework. Ghurye's next work, *Two Brahmanical Institutions: Gotra and Charana* (1972), was also within a similar Indological framework. Ghurye's student K.M. Kapadia's followed in his footsteps. His book *Kinship* (1947), is a detailed analysis of Brahmanical texts and their positions on various aspects of kinship like household, organisation of kin, marriage, adoption, inheritance, succession, and death impurities. In his next book, *Marriage and Family in India* (1955) Kapadia sets the tone for fieldwork and also points out the lacunae in terms of exclusion of Muslims and tribal communities and primary data through field work.

1.3.2 Iravati Karve

Iravati Karve is known for her extensive work on kinship. For the purpose of understanding kinship in India she divided the country into four main zones based on language: North, South, East and Central. She acknowledged that kinship behaviour and patterns are not uniform across the region and may differ from village to village or from caste to caste. Some of the key features of kinship organization as pointed out by Karve are as follows:

North Zone: She observed that in this zone, In north India, there are terms for blood relations, and terms for affinal relations. There are primary terms for three generations of immediate relations and the terms for one generation are not exchangeable for those of another generation. Four-gotra (sasan) rule, that is, avoidance of the gotras of father, mother, grandmother and maternal grandmother is generally practised among Brahmanas and among other upper castes in north India. However, some intermediate and most of the lower castes avoid two gotras, namely, that of father and mother.

Central Zone: Karve speaks of great similarity between the North and Central zone in terms of kinship organization. Like in the North, the kinship terms used denote respect to elders and kinship relations is often marked by giving and receiving gifts, marriage is exogamous though she cites the example of Gujarat where certain follow the practice of marriage with the mother's brother(mama) and the practice of **levirate**(marrying the brother of dead husband). Karve also points out that certain caste groups like the Marathas and Kunbis practice both the system of dowry and bride price. She writes that the Maharashtra kinship organization shows the influence of north and south zones.

South Zone: The Southern zone is again interesting because it presents before us a kinship pattern not common in the North or Central zone. It is complex to study the southern areas as they are dominated by the patrilocal and patrilineal system and in some areas matrilineal and matrilocal systems, like among the Nayars of Kerala; we will learn more a +eal system among the Nayars in our subsequent units.

The preferential marriage system in the south is among the cross cousins, that is the children of the brother and sisters marry; that is an **ego's** (the person in reference) mother's brothers children or fathers sisters children. Thus, the strict separation between family of procreation and family of marriage which exists in the North and central Indian kinship is not present in the South Indian kinship system. The South Indian kinship stress the bilateral kin relationships of brother and sister through their children.

The Eastern ZoneThe area consists of a number of Austro-Asiatic tribes.All the people speaking Mundari languages have patrilineal and patrilocal families. The Ho and Santhal have the practice of cross-cousin marriage. But till the father's sister or the mother's brother are alive, they cannot marry their daughters. This condition makes cross-cousin marriage a rare phenomenon. Many of the tribes, like Ho and Munda are divided into exogamous totemistic groups, where marriage has to be outside the totemic group or clan. Some of the tribes have practice of bride price. In this zone there are matrilineal communities like the Nayars of Kerala .But unlike them the husband and wife live together in small household of their own and the property is inherited by the youngest daughter. The Khasis have clan exogamy. Marriages of parallel cousins are not allowed. Cross-cousin marriage is also quite rare.

1.3.3 T. N.Madan

Prof Madan's work titled '*Family and Kinship: A study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir*', is a pioneering work on kinship in India. It is based on his field work in the village of Utrassu-Umanagri in 1957-58. He writes the kinship rituals of the Pandits are a combination of both Sanskritic and non-Sanskritic rites and ceremonies.

The Pandits are divided into two main subcastes which determine endogamy for marriages. These two subcastes are the *Gor* (those who are involved in priestly duties) and the *Karkun* (roughly translated as workers). These two sub castes cannot intermarry. Endogamy within the sub caste and exogamy outside *gotra* is followed and marrying outside the religion is seen as polluting. In case a good alliance is received from a same *gotragroom*, the mother's brother who belongs to a different *gotra* may give away the bride thus technically circumventing the *gotra* principle. Village exogamy was also practiced. Reciprocal marriages were also common where daughter is given in exchange of a daughter-in-law. Madan also mentions that apart from reciprocal marriages another type of marriage that took place sometimes involved bride price, where the groom's family paid a certain sum of money to the bride instead of the usual practice of taking dowry.

The basic unit is called the *gara* (household) or *chulah* (hearth group). The family would consist of paternal grandparents, brothers and their children. The eldest brother of the family, in absence of parents, was the patriarch often taking decisions for the children of other brothers. The *kotamb* on the other hand referred to a larger group which included the extended kin.

Madan speaks of another concept, the *kol* which he says is the backbone of the kinship structure. The *kol* according to him is the patrilineage (lineage based on descent through the father's kin). The wives in the family though active participants in kin and family life, however do not maintain close relations with their natal family post marriage. Madan writes that the husbands do not count the wives natal family as kin. There is a certain degree of inequality and hierarchy where the natal kin is supposed to be subservient to the groom's family. But if the natal home is rich and powerful, the groom's family shows off their affinal ties.

Madan speaks of the bias against girls in the Pandit community at the time of his fieldwork. He says how there are sayings and proverbs denoting that the birth of a daughter brings sadness while the birth of a son brings joy to the family. Girls are expected to help their mother in household work and many were denied education.

There are several aspects of the kinship system in the rural Kashmiri Pandit family which are unique. Upon the death of the father, the sons may divide the property, as the mother has no rights over the property. This is a unique feature as in most societies, after the death of the husband, the widow is the natural heir to the property. Secondly, in case of a sister in the family, if she is married and stays in the marital home then she doesn't have any right over the property and nor do her children. But if she stays at her natal home, due to a failed marriage or widowhood then she has claims over the property, though her children do not. In most communities, the *Mama* (*maternal uncle*) finds a special mention. Among the Pandits, it is the father's sister who plays an important ritualistic role in the ceremonies accompanying the birth of a child. It is she who leads the ceremonies by lighting up a bark of a birch tree and blessing the child (her niece or nephew).

Madan points out that core to the kinship idea among Pandits are differentiating between those who were born into a kin and those who are married into it. It is because of this that while the wife is expected to integrate into her conjugal family, her husband is a guest at his wife's house. He doesn't have any rights, legal or ritualistic, with regard to his affinal kin. But with passage of time, due to the relation of the children with the mother's family and vice versa, certain rituals come up which involve the husband.

1.3.4 M.N. Srinivas

M.N. Srinivas is one of the pioneers of Indian anthropology. His Master of Arts (MA) thesis was on *Marriage and Family among Kannada caste in Mysore* (1942). In this he explored not only kinship terminology but also marriage practices such as rituals, bride price, dowry and the family structure. Another work of his based on intensive field in Coorg, "*Religion and Society among Coorgs*" though not exclusively on kinship but does speak of the idea of lineage among Coorgs. Srinivas writes about the Coorg household, built on ancestral land would sometimes comprise of about 250-300 people. Srinivas gives insight into the life of a village in Coorg, religion- beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, family life and structure and lineage. Srinivas makes an interesting observation that the Coorgs did not follow any Vedic practices or rituals. They were economically and politically powerful. The ancestral property is treated as sacred and there is an ancestral shrine in every estate.

The Coorgs have a system of **patrilineal** (where lineage is traced through the male side of the family) and **patrilocal**(a custom where the married couple are expected to reside in the husband's family) . In the Coorg society, the Okka is the basic unit .We mentioned earlier on

about the household comprising of about 250 members. Srinivas compares the Coorg family structure to that of matrilineal Taravad of the Nayars and the patrilineal Illam of the Nambudris. Every village has its own headman and this position is hereditary and a council of elders. The Coorgs are patrilineal to the extent that only male members have any right in the right ancestral estate and it is the son who carries the legacy of the Okka. The division among men and women is quite sharp in the Okka, with special spaces designated to each gender. The verandah is used by the men and the women use the kitchen or other inner rooms to meet their guests. After marriage, women are no longer members of their natal Okka. Even in the natal Okka they do not have rights. In case of widowhood, women can remarry and there is a system of **levirate**(a marriage custom where the widow marries the brother of the deceased husband) in Coorg. Interestingly, while men need to be skilful in hunting, they also love to dance and they do so during the harvest festival and other religious festivals, while women watch from afar.



(Ceremonial dance by corgi men. Source:wikicommons)

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The main sources for study of kinship in India in the initial years wereand
- 2) Name two Indian societies that are matrilineal

.....
.....
3) What were the two main differences between the Indian and Western study of Kinship

1.4 KINSHIP STUDIES AND GENDER

The earlier studies on kinship described terminologies, family organisation, descent and lineage and relationships. In later days, there were several new perspectives like the Marxist, postmodern and the feminist were added to the study of kinship. The Marxist and feminist perspectives pointed out the inherent inequalities in the kinship system. There are several examples which reflect this inequality- bride price, gender specific rituals, gift giving and its nature, leadership etc. When we speak of women and kinship, what we are essentially talking about is the role played by women in family, marriage, property rights, lineage and descent. In short the role and status of women within the kinship system.

Leela Dube one of India's leading anthropologist, writes about her own life story to highlight the connection between gender and kinship. Dube recalls how girls were expected to learn household work as a preparation for married life. Single women (unmarried women) were rare, but Dube also mentions several of her teachers who were single women. She says that in her cultural set up women were asked to get education only to help them in case of unforeseen difficulties like widowhood. Women were further socialised into their expected role through religion and other customs. She also mentions that women were not allowed to visit their natal homes after marriage nor were the bride's family welcomed by the groom's family. The system of kinship was clearly in favour of the men with emphasis on patrilocality and the kin group of the husband.

During her field work with the Gonds, Dube saw a different kind of system. In the Gond society, widows remarried, there was bride price instead of dowry. She observed that the Gond women had more freedom than upper caste women. But she also observed that older women who did not have any source of income were dependent on their children and were expected to contribute to looking after the family irrespective of their age. So we see that lack of in-

come, and affected women's role in the kinship system as pointed out by anthropologists studying other societies as well.

Another aspect of gender which has been explored largely by American sociologists, is that of impact of gay and lesbian relationship on the concept of family. Researchers say that the current understanding of a family is that of man-woman and children, however a gay or lesbian couple do not fit into this box. The question that comes up then is how do you then define and understand kinship which may not involve family, procreation or descent in the traditional understanding. A family based on gay/lesbian relationship raises the question on whether kinship can only be defined by blood ties or genetics.

Activity 1

Write down some beliefs and sayings that capture the birth of a girl child in a family, gather this information from the elders in your family and from the anecdotes in the family. Compare your anecdotes with others in the study centre.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The home that women are born into is calledand the one they are married into is the
- 2) Marriage practices like and point towards gender inequality
- 3) Leela Dube gained a different perspective towards gender in kinship by studying the

1.5 LET US SUM UP

This unit traced the development of kinship studies in the West and in India. Lewis Morgan, initiated a formal study of kinship, focused on kinship terminology. Subsequent anthropologists like Radcliffe-Brown were concerned about not only kinship terminology but also relationships and the method of analysis. It was Levi-Strauss who changed the way kinship was studied with his focus on abstract modelling and exchange of women. In India, the study of kinship was a part of the larger aspect of Indian society. Kinship was studied along with family and marriage and it is reflected in the works of Ghurey, Karve, Madan and Srinivas. But the main difference was that in India, unlike the West, the initial work on kinship was based on literary and religious texts. In recent times, the scope of kinship has been expanded to look at gender, division of labour, gay/lesbian relationship. The role of women in the kin

group has an impact on the nature of relationship not only between individuals but also between families.

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1.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) According to Radcliffe-Brown, clan is based on ancestry traced to a mythical ancestor. Lineage on the other hand, traces descent through either the male or female line of ancestry.
- 2) For Lewis Morgan an integral part of the study of kinship was: kinship terminology, which he thought pointed at the organization of the society itself
- 3) Affinal relationship is based on non-blood ties while consanguineal is based on blood relation

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The main sources for study of kinship in India in the initial years were religious and literary texts
- 2) Two examples of matrilineal societies are the Khasis and Nayars

3) Indian kinship studies are located in the context of family and marriage and also often caste and village. Initially, Indian kinship studies were not based on fieldwork. In the West, on the other hand, kinship studies were based on fieldwork and are differentiated from the studies on family and marriage.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The home that women are born into is called their natal home....and the one they are married into is the marital home
- 2) Marriage practices like dowry and bride price point towards gender inequality
- 3) Leela Dube gained a different perspective towards gender in kinship by studying the Gonds



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UNIT 2 BASIC CONCEPTS*

Structure

2.0 Objectives

2.1 Introduction

2.2 Family

2.2.1 Types of Family

2.2.2 Functions of Family

2.2.3 Patterns of Residence and Family

2.3 Marriage

2.3.1 The Concept of Marriage

2.3.2 Types of Marriage

2.4 Descent and Alliance

2.5 Let Us Sum Up

2.6 References

2.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to

- Explain the definition of family and marriage
- Classify different kinds of family and marriage
- Explain descent and alliance as concepts

2.1 INTRODUCTION

* Written by Sushree Panigrahi, Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS) New Delhi, with section taken from unit 6 and 7 of ESO-12

The previous unit on kinship introduced the reader to various perspectives from which kinship is studied and understood. Since kinship studies constitute an important part of sociological and anthropological studies, there are several studies on the key concepts of the idea of kinship. In this unit, we look at the basic concepts used in kinship, namely: family, marriage, descent and alliance. Let us begin with the concept of family.

2.2 FAMILY

Family is one of the most important social institutions. Most of the world's population lives in family units. The specific form and behaviour patterns found within a family have shown variations throughout time, across societies of the world and even within a society. A sociologist looks at the institution both in terms of an ideal type and a reality. He/she ascertains the ideals of the family system partly because they are a guide to behaviour and also because these ideals act as values, a set of norms which are passed from one generation to another. After trying several methods of studying the family, the sociologist Emile Durkheim reached the conclusion that the best way to do so was through ethnographic and historical study, of customs, law and demography. But he also added that while ethnography can inform us about existing familial organisation and history about the past, what was missing was the methodology of predicting the future pattern or organisation of the family. A sociologist also studies the actual way in which a family is patterned and re-patterned within a society, in a particular group through time. He/She will also try to identify the forces, which have been responsible for changing certain aspects of the family units in a particular manner.

The family is recognised as central to the kinship system and is seen as the basic unit of social organisation. Can one imagine a society without a family? Family is believed to be universal in nature, though there are debates on whether every society is characterised by the

presence of family and whether it can be defined only in a particular manner. George Peter Murdock in his work titled *Social Organisation*(1949)says that the concept of the family is universal as almost all the societies that he studied had some form of family. He defined family as ‘a social group that is characterised by common residence, reproduction and economic cooperation. He adds that it includes adults of both sexes who are in socially approved sexual relationship with one or more children own or adopted’ While this is the broad understanding of what a family is, not every society adheres to these norms. According to Goody (1964), family is one of the most researched groups but not enough theoretical work has been done towards building a sound theory on the family.

2.2.1 Types of Family

In order to understand the nature of family we will look at the types of family to begin with. You must have heard of nuclear, joint and extended family? One way of defining a family is based on the degree of interaction that exists between the family members. Normally the basic unit of social structure contains the two primary links of kinship. These are of parenthood and siblingship. In simple terms, a family usually comprises various combinations and permutations of these relationships. In the Indian context, we generally speak of the contrast between nuclear and joint family types. A classification of families into joint and nuclear types is usually based on the way in which families are organised.

Nuclear family: A nuclear family is the smallest unit consisting of husband, wife and children. In a nuclear family the husband-and-wife relationship is important for the survival of the system.

The **Joint Family** is larger than the nuclear family and may include grandparents, parents, siblings and their spouses and their children. The other characteristics of a joint family include, common kitchen, joint property and a sense of mutual obligation among members.

Much has been written about the joint family system, especially the Hindu joint family system. The patrilineal, patrilocal (residence of the couple after marriage in the husband's father's home), property owning, co-residential and commensal joint family, comprising three or more generations has been depicted as the ideal family unit of Hindu society. M.S. Gore (1968: 4-5) points out that ideally, the joint family consists of a man and his wife and their adult sons, their wives and children, and younger children of the paternal couple. In this ideal type the oldest male is the head of the family. The rights and duties in this type of family are laid down to a great extent by the hierarchical order of power and authority. Age and sex are the main ordering principles of family hierarchy. The frequency and the nature of contact/communication between members vary on the basis of sex. A married woman, for instance works in the kitchen with her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. Younger members are required to show respect to the older members and can hardly question the authority or decision taken by elders even when it directly concerns them. Children of the joint family are children of all the male members in the parental generation.

Extended families are bigger than nuclear families and include a third generation which may include parents of either spouse, spouse of a brother and so on. Frequently, the term 'extended' family is used instead of the term joint family to indicate that the combination of two or more nuclear families is based on an extension of the parent-child relationship. Thus, the patrilineally extended family is based on an extension of the father-son relationship, while the matrilineally extended family is based on the mother-daughter relationship. The extended family may also be extended horizontally to include a group consisting of two or more brothers, their wives and children. This horizontally extended family is called as the **fraternal** or **collateral family**. In India, the family whether extended vertically and/or horizontally is called the joint family, which is strictly speaking also a property-sharing unit. Thus, the concept of joint family in India has legal and other references as well.

Another important point to be raised is the differentiation between family and household. In many research studies and even in the process of data collection by the government, the term household size is used rather than family. What is the difference between a family and a household? Sociologists clarify that while family is a social phenomenon, household is a physical one. The physical aspects also include differences in size, increase in divorce rates and so on.

The above definitions of the nuclear and the joint family are limited in the sense that they do not say anything more than the compositional aspect of the family. When we look at the wide variations through time in patterns of family living based on region, religion, caste and class in India we find that the nuclear and the joint family organisation cannot be viewed as two distinct, isolated and independent units but as a continuum, as something interrelated in a family developmental cycle.



The nuclear and joint family

(image source https://hindiourhome.blogspot.com/2018/07/blog-post_16.html)

2.2.2 Functions of the family: The family performs certain essential functions that are social, reproductive, economic and educational in nature. It establishes a permanent relationship between husband and wife that involves reproduction. The traditional view of

family includes division of labour, which stands true even today. In patriarchal society, the man is seen as the head of the household and main wage earner. Women take care of home, children and elders in the family. In joint families, the families are also economic units where each family member contributes to economic production. Examples of this are family businesses or agricultural families, in which each family member has a specific role and a share in the earnings and profit. One of the primary functions of the family is socialisation. It is through the family that the new generation learns to integrate in the society and transmission of culture and social norms takes place. One of the key issues related to the family and change is the functions of the family. Some of the functions that were performed by the family, especially the extended family, are now taken over by other institutions of the society. Bell and Vogel (1960), write that, one of the often repeated point is that women in modern society have much less work than those in traditional societies. Many of the chores -- washing clothes, dishes and other laborious work have been reduced due to mechanisation. Bell and Vogel disagree and say that while women may spend less time on certain chores, they have taken over many other chores - going to bank, working in professions and working at home etc., so individual contribution to the family may have changed in nature but not in quantity. The other point they make is that of perceived change in values and behaviour: The joint family was viewed as closed and patriarchal, where the individual lacked freedom. But Bell and Vogel say it is a misconception that nuclear families are independent and autonomous. The children are economically dependent on parents and stay on with parents till they find their feet.

2.2.3 Patterns of Residence and Family

The lineage structures and patterns of residence also vary across cultures In the Iban society, of Indonesian Islands, each child is born into one particular family, known as *bilek*. The child

can belong to either the mothers or father's family. Research into the Iban society showed that there were 49% of cases that were **virilocal** (residence in man's house) and about 51% were **uxorilocal**(residence in woman's house). The family to which the child belongs as a matter of right is his/her natal family. The child belongs to either his father's or mother's family and not both, unless the child is adopted by another family or marries into another family. As long as the person is a resident member s/he has inheritance rights over property and land. Raymond Firth gives the example of Maoris of New Zealand where descent through either one parent was necessary for establishing membership but where tracing descent was concerned both sides were factored in. Firth referred to the Maori *hapu* as an **ambilateral** group as kinship membership could be from both parents, unlike the Iban society where membership could be to only one group. In the latter case, the term **utrolateral** is used.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) What is the difference between a nuclear and joint family?

.....

.....

.....

- ii) What are the main functions of the family ?

.....

.....

.....

2.3 MARRIAGE

Marriage is an important and universal social institution of society. As a social institution, it provides a recognised form for entering into a relatively enduring relationship for the bearing and rearing of children. It is thus primarily a way of regulating human reproduction. This reproduction, however, also has a sociological dimension. The right of sexual relationship, that universally accompanies marriage, provides legitimisation to the children born in wedlock; this legitimacy is of great importance in the matters of inheritance and succession. Besides, through marriage there comes into existence the family, a relatively stable social group that is responsible for the care and training of children. In all these respects, then, marriage has historically provided the institutional mechanisms necessary for replacement of social members and thereby has been meeting the important prerequisites of human survival and society's continuance.

2.3.1 The Concept of Marriage

However, with changing norms on what constitutes as recognised forms of intimacy and sexuality, marriage as an institution too saw changes. In any case, sociologists and anthropologists have struggled with defining marriage as a concept. Kathleen Gough in her article on marriage (1959) writes that a particular definition may be appropriate for one society but not for another. She gives the example of her definition of marriage which says, "Marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that the children born to the woman are recognised legitimate off spring of both parents" (1959:33). She points out the Nuer society where this definition would be valid, as among the Nuers women marry women. This kind of marriage occurs when a woman is unable to have children and marries another woman, even if she is previously married and she acts as the 'husband' and begets children

with the 'wife' through an arrangement with clan's man who impregnates her. According to the well known definition by Gillin and Gillin, "Marriage is a socially approved way of establishing a family of procreation."

Edmund Leach has argued against making legitimacy of the off spring the only criterion for defining a marriage. He cited the Nayar case; On the basis of Kathleen Gough's study of Nayars. He states that the Nayars traditionally had 'no marriage in the strict sense. He argues that it is not possible for a single definition to be applicable to all societies so he suggested instead about ten types of rights derived from the various types of marriages and if an institution in a particular society reflected any one or more of those rights, then that institution could be termed as marriage. Needless to say, this was not acceptable to many scholars. Gough also suggests the following definition, "marriage is a relationship established between a woman and one or more persons, which provides that a child born to a woman under circumstances not prohibited by rules of the relationship, is accorded full birth status rights common to normal members of his society or social stratum"(1959, 32).

2.3.2 Types of Marriage

As has just been pointed out, marriage has a large variety of forms. These forms can be identified on the basis of the number of partners and rules governing who can marry whom. In terms of the number of partners that can legitimately enter into matrimony, we have two forms of marriage, namely, monogamy and polygamy.

Monogamy: Monogamy restricts the individual to one spouse at a time. Under this system, at any given time a man can have only one wife and a woman can have only one husband. Monogamy is prevalent in all societies and is almost the universal form in all modern industrial societies. Even where polygamy is permitted, in actual practice, monogamy is more widely prevalent. Due to constraints of financial resources and almost an even balance

between the ratio of men and women in the population, a vast majority of individuals living in polygamous societies cannot have more than one spouse at a time. In many societies, individuals are permitted to marry again on the death of the first spouse or after divorce; but they cannot have more than one spouse at the same time. Such a monogamous marriage is termed as serial monogamy. Most western societies practice serial monogamy. A society may also practice straight monogamy, in which remarriage is not allowed. Most upper caste Hindu females were obliged to follow the norm of straight monogamy prior to the enactment of Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, as until then widows were not allowed to marry again. These restrictions did not, however, apply to men. They were allowed to remarry after their spouse's death. However, in some lower castes, widow remarriage was permitted. In such a remarriage usually the deceased husband's brother was considered a preferred mate. This practice helped keep property within the family. It is also called **levirate marriage**.

Polygamy: Polygamy denotes marriage to more than one mate at one time and takes the form of either **Polygyny** (one husband with two or more wives) or **Polyandry** (one wife with two or more husbands). While monogamy is permitted in all societies, polygamy, in the form of polygyny, is the preferred form in several societies. Murdock's (1981) research, based on an analysis of 283 societies, revealed that 193 of these were characterised by polygyny, 43 were monogamous and only 2 practiced polyandry. Preferential rules for the choice of wives/husbands are followed in some polygamous societies. In certain societies males marry the wife's sisters, Such marriages are termed as **sororal polygyny**. Among polyandrous societies, **fraternal polyandry** is by far the most common, where the husbands of the woman are brothers.

Box 1 Marriage among Nayars

Nayars of Kerala form a household that comprised of the sister, brother, their children and the children of the daughter/s of the sister/s. The home in which they lived was referred to as *taravad* and the oldest male legal guardian is called *karavanan*. The Nayar girls who were yet to attain puberty were married off in ritual ceremony called Kalyanam. After the rituals, the couple would be kept in seclusion for three days. After three days of seclusion the couple would separate symbolically, shown by tearing off a piece of cloth in public. The couple would not meet again and the wife would go to the husband's house only to observe his death rites upon his death. In many Nayar groups, the ritual husband would be referred to as father by the children rather than the biological one.

For the girl this rite marked a transition in her life. She was now viewed and accepted as an adult. She was also to maintain a social and sexual distance from the men belonging to her lineage. She was also seen as ready to accept visiting husbands of other sub-caste groups or lineage or Nambodri Brahmins. These relationships were referred to as *sambandham*. She was prohibited to have a relationship with a Nayar belonging to her lineage or a lower sub-caste or with a man of a lower caste. The ritual husband would not meet his ritual wife unless he too became a visiting husband.

The question that arises now is that of children and paternity. When the woman became pregnant one or more men would claim paternity and would give clothes and vegetables to the midwife. However, if no-one came forward to claim the child, it was presumed that it was a result of a union with a man of lower caste or different religion. In such an event, the woman would be ostracized or sometimes even killed. The person who claimed paternity did not have any social, economic or legal duties towards the child; it was the matrilineal kin group which bore all responsibility of the child.

The form of marriage described in Box 1 does not exist among the Nayars now and witnessed a decline after independence. It does serve as an example of how marriage patterns can differ from society to society thus making a definition difficult. Not only marriage, this also led to a different family structure as well. It did not comprise of the usual father, mother and child unit nor did the father have the obligatory duties or rights where the child was concerned. Though the child referred to his ritual father as “appan” (father), there was no obligation or rights on either side other than observing pollution on death of the ritual father. But the point to be noted is that every child needed to have a ritual and biological father- without which s/he would not be recognised in the society or be part of it. Among the Nuer of Africa, a man may legitimise the child of an unmarried woman by merely paying a fee. (Evans Pritchard, 1951). Likewise among the Todas of South India marriage and legitimacy are not necessarily related and there is a legitimising ceremony that takes place even post marriage. This ceremony is conducted by the husband - and this he could do even for children born of previous husband/s.

The nature of marriage is also determined by religion. In Islam, marriage is a contract between two individuals while in Hinduism and Christianity, it is seen as a divine contract and one that cannot be broken. This is the reason why divorce is frowned upon in India and women are expected to continue in dysfunctional and abusive marriages. Similarly, the Roman Catholic Church does not recognise divorce; even if a couple does get divorced; they are ‘still married in the eyes of God’.

Activity 1

‘Hindustan Times’ of August 2004 published a news item “Girlfriends shun families”. It referred to two young girls living in a slum in Bhopal. The parents of one of them had forcibly married her to a man but her ‘girlfriend’ disrupted the marriage and the two girls

decided to live together. The police and the counsellors tried to help the girls to return to their families but the girls did not oblige them. Does Gough's definition of marriage include this case? Write your answers to the above questions on a separate sheet of paper. Then provide your own definition of 'marriage' that may reflect on contemporary issues related to alternative sexualities and share with your peers.

The following section on alliance and descent can be said to be the foundation of the concept of marriage. Before we move on to that, let us go through what all we have discussed so far by answering the questions below.

Check Your Progress 2

i) What is sororal polygyny?

.....
.....
.....

ii) Which is the most common form of polyandrous marriages?

.....
.....

2.4 DESCENT AND ALLIANCE

In this section we will discussing two concepts used in kinship studies, descent and alliance. Robin Fox, who wrote extensively on this, says that social organisation in most tribal societies is based on the concepts of alliance and descent. He writes that alliance is the temporary association of a male with several females. He uses the word temporary, as the alliance may end due to death of either partner. In another interpretation of alliance, it refers

to the linkages between two or more clans (clan refers to a group of people who trace their descent from a common ancestor). Social units of kinship are said to be formed by alliances by marriage. It is through alliances that relationships are made with people /groups who are not part of the tribe/clan. These alliances, especially for marriage, may be based on certain rules. These rules are those of **exogamy** (marrying outside tribe/clan) and **endogamy** (marrying within the tribe/clan). The *sapinda* and *gotra* rules of marriage in India are an example of this. As per the *sapinda* rules of exogamy, a person cannot marry someone who shares common ancestry on either mother or father's side. This includes up to three generations from the mother's side and five generations from the father's side. Similarly, two people belonging to the same *gotra* cannot get married. When two people say that they have the same *gotra*, it implies that they trace their descent from a common ancestor. Some villages may follow rules of exogamy, prohibiting marriage within the village. All these rules determine how and with whom alliances can be formed.

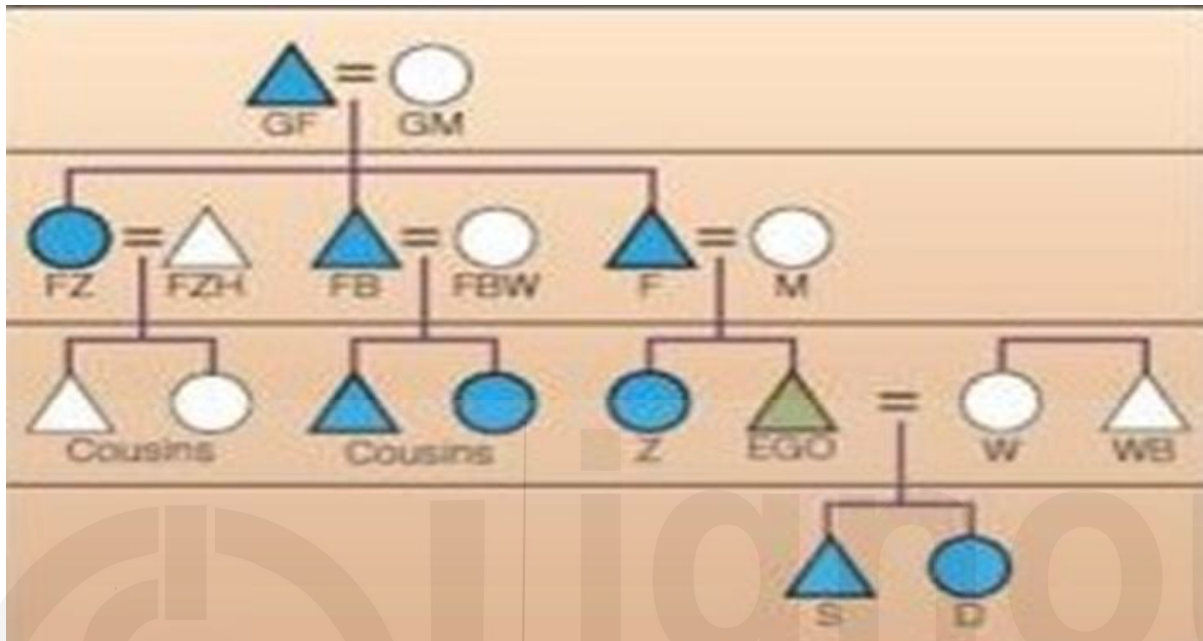
Jack Goody (1961) in his article on double descent, begins by saying that descent is used to classify human societies. A descent group is broadly defined as any social group that traces its descent from a common ancestor. This ancestor may be real or mythical.

The anthropologist W.H.R. Rivers, in his work *Kinship and Social Organisation* (1968) referred to descent as the eligibility to belong to a kin group and that too unilinear kin group. Descent is classified as bilateral, patrilineal, matrilineal and double descent. He adds that this classification may be interpreted differently by anthropologists.

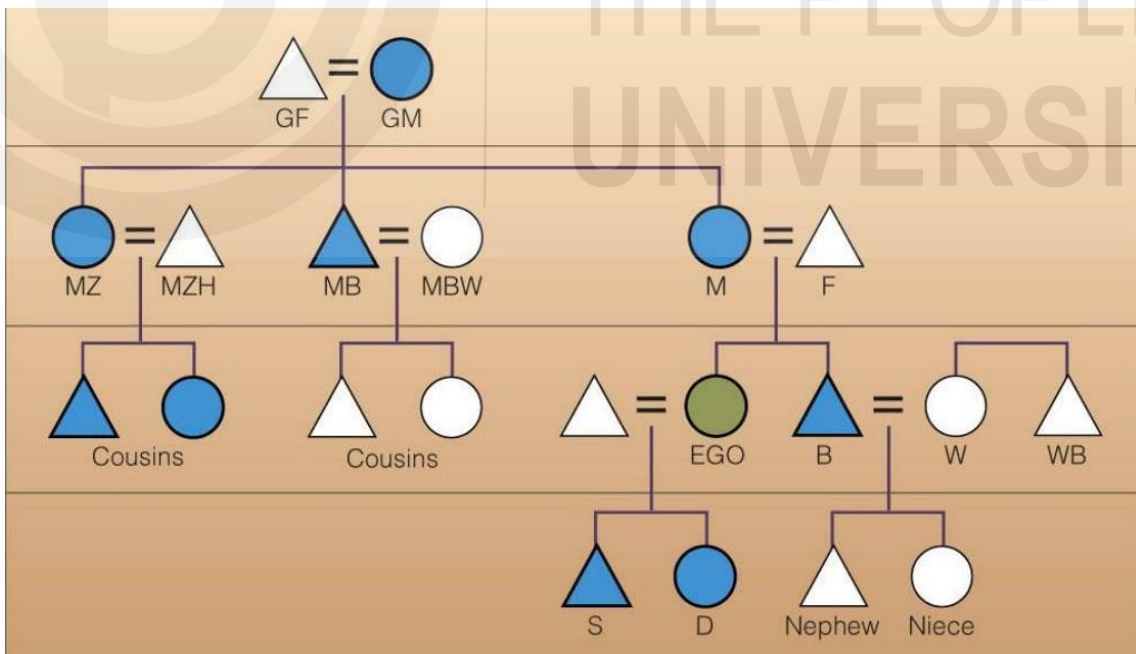
When a group traces its ancestry from the female line, it is referred to as **matrilineal descent** and when it does so through the male line, it is known as **patrilineal descent**. Most societies are said to be **unilinear descent** groups, that is, they are patrilineal or matrilineal. As an extension of this concept is that patrilocal or matrilocal. When a newly married couple moves on to stay within the house of the husband along with his family, it is said to be **patrilocal**. If

the couple move in to stay with the wife's relatives and family, then it is said to be a **matrilocal** society. It is not necessary that inheritance in a matrilineal society will always be through the women. But there are several examples among Native American tribes, where matrilineal descent determines, inheritance. In India, Khasis and Nayars follow the matrilineal system, but among the Nayars the property is controlled by a male member, mainly the brother. Keesing (1968: 453) speaks of three types of descent categories 1) **Cognatic**: the relationship between a person and a lineal ancestor, through the male or female line. Maoris, Malaita follow this pattern of descent 2) **Agnatic**: here the descendant is born of an unbroken line of men 3) **Non-agnatic**: those descendants born through at least one female link. The Kwaio can be both agnatic and non-agnatic. Firth, 1957; Scheffler, 1964; Murdock, 1960, among several other scholars, worked on cognatic descent groups. Around this time, there was an interest in working on **unilineal** descent groups that were found in Africa- for example the Nuer and Tallensi. However, it appeared that the groups in the Pacific followed a different pattern of descent. In **dual/double descent**, a person is a member of both the patrilineal and matrilineal group. The diagrams below illustrate the different types of descent groups.

Patrilineal Descent



Matrilineal Descent



Check Your Progress 3

- i) Double descent refers to the practice of tracing descent through
- ii) In a patrilineal society, descent is traced through.....
- iii) As per the rules of exogamy, one has to marry the gotra.
- iv) When a newly married couple moves on to stay within the house of the husband along with his family, it is said to be

2.5 LET US SUM UP

After going through the Unit, you would have become familiar with some of the basic concepts in kinship studies. We began the unit with some of the key definitions of the concepts and then moved on to the various categories within each concept. In the section on family, we discussed nuclear, joint and extended family. In the section on marriage, we discussed the various types of marriages, namely, monogamy, polygyny and polyandry. In the last section on descent and alliance we found that all the concepts of family, marriage and descent are interlinked. Descent and alliance determine marriage and in turn the family. The unit also familiarises you with the concepts of patrilocality and matrilocality. You should be able to identify different types of families, marriages and descent groups.

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2.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress 1

i) The nuclear family typically consists of mother, father and their unmarried children. The joint family on the other hand is larger than the nuclear family and may include grandparents, parents, siblings and their spouses and their children. The other characteristics of a joint family include, common kitchen, joint property and a sense of mutual obligation among members

ii) The family has many functions which is one of the reasons for its endurance as a social institution. The family regulates sexual behaviour. The regulations of reproduction is centred in the family. Children born through recognised forms of marriage are considered to be the legitimate members of family . The reproductive functions help replace people in the society by birthing and nurturing the family members. The family carries out the serious responsibility of socialising each child. Children are taught largely by their families to conform to socially approved patterns of behaviour. A family prepares its children for participation in the larger world and acquaints them with the larger culture. The family also performs economic functions and division of labour wherein members are assigned different roles for upholding the family as an economic unit.

Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress 2

i) In certain societies males marry the wife's sisters, Such marriages are termed as sororal polygyny

ii) Among polyandrous societies, "fraternal" polyandry is by far the most common.

Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress 3

i) Double descent refers to the practice of tracing descent through father's group (patrilineal) or through mother's (matrilineal) group .

ii) In a patrilineal society, descent is traced through father's side of the family

iii) As per the exogamous rules, one has to marry outside the gotra.

iv) When a newly married couple moves on to stay within the house of the husband along with his family, it is said to be patrilocal



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