

KINSHIP SYSTEM

Man is a social animal he lives with his kin in the society. Since his birth he is accompanied by number of people in his life like relatives, neighbours and his friends. But he is bound to people who are related to him either on the basis of blood, descent or marriage.

The people binds by blood relation or by marriage or adoption is called kinship. In simple words Kinship is a “bond formed on the basis of descent, blood, marriage or adaptation which binds people together as a group”. It is universal social institution found in every corner of world.

Importance of Kinship

- Kinship gives an identity to the relationship of man with the people surrounded around him either in blood relation or casual relation.
- It plays an important role of socialization of individual and the maintenance of unity.

Types of Kinship

Kinship can be explained in following two mains types:

Affinal Kinship

- Affinal kinship is a bond established as soon as a marriage takes place. Here a man and a woman both enter into new relation not only with each other but also with other members in their family.
- For examples a person after marriage not only becomes a husband or wife but also becomes brother-in-law, son-in-law and sister-in-law, daughter-in-law and all other family members will be theirs in-laws.

Consanguineous Kinship

- The difference between Consanguineous and Affinal kinship is about the blood relation consanguineous kin are related through blood whereas Affinal kin are related through marriage. The child other than biological relation i.e. through adoption, who is socially recognised as a member of a family is also a consanguineous kin.
- For example bond between parents and their siblings. The family that includes son, brother, sister, uncle, nephew and cousins are consanguineous kin.

Further Kinship is also classified on the basis of nearness of distance relatives which are described below.

Primary Kins

These kins have very close relation or direct relation between each other. There are total eight direct primary kin relations form between Father, mother, Husband, wife, son, daughter, brother and sister.

Secondary Kins

Secondary Kins have relation with the primary kins. In other word they are not the primary kins but are the primary kin of the primary kin. For example Uncle (Father's brother), he is primary kin of father but father is primary kin of his own children. So uncle is the secondary kin to the children.

Tertiary Kins

Here the tertiary kins are the secondary kin of our primary kin and the primary kin of our secondary kin. Like the wife of brother-in-law (sala) is tertiary kin because brother-in-law is secondary kin and his wife is the primary kin of brother-in-law similarly.

Similarly the brother-in-law of our brother is the tertiary kin because the brother is our primary kin and his brother-in-law is the secondary kin of our brother.

Dimensions of Kinship System

Kinship terms

There are two important Kinship terms under which kin are designated:

Classificatory System

In this system kins are included in one category and referred under same term. For example the common term 'uncle' is used to designate chacha, mausa, mama, tau (elder father's brother) foofa etc. Similarly, the common terms like 'nephew', 'cousins' or 'in-laws' are used to designate various kins.

Descriptive System

Unlike classificatory system in descriptive system one term is referred to only one relation. Under this terminology an exact relation between two persons is highlighted. For example, in English nomenclature the term father and mother are descriptive terms. Whereas in Hindi there are many descriptive term which depict exact relation like mama, bhatija, mausa, bhanja, tau, bhabhi, devar, sala, bahnoi, nandoi, etc.

It should be noted that both the systems are found common, there is no place in the world where either the pure descriptive or the pure classificatory system is used.

Rule of Descent

The term 'Descent' in sociology refers to the social recognition of the biological relationship between the individuals. Whereas, the 'rule of descent' is a set of principles used by an individual to trace back his biological relations.

The biological relation can be traced by an individual on the basis of three rules of descent.

Patrilineal Descent

Here, the descent of an individual is traced through the father's line. That means the descent will be traced only from the common male line/ancestor or father's kin group. This is also known as agnatic or patrilineal kin.

Matrilineal Descent

Here, the descent of an individual is traced through the mother's kin group or female exclusively. Here female descendants are called uterine or matrilineal kin. Both of these two rules of tracing the descent are called "unilineal descent rule" as in both the modes they select one "line" either the male or female.

Bilateral Descent

In this rule, both the lines of male and female descendants are used to trace the descent of an individual. This rule is extensively used to trace the descent by an individual than the above two rules as here both male and female lines are considered.

Importance of rule of descent

- It establishes a network of social positions for an individual in which he participates.
- Every individual comes to know about his rights of inheritance and succession.
- The Kinship system consists of certain aspects which are briefly explained below:

Kinship Groups

Kin relationships are very important for an individual passing on family status and property from one generation to the next similarly an effective social group is also important for the purpose of cooperation and conflict.

In order to seek above benefits it is important to identify the form of descent or of tracing one's relationships. For tracing one's relationships it is important to trace the descent line under rules of descent and for this it is important for an individual to understand Kin groups these are:

- *Family*: it is the smallest social unit consisting of group of people living together that have blood relation among them.
- *Lineage*: It is the line of descendants of common ancestors mainly from the unilateral (Male line or female line) descent group.

- *Clan or Sib*: It is also a unilateral descent group who are regard themselves as the descendent of common ancestor but the common ancestor of a clan is generally a mythical figure.
- The people from similar lineage know their actual common ancestor but the person from similar clan does not know their actual ancestor.
- *Phatry*: Phatry is composed of two or more clan of a unilateral descent group.
- *Moiety*: It is a biggest kinship group which is the half of a social group formed from the splitting of a society on basis of descent.
- Considering the size of the kinship group the above groups are explained in descending order means family is the smallest social group whereas the Moiety is the largest social group.

Kinship usages

It is important to study the behaviour pattern of different kins. The behaviour pattern changes with the relationship with the individual, every relation have a particular type of behaviour pattern. To regulate this behaviour pattern there are some kinship usages some of these usages are the following:

- **Avoidance**: Under the usage of avoidance two kin are oblique to remain away from each other and have some restriction in their behavioural pattern while interaction with each other. Ex Purdah system where women are not supposed to show their face while interacting with male relatives.
- **Joking Relationship**: It can be said as a reverse of avoidance relationship, as in this usage it is permitted to tease or make fun of the each other e.g. the relationship between devar & bhabhi, jijaji & Sali.
- **Teknonymy** : Under this usage a kin is not referred to directly but he is referred to through another kin e.g in traditional Hindu family a wife does not takes her husband's name directly but call him as the father of her children. Like father of Tannu or Mannu.
- **Avunculate**: Under this kinship usage the maternal uncle (mama) has a prominent place in the life of his nephews and nieces. Here the maternal uncle has special obligations towards them; he comes first among all male relatives. Some rights even exceed that from the father.
- **Amitate**: Here special role given to the father's sister. She even gets more respect than the mother.
- **Couvade**: Under this kinship usage whenever the wife gives birth to a child the husband is made to lead the life of same taboos which his wife observes during pregnancy e.g in Khasi and Toda tribes the husband of pregnant wife is refrained from active work and also takes sick diet same as his wife.

Function of Kinship

- It set rules for governing the relationship between kin.
- It defines socially acceptable role for relationship between the kin e.g the relationship between father- daughter, brother-sister etc.
- It establishes family line relationships e.g lineage and clan
- It sets rules for marriage relationship between people and decides who can/cannot marry whom.
- It establishes rights and obligations of the members in all religious practices right from the birth to the death of person.
- It helps to maintain harmony between the relationships.
- For tribal regions it determines the rights and obligations to establish family, to conduct marriages and gives political power.
- Kinship through usages defines a behavioural pattern and assigns guidelines for interactions between two persons.
- It defines a system for designating kin through kinship terms.
- Kinship plays an important role to create special grouping of kin though usages.
- It helps easy succession, transfer of property to descendants.
- It regularises the social life of an individual.