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## UNIT 6: FICTIVE\*

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### 6.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Explain that kinship is also cultural construction;
- Narrate different fictive kinship practices across cultures;
- Relate the problems associated with the term fictive

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### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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Fictive kinship also referred as social, quasi or pseudo kinship is a common concept in anthropology and the social sciences. It refers to individuals unrelated by birth or marriage who label or treat one another as kin. It involves extension of kinship obligations and relations to individuals specifically not otherwise included in the kinship universe. In the beginning of the study of kinship only two forms of relation were recognised – first those related by blood and second relations through marriage. All other relations were considered outside the

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kinship map. The term ‘fictive’ was used to describe all such relation which were treated not-real leading to a distinction between pure/real kinship (blood and marriage) and impure or fictive relations. The use of the term ‘fictive’ was limited till the mid-to late twentieth century when there was an attempt to deconstruct and revise anthropology. It was realised that kinship was not simply a mirror of physical links but also socially constructed in specific cultural context.

The creation of fictive relation requires individuals having prolonged physical proximity in order to develop a relationship that is both interdependent and mutually beneficial. Such bonding consistently contributing to the emotional or material needs of an individual over time. Non-kind bonds of interpersonal association were more prominent in the tribal and peasant society but also found in the modern urban society. Rather it is found in greater number in contemporary society because of increase in social and geographic mobility and soaring divorce rates. These changes have led to formation of non-traditional family forms based more on voluntary ties and social networks.

Some of the salient features of fictive kinship are:

1. Fictive relationships are defined by criteria distinct from those establishing blood or marriage relationships. They may mimic the ties they copy, but they are defined in their own terms. These terms may have a religious or economic component, be predicated on existing social networks, or manipulate reality to fill gaps in real kinship networks.
2. Fictive kin are accorded many of the same rights and statuses as family members and are expected to participate in the duties of the extended family.
3. Relation are non-voluntary but involves a set of responsibilities and obligations.
4. Emulates even distant relationship as in the case of cousins and the practice of individuals becoming “honorary” uncles to their friend’s children.
5. Ensures the extension of kinship relation and terminology to a wide network of people

A comparison of pure kinship formed on basis of blood and marriage and fictive kinship is illustrated below.

<b>Comparison between Pure kinship and Fictive kinship</b>		
	<b>Pure kinship</b>	<b>Fictive kinship</b>
1.	Defined in relation to blood or marriage	Defined in relation to the fact of sharing and relating
2.	It is non-voluntary in the sense that relations are established on birth, especially those through blood. Even rules of marriage prescribes the relatives through marriage.	It is voluntary and often create in individual’s everyday social life.
3.	It assumes that kinship is universal and uniform in every culture.	It points at the relevance of cultural specificity.
4.	Responsibilities defined through blood and marriage are clear and identifiable.	There is a sense of ambiguity and lack of clarity in defining roles and responsibilities.

5.	Relationships are permanent and assumed to exist even after death.	Relationships are impermanent. They can change over the life course. And can even be dissolved at any time.
6.	Blood and marriage creates one to many relations, i.e. a marriage not only creates a relation between husband and wife but also with relatives of both.	Is restricted to individual and does not extend to other members. For example, someone's fictive sister does not automatically becomes a fictive child of that person's mother.

### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Briefly outline three features of fictive kinship.

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- 2) Discuss any three difference between pure kinship based on blood and marriage and fictive kinship. Use three lines to answer.

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## 6.2 FICTIVE KIN: AN APPROACH TO KINSHIP

The early view that kinship is based on biological and affinal relationship was critiqued on the ground that it was shaped largely by western notion of natural and universal importance of blood ties. Such a view excluded a variety of culture in which kinship was not based on the natural facts of marriage and reproduction. The critiques argued that it not the mere fact of biology that defined kinship. Kinship can also be based on large number of other factors which are social and thus kinship is a process in which relations are created in multiple ways. In an attempt to revitalise kinship, the concept of 'fictive' was used to study systems of kinship that was not based on blood and marriage.

### 6.2.1 Related terms – Relatedness, Kinshipping etc.

According to Lewis Morgan there are two kinds of kinship classes: the descriptive or natural and the classificatory or the artificial. The later or classificatory kinship has also been described as fictive or claimed kinship referring to relations without evidence of biological descent. This type of relationship is often used to encourage social and political interaction.

Another way fictive kinship has been described in anthropology is the use of the term relatedness. The term was used by Janet Carsten in her work, *Culture of Relatedness* in which she argued that kinship could not be understood only with reference to biology and reproduction. Rather kinship is more social in the sense that relations are constructed through relatedness.

Shyrock, Trautman and Gamble have used the term 'kinshipping' to describe the human ability to construct relations that are not based on genetic kinship but which nonetheless allows people to move freely between non-related groups.

It implies that kinship relations are no longer only face to face experience nor based only on genetic ties. It elaborates the social ability of human to construct relation beyond blood and marriage. It is the process by which people decide who family is and who is a stranger.

### **6.2.2 Types of Fictive Relations**

Since fictive kinship varies from culture to culture there is existence of different types of relations described as fictive. There are different ways in which fictive kinship has been classified. One type of categorisation is on the basis of the formation of relationship, it could of three types- peer group, religious group and bonds of friendship. Then there is the distinction between horizontal relation, those between peer groups resembling sibling ties and the vertical or those resembling intergenerational ties, example co-parenting.

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## **6.3 FACTORS FOR FORMATION OF FICTIVE TIES**

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Not all close non-kin ties are transformed into fictive kin and not every individual is equally likely to designate close others as part of the family. Relationships are negotiated over time and circumstances. There are many factors or conditions under which fictive ties are created, established and maintained. Fictive relations develop over time, involve frequent contact and requires close proximity and support.

### **6.3.1 Absence of Family like setting**

The absence of certain primary family relationships often leads to the desire to be surrounded by close relatives. As a result a non-family relationship develop into a family-like relationship where members feels the sense of belonging. Thus fictive kin ties often formed when primary family ties such as adult children or a partner is missing or absent. For example in Africa, the slave population replace their absent extended family with "fictive kin," from the same ethnic or national community to perform the role of absent family members. Another example is that of immigrant who are in foreign land without their primary family members. They cultivate interpersonal ties with the co-workers in an effort to cope with uncertainty and resource scarcity. Such form of kinship is relevant to people who form relationships in which they regard another as being part of their family due to ties of affection or emotional significance. Non-traditional family forms such as gay and lesbian unions can also be defined as fictive kinship. Lesbian and Gay men who are rejected by their family and are excluded from cultural definition of family create fictive kin with their homosexual partners as a way to legitimise and reinforce their relationship.

### **6.3.2 Religious Practice**

Fictive kin associations are established in a religious setting, like a baptism. Baptisms are the act of initiating an individual into a religion and making them a part of a network of people with shared beliefs. The godparents of the individual being baptised form a fictive kinship connection with the newly baptised, their parents and with any other godparents the baptised person may have. Further, members of religious movements may refer to each other as "brother" or "sister" while observing the rules and prohibitions attached to those statuses. The act of being part of the same religious ceremonies and rituals also creates a sense of relatedness and may develop into kinship ties.

### 6.3.3 Sharing of Common Substance or Life Situation

Fictive relations are created and maintained in many avenues outside the traditional sites of kinship, mainly family, clan etc. The military has also been an avenue to propagate fictive kinship, such as the sense of brotherhood felt by the soldiers. Fictive kinship has been demonstrated among the spouses of military men and women as well. These relationships may facilitate close bonds that are beneficial during times of hardship. Another example is the establishment of brotherhood among migrants and immigrants. They are known to form pseudo-families in which they cooperate within living and working situations. These relationships benefit them by creating a support system that would otherwise be unavailable to those living far from home. Crime networks and youth gangs employ kinship bonds and ideas of "blood brotherhood" as organising principles.

### 6.3.4 Honour/Respect for Non-kin Members

In many societies fictive kinship can be observed in everyday life as a form of showing respect. Older middle aged men and women (late 30s and above) are termed as 'uncle' or 'auntie', usually by people who are younger in comparison. In this context these terms are used as form of friendly yet respectful address to an older person. It also creates a temporary and seemingly familiar relationship and helps to facilitate interaction. It is also common for one to address friends of parents as 'auntie' or 'uncle'.

### 6.3.5 Medical/Legal Requirement

Some fictive kin relationships have been discovered in Israel in relation to organ transplants. Hospital committees are formed to assess whether the organ donation is from a true family member or from a friend. In order to obtain organ transplants, some individuals are forced to find strangers and pay them compensation for the procedure. However, the relationship between the donor and recipient must be invented as a familial relationship in order to pass through the hospital committee. In this case, fictive kinship is created knowingly to both parties in order to achieve their goals, and is mutualistic in nature.

#### Check Your progress 2

- 1) Discuss any four conditions that can lead to the creation of fictive ties in society.

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## 6.4 CULTURAL MANIFESTATIONS OF FICTIVE KINSHIP

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There are special forms of fictive kinship relations in different society, examples of some of them are explained below.

### 6.4.1 Feast of Souls

This refers to the use of ceremony to identify kinship ties between participants. Those participating in the rituals are defined as having relation because of the



fact of sharing a ritual bond. This required that a ritual takes place in order for the creation of kinship ties to be acknowledged as a formal alliance.

### 6.4.2 Miteri

The term ‘miteri’ literally means friendship and is a form of fictive kinship. Men who form fictive kin bonds are called mit; the female friend of another woman is called mitimi. The generic miteri is simply defined as an individualistic form of fictive or ritual kinship common among Hindu caste and ethnic group of Nepal. There are two rules for establishing a miteri membership, first that the bond is made with someone outside one’s own clan or caste and second that it is only made between people of same sex.

### 6.4.3 Compadrazgo

Compadrazgo is a form of fictive kinship found in Central Mexico for past many years. Literally meaning "co-parenthood", compadrazgo is a term to describe the set of relationships between a child, their parents, and their godparents. Beginning with the child’s baptism, godfather and godmother agree to share child’s spiritual and material welfare. This formalises bonds between godparents, parent and children.

### 6.4.4. Gurung tradition of ‘Rodi’

A noted Gurung tradition is the institution of "Rodi", where teenagers form fictive kinship bonds and become Rodi members to socialise, perform communal tasks, and find marriage partners. This is an institution by teenagers formed in the aim of socialisation, to undertake cultural responsibilities together and to look for marriage potentials.

### 6.4.5. Sorority among American communities

This is a club or organisation of women, usually young and commonly students, formed mainly for social purposes as well as for helping each other out in times of trouble or need. In this type of fictive relationships, usually the members refer to each other as ‘sisters’ in case of girl-groupings and ‘brothers’, in case of boy-groupings.

**Activity**

In this section we have discussed the different cultural manifestation of fictive kinship. Look around your neighbourhood and observe such relations. Discuss it in your study centre

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 2). Explain the following:
  - a. Miteri .....
  - .....
  - .....
  - b. Compadrazgo .....
  - .....
  - .....

c. Sorority .....  
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## **6.5 STRENGTHS OF FICTIVE RELATIONS**

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Fictive kinship is as important as, or more important than, comparable relationships created by blood, marriage, or adoption. Today fictive kin persists as a form of extended kin for pooling resources, extending familial networks, and extending social support among many ethnically marginalised families.

### **6.5.1 Builds Social Network and Strengthens Community**

Fictive relationships serve to broaden mutual support networks, create a sense of community, and enhance social control. In essence, fictive kin ties elaborate social networks and regularise interactions with people otherwise outside the boundaries of family. It enables people who do not have a place in the kinship system to be adopted into the system and therefore being accepted in the community. It fosters a sense of community and regularises interactions with people outside the boundaries of family. Fictive relationships serve to broaden mutual support networks, create a sense of community, and enhance social control.

### **6.5.2 Used as a Form of Address**

Fictive kinship is used as a form of address which expresses familiarity or as a public validation or for replacement kin (Ibsen and Klobus 1972). In Ju/'hoansi society, of the Kalahari desert one way to define a kinship relationship is by namesake. Children are named after ancestors and all persons with the same name are sibling and regarded as 'brother' or 'sister'. Further anyone with the same name of father is regarded as 'father' and so on. This allows establishing familiar relationship between distant relatives or strangers.

### **6.5.3 Relevant as a Mode for Socialisation**

Fictive kinship can be considered as a social lubricant, in association with manners and courtesy. Manners help society to run more smoothly and ease social tensions as it encourages people to act in consideration of others. Fictive kinship is therefore an important and highly used function in society for people to posit themselves in relationships and act accordingly to each other. It is viewed as the normal idiom of social relations.

### **6.5.4 Acts as a Resource to Face Unfamiliar Environment**

A fictive kin system enhances an immigrant's social capital and becomes a resource for aiding their integration into a new society. Social capital through fictive kinship acts as a support in the process of settling into an unfamiliar environment. 'Fictive kin serve as social and economic resources that can be used in a hostile social environment. Migrants can use these relationships to form closer ties between themselves and another individual, giving them an ally in their new home through spirituality. Fictive kinship exists to provide support to newcomers in the population.

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## 6.6 PROBLEM WITH CONCEPT OF FICTIVE

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The term tends to subsume all forms of relationship under one all-encompassing notion. This masks distinction that may remain important in people's everyday lives. A major problem with the concept of fictive kinship is that it is applied so liberally that its usefulness for comparative purposes is open to question. All fictive kin relationships are defined in their own terms and are subjective to change leading to lack of permanence. Fictive kin terms are sometimes used not to label or supplementary or replacement kin but to describe and validate familiarity. Blended and same sex family illustrates this problem. Further fictive kinship is "catch-all" term used for describing often misleading relationships that do not follow a typical kinship pattern.

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## 6.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have learnt about fictive as an approach to study kinship relations that are based outside blood and marriage. The term fictive became relevant in anthropology due to the limitation in the descent and alliance approach. These approaches emphasised on kinship as natural and universal. We also examined the different conditions, like religious practice, absence of family, sharing of substance that led to the creation of fictive kinship. The practice of fictive kinship in different societies has been explained in order to comprehend its cultural manifestation. Fictive kinship like pure kinship serves several functions in society. It extends the network of relations beyond blood and affinal kin. At the end of the unit some of the problems of the concept of fictive have been examined.

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## 6.8 REFERENCES

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## 6.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The salient features of fictive kinship are:
  - i. Fictive relationships are defined by criteria distinct from those establishing blood or marriage relationships. Some of the criteria for



formation of fictive kinship could be religious, economic, legal or political.

- ii. Fictive kin are accorded many of the same rights and statuses as family members and are expected to participate in the duties of the extended family.
- iii. Relation are non-voluntary but involves a set of responsibilities and obligations.

2) Difference between pure and fictive kinship:

	<b>Pure kinship</b>	<b>Fictive kinship</b>
1.	Defined in relation to blood or marriage	Defined in relation to the fact of sharing and relating
2.	It is non-voluntary in the sense that relations are established on birth, especially those through blood. Even rules of marriage prescribes the relatives through marriage.	It is voluntary and often create in individual's everyday social life.
3.	It assumes that kinship is universal and uniform in every culture.	It points at the relevance of cultural specificity.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The four conditions that can lead to the creation of fictive ties in society are :
  - i. Absence of primary family- fictive kin ties are formed when primary family ties such as adult children or a partner is missing or absent.
  - ii. Religious practices - fictive kin associations are established in a religious setting, like a baptism or membership of religious organization.
  - iii. Sharing of common substance or life situation-fictive relations are created and maintained in many avenues outside the traditional sites of kinship, mainly family, clan etc. These are situations where individual share similar life situations and tend to develop emotional support.
  - iv. Honour/Respect for non-kin members-In many societies fictive kinship can be observed in everyday life as a form of showing respect. Older middle aged men and women (late 30s and above) are termed as 'uncle' or 'auntie', usually by people who are younger in comparison.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) These are different forms of fictive kinship found in different society.
  - i) Miteri is an individualistic form of fictive or ritual kinship common among Hindu caste and ethnic group of Nepal.
  - ii) Compadrazgo is a form of fictive kinship found in Central Mexico. It refers to the set of relationships between a child, their parents, and their godparents.
  - iii) Sorority is a club or organisation of women, usually young and commonly students, formed mainly for social purposes as well as for helping each other out in times of trouble or need.