

KINSHIP

INTRODUCTION

- Kinship system represents one of the basic social institutions.
- Kinship is universal and in most societies plays a significant role in the socialisation of individuals and the maintenance of group solidarity.
- It is supremely important in the primitive societies and extends its influence on almost all their activities- social, economic, political, religious, etc.

DEFINITION

- Robin Fox : “Kinship is simply the relations between ‘kin’ that is persons related by real, putative or fictive consanguinity.”
- A.R.Radcliffe Brown: Kinship is “a system of dynamic relations between person and person in a community, the behaviour of any two persons in any of these relations being regulated in some way, and to a greater or less extent by social usage.”

STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLES OF KINSHIP

- The kinship system is governed by some basic principles which can be called the “facts of life”.
- Robin Fox speaks of four such basic principles which are mentioned below:
 - Principle 1: The women have the children
 - Principle 2: The men impregnate the women
 - Principle 3: The men usually exercise control
 - Principle 4: Primary kin do not mate with each other.

RULES OF DESCENT

Descent refers to the social recognition of the biological relationship that exists between the individuals. The 'rule of descent' refers to a set of principles by which an individual traces his descent. There are three basic rules of descent:

Patrilineal Descent

Matrilineal Descent

Bilateral Descent

PATRILINEAL DESCENT

According to this rule, descent is traced through the father's or male line. Here the descent criterion is restricted to males, and only descendants of a common ancestor in the male line will be recognised as kin. These are known as agnatic or patrilineal kin.

MATRILINEAL DESCENT

The descent of the individual is traced through the mother or either the male or female. The descendants are called here uterine or matrilineal kin.

BILATERAL DESCENT

This is a rule in which the descent is traced through both the lines, the female line and also the male line for some or the other purpose. Almost all kinship systems recognise ‘bilateral’ relationships, that is relationships to both maternal and paternal kins.

Example: Some societies such as the “Yako” of Nigeria, utilise matrilineal descent for some purpose and patrilineal descent for others. Here there exists a system of ‘double unilineal descent’ which is normally known as “double descent”.

UNILINEAL DESCENT

In this mode of tracing descent, they select one “line” only either the male or female.

IMPORTANCE OF THE RULE OF DESCENT

- The rule of descent is very important for two main reasons:
 - (a) Rule of descent establishes for every individual a network of social positions in which he participates. He comes to know about his obligations and rights.
 - (b) Rule of descent invariably defines some rights of inheritance. Inheritance and succession would go normally along the line of descent.

PRIMARY SECONDARY AND TERTIARY KINS

- Kinship has got various ramifications. On the basis of nearness or distance, kins are classified into:

Primary kins

Secondary kins

Tertiary kins

PRIMARY KINS: Every individual who belongs to a nuclear family finds his primary kins within the family. There are 8 primary kins: husband and wife, father-son, mother-son, father-daughter.

SECONDARY KINS: Outside the nuclear family the individual can have 33 types of secondary relatives: Example: Mother's brother, brother's wife, sister's husband, father's brother, etc.

TERTIARY KINS: Tertiary kins refer to the secondary kins of our primary kins. Example: wife's brother's son, sister's husband's brother, and so on.

KINSHIP MAP OF INDIA

For purposes of describing the kinship systems found in India, Irawati Karve (1953: 93) identified four cultural zones :

- The Northern Zone
- The Central Zone
- The Southern Zone
- The Eastern zones.

THE NORTHERN ZONE

- The northern zone, according to Karve, lies between the Himalayas to the north and the Vindhya ranges to the south.
- In this region, the majority of the people speak languages derived from Sanskrit. Some of these languages are Hindi, Bihari, Sindhi, Punjabi, Assamese and Bengali.
- In such a large region, we cannot say that there is one kinship system. The differences of language, history and culture bring about a high degree of variation within the region.
- The basic structure and process of kinship system in this area can be seen in terms of four features that is:
 - i) **kinship groups**, ii) **kinship terminology**
 - iii) **marriage rules**, and iv) **ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin**

Kinship Groups

Sociological studies in various parts of North India show that social groups, such as patrilineage, caste, subcaste provide the basis for cooperation or conflict among the people.

- i) Patrilineage
- ii) Clan
- iii) Caste and Subcaste
- iv) Fictive Kin

PATRILINEAGE

Kinship organisation in North India is based on unilineal descent groups. When the lineage membership group is traced on the basis of shared descent in one line, we call it a unilineal descent group. In North India, we have mostly patrilineal descent groups. This means that the descent is traced in the male line from father to son. Members of patrilineages cooperate as well as show antagonism in various situations.

CLAN

- A lineage is an exogamous unit, i.e., a boy and a girl of the same lineage cannot marry. A larger exogamous category is called the clan.
- Among the Hindus, this category is known as gotra. Each person belongs to the clan of his/her father and cannot marry within the clan or gotra.
- One usually knows about the common ancestor of lineage members as an actual person. But the common ancestor of a clan is generally a mythical figure. The members of a lineage live in close proximity and therefore have greater occasions for cooperation or conflict. Common interests or action do not characterise the relationships among clan members because they are usually scattered over a larger territory and their relationships are often quite remote. These relationships do become significant only in the context of marriage.

Caste and Subcaste

- Besides lineages and clans, the kinship system operates within the families of the caste groups, living in one village or a nearby cluster of villages. As castes are endogamous, i.e., one marries within one's caste, people belonging to one caste group are kinspersons in the sense that they are already related or can be potentially related to each other. Caste-fellows generally come forward to help each other when others challenge their honour and status. They may also hold rituals together and help each other economically.
- Subcaste is the largest segment of caste and it performs nearly all the functions of caste, such as endogamy and social control. In this respect, we can say that the internal structure of the subcaste would provide us the framework within which we can see the operation of kinship system. The members of a subcaste cooperate as kinspersons. They, depending on the context, work together as equals in the sphere of ritual activities and political allies in socioeconomic activities.

FICTIVE KIN:

- Often, people, who are not related either by descent or marriage, form the bonds of fictive kinship with each other. We find the evidence of such a practice in many tribal and village studies. On the basis of common residence in a village in North India, unrelated individuals may usually behave like brothers.
- Mahapatra (1969) points out that fictive kinship is a mechanism to provide even such kin who are not ordinarily found in a particular situation. For example, in North India where village exogamy is a normal practice, it is rare to find a brother to a daughter-in-law living in the same locality. She can get a brother only through a fictive relationship. In urban context, you must have frequently come across small children who call any older man 'uncle' and an older woman 'aunty'. This shows how easily we make use of kinship idiom in our day-to-day behaviour towards total strangers. These transitory relationships do not however assume much importance in terms of actual kin ties and behaviour associated with them.

Kinship Terminology

A comparison and analysis of the various kinship terms helps us to understand the kinship structure, its make-up and the behaviour associated with each term. In other words, kinship terms provide the context and the idiom for our social relationships. In this sense, kinship terms do not just tell us about biological and social relationship. They help us to look at the whole way of social life. Only after studying the language, values and behaviour of the particular people can we fully appreciate the significance of their kinship terms. Many times the same kinship term is used to denote different meanings in different contexts. This is the reason why the study of kinship terms is closely associated with the study of language and culture.

Marriage Rules

Because every time a marriage is contracted, new kinship bonds come into being, we can clearly see the relevance of marriage rules for discussing the patterns of kinship organisation. In the context of North India, we find that people know whom not to marry.

The rule of exogamy in North India:

i) Clan Exogamy

Descriptive Nature of North Indian Kinship Terms

The kinship terminology is the expression of kinship relations in linguistic terms. In the case of North India, we can call the system of terminology as descriptive. This is because the kinship terms generally describe the relationship from the point of view of the speaker. In a few words, even the most distant kin relationships can be accurately described. Unlike the English terms, uncle, aunty, cousin, which do not reveal age, patrilineal/matrilateral ties, the North Indian kinship terms are very clear. For example, when we say chachera bhai, it can be easily translated as father's younger brother's (chacha's) son, who stands in the relationship of a brother (bhai) to the speaker. Similarly, mamera bhai means mother's brother's (mama's) son. According to L. Dumont (1966: 96), the North Indian kinship terminology is descriptive in the sense that it describes elementary relationships starting from Ego. The elementary relationships of filiation upwards and downwards, siblingship (sister/brother) and marriage comprise the first set of terms have the relationships of the second order.

Social Behaviour

- Iravati Karve (1953) has given a list of kinship terms in North Indian languages. She makes use of kinship terminologies to describe and compare kinship systems in various parts of India. She studies the terms and also uses the findings for understanding the influences which have played a part in shaping them. Besides
- Iravati Karve, we can also give another example of the analysis of Indo-Aryan kinship terms, made by G.S. Ghurye (1946, 1955). He has highlighted the jural and ideological aspects of kinship systems through a comparison of kinship terms in North Indian languages. For example, among the Sarjupari Brahmins the term 'maan' refers to the bride-taker. In ideological terms, 'maan' reflects the high status of the bride-taker as compared to the bride-giver. |

KINSHIP TERMS SIGNIFYING SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- The very usage of kinship term also makes clear the kind of behaviour expected from a kin. For example, Oscar Lewis (1958: 189), in his study of a North Indian village, has described the pattern and relationship between a person and his elder brother's wife. This is popularly known as Devar-Bhabhi relationship, which is characteristically a joking relationship.
- As a contrast to the joking relationship is the behaviour of avoidance between a woman and her husband's father. Similarly, she has to avoid her husband's elder brother. The term for husband's father is shvasur and for husband's elder brother is bhasur. Bhasur is a combination of the Sanskrit word bhratr (brother) and shvasur (father-in-law), and is, therefore, like father-in-law.

Marriage Rules

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In the context of North India, we find that people know whom not to marry. In sociological terms, the same thing can be expressed by saying that there are negative rules of marriage in North India. We can also say that marriage is allowed only outside a defined limit. Let us see what this limit or the rule of exogamy is in North India.

Clan Exogamy

Belonging to one's natal descent line is best expressed in matters of marriage. No man is allowed to marry a daughter of his patriline. In North India lineage ties upto five or six generations are generally remembered and marriage alliances are not allowed within this range. In such a situation the lineage turns into the clan and we speak of gotra (clan) and gotra bhai (clan mates). Widely used Sanskrit term gotra is an exogamous category within a subcaste. Its main use is to regulate marriages within a subcaste.

The Four Clan Rule

In Irawati Karve's (1953: 118) words, according to this rule, a man must not marry a woman from -

- (i) his father's gotra,
- (ii) his mother's gotra,
- (iii) his father's mother's gotra, and
- (iv) his mother's mother's gotra.

In other words, this rule prohibits marriage between two persons who share any two of their eight gotra links. This means that the rule of exogamy goes beyond one's own lineage. Another related kind of exogamy, which exists in North India, is village exogamy. A village usually has members of one or two lineages living in it. Members belonging to the same lineage are not permitted to intermarry. This principle extends even to the villages, which have more than two lineages. In other words, a boy and a girl in a village in North India are like a brother and sister and hence cannot intermarry

Marriages within the Subcaste

- Associated with local terms is the idea of the status of various units within the subcaste.
- Taking the example of the Sarjupari Brahmin of Mirzapur district in Uttar Pradesh, studied by Louis Dumont (1966: 107), we find that each of the three subcastes of Sarjupari Brahmins of this area is divided into three houses (kingroups or lineages) which range hierarchically in status. The marriages are always arranged from lower to higher house. This means that women are always given to the family, which is placed in the house above her own.
- Another principle should also be mentioned here. It is rule of no repetition. This means that if the father's sister has been married in a family (khandan), one's own sister cannot be given in marriage to that same family (Dumont 1966: 104-7). The term family or khandan is used here as a smaller unit of a lineage. This rule of no repetition implies the negative rule of prohibition on the marriage with matrilateral cross-cousins. In other words, a man cannot marry his mother's brother's daughter.

Ceremonial Exchange of Gifts among Kin

- Ceremonial exchange of gifts on the occasions of life cycle rituals provides us with the understanding of a patterned behaviour among various categories of kin.
- Generally, the bride-givers, in correspondence with their inferior status vis-à-vis bride-takers, initiate the process of gift-giving during marriage and continue to give greater amounts of gifts.
- Let us take an example of this behaviour. L. Dumont (1966: 91) has pointed out that mother's brother (uterine kin) and wife's brother (affinal kin) have similar ceremonial functions. Not only this, as wife's brother becomes, after a few years, mother's brother to the children, there is little difference between the two.

CONCLUSION

Kinship ensures cohesion, a unique social identity and sense of security for a definite group of people living in a simple accommodative society. Kinship is essentially a group bond for the sustenance of social relationships in most convenient manner.

The kinship system at the present world is undergoing changes. Due to modernisation, urbanisation, gender sensitisation and structural transformation of family kinship system is facing new challenges. Patriarchy is being questioned while matriarchy is also not the answer, at the same time modern man is having the queries about their origin and meaning of such origin.

REFERENCES

1. Karve, I., 1994, “The Kinship Map of India” in P.U Uberoi (ed.) Family, Kinship and Marriage in India. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

EXPECTED QUESTIONS

1. Name the three kinship groups found in North India.
2. What is the significance of learning kinship terms?
3. Explain the four-clan rule of marriage in North India.
4. What is kinship?
5. What do you understand by clan?
6. Write down the principles of Kinship.
7. Who is a Primary kin?
8. Give one example of Tertiary kin.

PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTIONS

- Define Kinship. (2021)