

Subject: Anthropology

Production of Courseware

 **-Content for Post Graduate Courses**

Paper No. : 02 Social Cultural Anthropology

Module : 17 Kinship: Descent and Alliance Kinship Terms



Development Team

Principal Investigator

Prof. Anup Kumar Kapoor
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Delhi

Paper Coordinator

Prof. Sabita Acharya
Department of Anthropology, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar

Content Writer

Dr. Jaspreet Kaur
Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi, Delhi

Content Reviewer

Prof. A.K.Sinha
Department of Anthropology, Panjab University, Chandigarh

Description of Module	
Subject Name	Anthropology
Paper Name	02 Social-Cultural Anthropology
Module Name/Title	Kinship: Descent and Alliance Kinship Terms
Module Id	17

 **Pathshala**
पाठशाला
A Gateway to All Post Graduate Courses

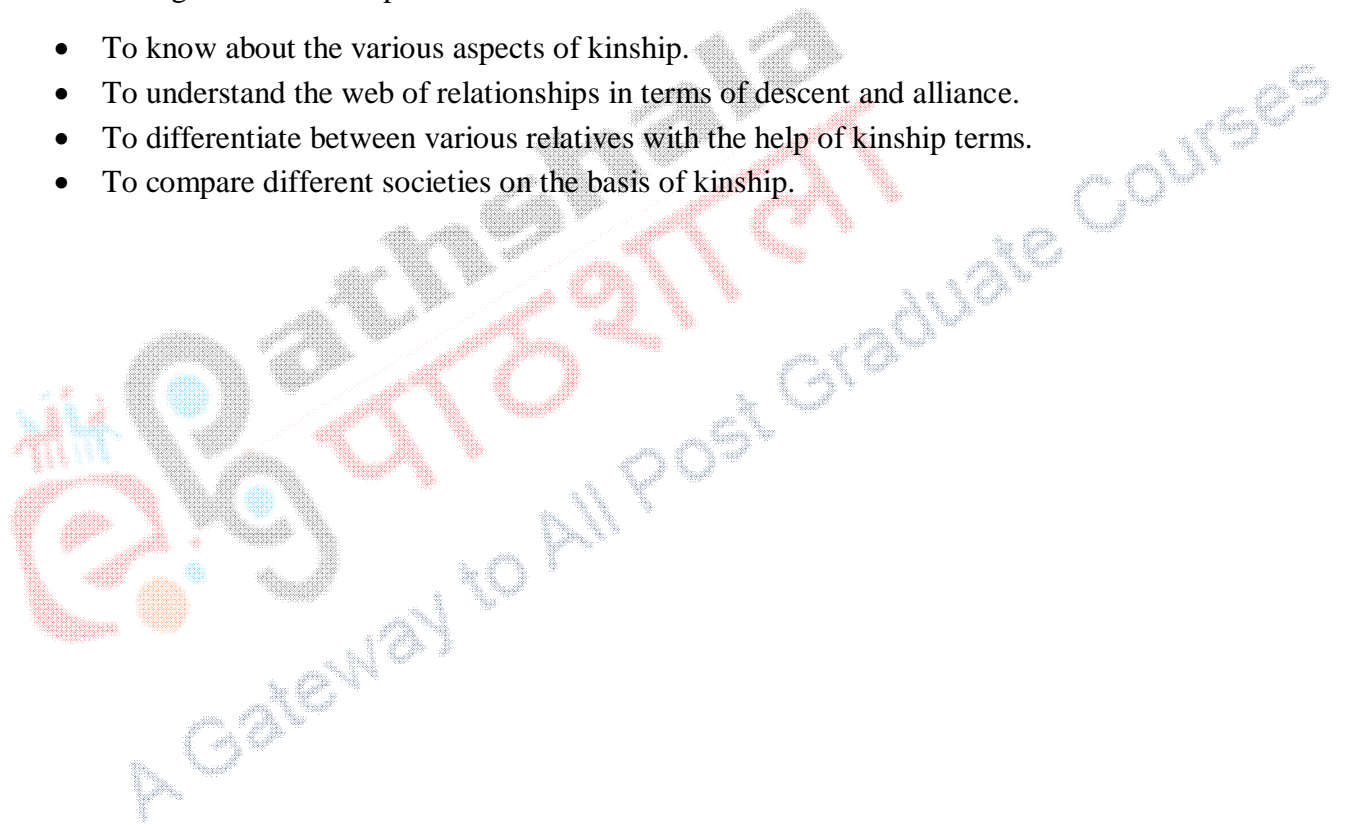
Contents:

- Kinship
- Descent
- Alliance
- Kinship terminology
- Summary

The learning outcomes:

The following e-Text will help the students-

- To know about the various aspects of kinship.
- To understand the web of relationships in terms of descent and alliance.
- To differentiate between various relatives with the help of kinship terms.
- To compare different societies on the basis of kinship.



INTRODUCTION

1. KINSHIP

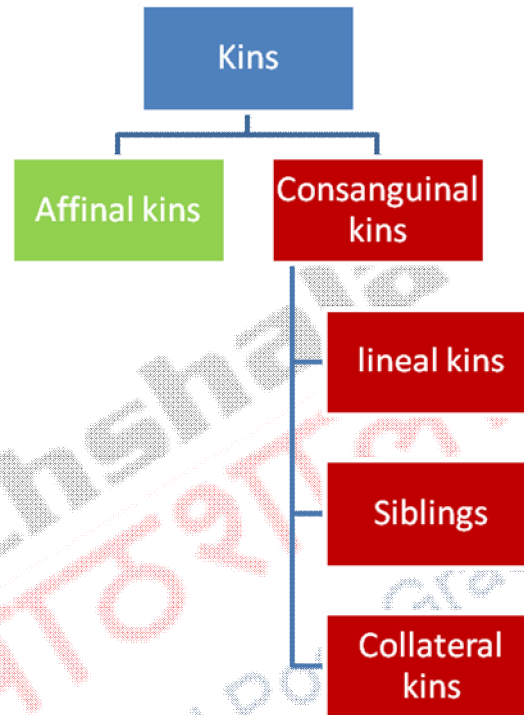
Kinship can be defined as a network which encompasses all relations of Consanguinity and Marriage alliance. Kinship is the social recognition of the bonds a person share with his blood relatives and those who are related through marriage ties. Such related people are called as -kinş Robin Fox has defined kinship in an evolutionary perspective. According to him, kinship is an adaptation in human evolution. In ancient time when there were no technology or it was poorly developed humans who had to rely on human labor for their survival, for this purpose they formed groups and these groups were formed on the basis of kinship. Kinship recognizes the ties of blood and the ties of marriage. These two concepts form the very basis of human life. Recognition of these ties has been done through the institution of kinship. Kinship studies help us to compare the blood ties and marriage ties.

1.1. The Relevance of Kinship in Anthropology:

Kinship has been an important part of human societies. Kinship is an important principle of group formation. In traditional societies where there is greater homogenization, resources are scarce; groups are formed on the basis of kinship in such societies. These preindustrial societies have been the main focus of the study of anthropologists since long time. In these societies -kinship acts as an organizing principle. The non-western societies have greater diversity in kinship structure and the anthropologists by studying this diversity can arrive at a comparative account. Kinship determines the social status of an individual in these societies. Groups are related to each other kinship i.e. one group is wife-giver, the other is wife-taker and the social position of wife-giver is always higher. Kinship also provides a -boundary and a bridge between the human and non-human primate order. Thus we see that kinship is very central to the enquiry of anthropology and an important field of study in anthropology.

1.2. The Types of Kins:

There are two types of kins:



1.2.1. Affinal kins: Those who are related through the bonds of marriage are known as affinal kins or affines. These kins are not related through blood.

1.2.2. Consanguineal kins: those who related through the bonds of blood are known as Consanguinal kins or Consanguines or blood relatives. The consanguineal kins may be lineal, siblings or collaterals.

1.3 Approaches to the study of Kinship:

1.3.1. 1870s-1940s: One of the very important works in the anthropological study of kinship came up with the work of L.H. Morgan's *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of Human Family (1871)*. In the works of Morgan and Radcliffe Brown, Kinship was considered as a phenomenon in itself or as an important social institution. It mentions about Kinship terminology classifications, kin types and typology of kinship groups. This approach is often known as the classical approach.

1.3.2. 1950s: According to Edmund R. Leach kinship is not a thing in itself; kinship has no content of itself as it deals with those phenomena which have independent existence. These phenomena are

marriage, inheritance, property disputes, rituals, economy, land ownership, politics, etc. After removing all these aspects kinship becomes a framework or it becomes a guideline to regulate various aspects of human behavior. This approach enhances the importance of kinship.

1.4 Universal Principles of Kinship:

Robin Fox gave four fundamental principles of kinship that are applied universally. These principles are as follows:

1.4.1: Women bear children.

1.4.2: Men impregnate women.

1.4.3: Incest is tabooed.

1.4.4: Men exercise control over property.

1.5. Degree of Kins:

1.5.1: Primary kins: Members of a nuclear family i.e. father, mother, daughter, son, husband, wife, brother and sister are primary kins.

1.5.2.: Secondary kins: All primary kins of primary kins are his/her secondary kins. For example: Brother's son.

1.5.3.: Tertiary kins: All primary kins of secondary kins are known as tertiary kins. For example: Brother's son's daughter.

1.6. Genealogy:

Genealogy can be described as the study of family and lineages. With the help of genealogy the ancestors of an individual can be traced. W.H. Rivers tried to demonstrate the genealogical method of anthropological enquiry. Genealogical studies reveal the principles of social organization in a community.

Abbreviations used for different relatives studied through genealogy are as follows:

F: Father

M: Mother

B: Brother

Z: Sister

S: Son

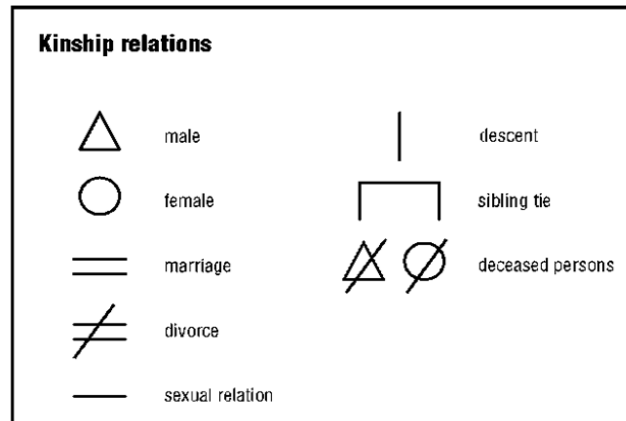
D: Daughter

H: Husband

W: Wife

C: Child

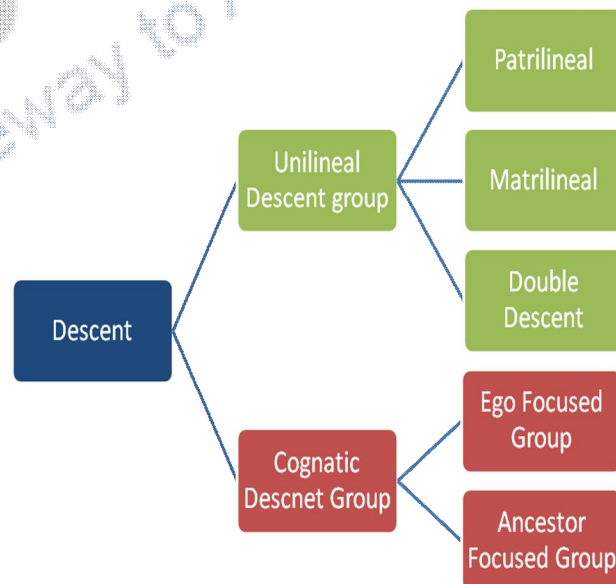
The symbols used in genealogy are as follows:



(<http://schulmanru.blogspot.in/2012/09/kinship-and-social-groups.html>)

2. THE IDEA OF DESCENT

Descent is a connection between an individual and his/her ancestors. For a group of individuals whose genealogy is same can be traced to a common ancestor and hence they are said to be linked through a common descent. In anthropological terminology descent can be referred as the connection of an individual with one or both parents. In many societies descent is the basis of group formation. Descent have social, political, economical and ritual value. Descent is a cultural rule which exhibit huge diversity but still has a common truth of recognition of blood relations.



Depending upon whether one or both parents are traced or the structural composition, descent is of following two types:-

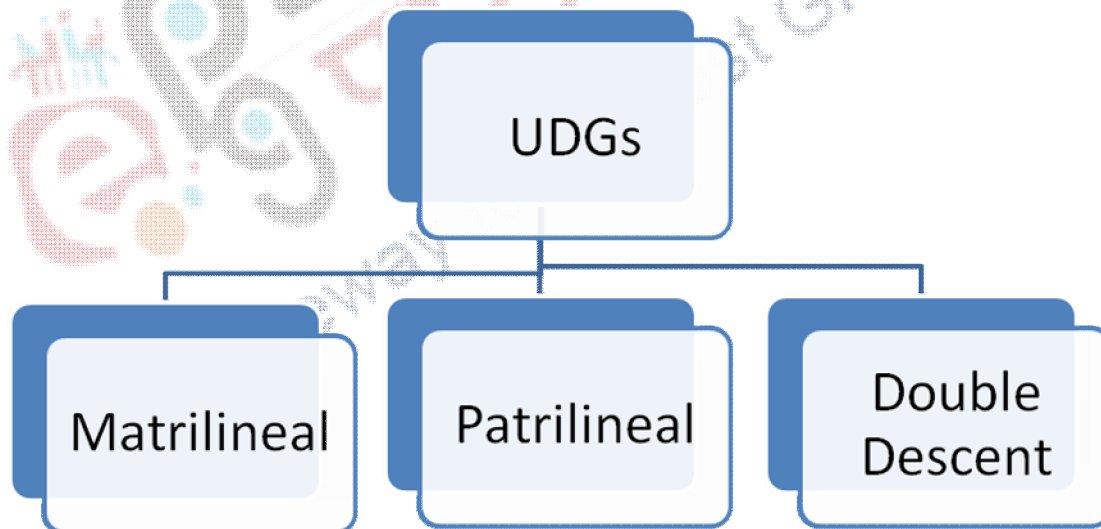
- Unilineal descent groups
- Cognatic descent groups

2.1. Unilineal Descent Group (UDGs):

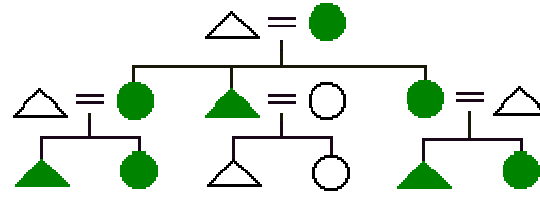
When the decent is traced from either the father's line or the mother's line is traced for genealogical connection then the rule is known as unilineal principle of descent. In such cases only one parental line is taken into account and the other is ignored.

UDGs are mainly found in those societies where resources are plenty and are able to fulfill the needs of all members. UDGs are corporate groups and act like corporations, these groups have well defined body, and membership of every individual is fixed. UDGs have certain political, and ritual functions and act as the building blocks of a society.

On the basis of whether the paternal line or the maternal line is traced UDGs can be classified as follows:



2.1.1. Matrilineality: When an individual traces his/her ancestry through maternal lines only, the descent is known as matrilineal. In a matrilineal society every person belongs to the lineage of his mother. Women enjoy the highest degree of freedom.



(http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_2.htm)

Fig: Matrilineal Descent

Examples: American Indian and Australian people, the Bantu tribe of Central Africa, the Akans of Ghana.

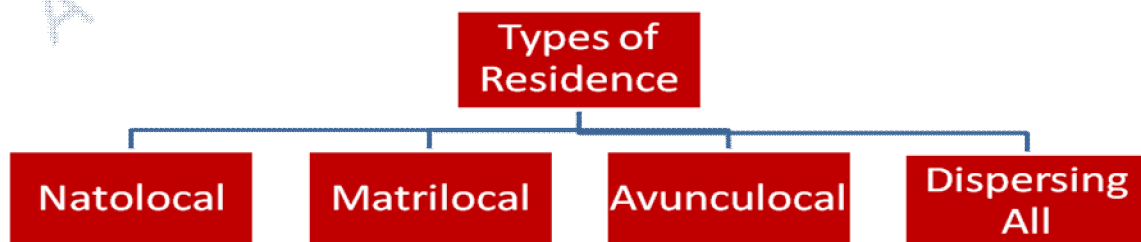
In matrilineal societies, when the universal principles of kinship are considered, the problem arises with third and fourth principle (i.e. incest is tabooed and men exercise control over property). This problem is reduced to two factors, residence and property. Thus by combining Residence and Descent four solutions are arrived to solve the problem of matrilineality which are as follows:

2.1.1.1. Natolocal: In this residence all members are kept together and the residence group includes brother, sister and sister's children. The sister has visiting husband(s).

Examples: Nayars of Malabar Coast. These are matrilineal groups, the extended matrilineal lineages are known as Taravad.

2.1.1.2. Matrilocal: In this type of residence, males are moved to wife's residence. This can also be described as a residence of couple with or close to the wife's family.

Example: Yao of Malawi, it is an agriculturalist community in which only sisters stay, brothers move out and husbands are brought in. usually the eldest brother stays back to take care of the property. He takes care of the property and then passes on the same to his sister's children.



2.1.1.3. Avunculocal: In this residence a man and his wife take up the residence with the man's maternal uncle.

Example: Trobriand Islanders, the rule of descent is matrilineal in their community. All men are kept and women are dispersed. But the women transmit the descent to next generation. In such cases the relationship between the mother's brother (MB) and sister's children is of great importance. At the time of marriage the MB welcomes his sister's children to join the descent group as a manager of property. The property is in the form of yam producing gardens, fishing nets, canoe, hunting instruments.

2.1.1.4: Dispersing all: In this type of residence pattern, all members are dispersed. It is mainly found in those societies which live in compact settlement. Villages are very near to each other.

Example: Mexican communities practice this kind of arrangement.

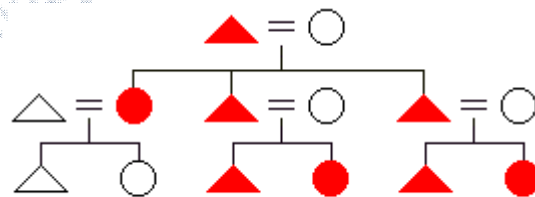
Audrey Richard used the term Matrilineal Puzzle for the problem of descent and residence associated with matrilineages.

2.1.2. Patrilineality: When an individual traces his/her descent through males only, it is known as patrilineal or the patrilineal rule of descent. This is also referred to as Agnatic Descent.

Examples: The classical Romans, the Chinese, the cattle owning people of Eastern and Southern Africa.

Patrilineality has been neatly arranged by combining the descent with residence and there is no problem as far as the four universal principles of kinship are concerned.

Depending upon the position of women in a patrilineal system, it can be of following two types.

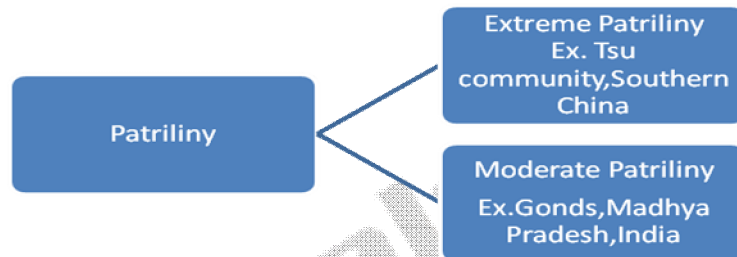


(http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_2.htm)

Fig: Patrilineal Descent

2.2.2.1. Extreme Patriliney: The woman completely belongs to her husband's patrilineal group after marriage and as a result there is no relation between a woman and her parents after marriage.

2.1.2.2. Moderate Patriliney: The woman even after her marriage continues to maintain relationship with her parents.



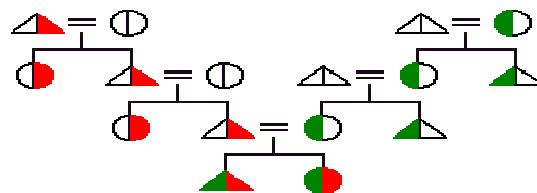
2.1.3. Double Descent: Both patrilineage and matrilineage exist within a society for different purposes. Members can be apart of a matrilineage for some purpose and of a patrilineage for some other purpose. In such societies usually the immovable property is associated with patriliney and the movable property is inherited through matriliney.

Example: The Yakos of Nigeria.

2.2. Cognatic Descent Groups:

When both paternal and maternal lines are traced for establishing the genealogical connections, such descent is known as Cognatic descent group. An individual is potentially a member of all existing descent groups.

These descent groups are characteristic of those societies where natural resources are scarce, and property is few. In such a case human labor is more important and in order to survive, the population has to be rearranged. So when one group goes economically down, members shift to another group.



(http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_2.htm)

Fig: Cognatic descent

Fig: In the diagram the red color indicates the patrilineage and the green color indicates matrilineage.

Cognatic descent as a social organizing principle leads to group formation and the groups which are formed using this principle are of two types.

- **Ego focused groups:** These are groups where cognatic kin groups are formed on the basis of ego's relationship with his/her cousins upto second degree.

Example: Among Zulu community in Africa the groups formed are known as Kindred where the ego is linked to his cousins upto second degree through paternal and maternal side.

Kindred are kin groups not the descent groups which use bilateral or cognatic principle for group formation.

- **Ancestral focused groups:** Here the cognatic principle has been used in three different ways leading to the formation of different types of group formation.
 - **Unrestricted Cognatic Descent Group:** The members can change the line of descent frequently as per economical needs.

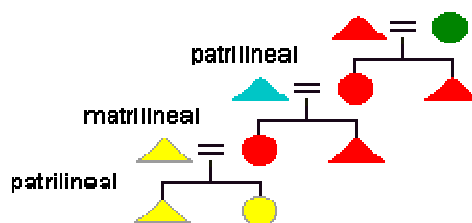
Example: Iban of Borneo.

- **Restricted Cognatic Descent Group:** The members have to decide their line of descent once in their lifetime.
- **Pragmatically Restricted Cognatic Descent Group:** Everybody is a member of the descent but the rights are exercised only when the members stay within the founder's territory.

Example: Sagada Igorots of Philippines.

There is another descent group other than all the above mentioned types of these descents which is found in certain societies i.e.

ambilineal descent: It combines unilineal pattern. Individuals may trace the descent either from maternal line or paternal line but individuals; can select only one line. As each generation can choose the descent in such a case one generation can be patrilineal and the other can be matrilineal.



(http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_2.htm)

Fig: Ambilineal descent

The ambilineal descent is more flexible. Examples: Polynesian cultures.

3. THE IDEA OF ALLIANCE

Alliance is the concept of joining people together into an activity. In human societies people are joined together by means of marriage. The marriage between two groups is accomplished by means of exchange of women. Different societies have different rules of marriage which are to be followed by its members. There are several ways of marriage exchanges that differ from society to society. There is one theory which talks about the general methods of exchange. This theory is known as the alliance theory which has its origins in Claude Levi-Strauss's *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949). Incest taboo is one reason that has given rise to exogamy. Levi-Strauss talked of mainly two models of marriage exchange i.e. elementary structure and complex structure.

3.1. The elementary structure: It talks about the positive marriage rules that accounts for whom should a person marry. The marriageable category is defined by the kin status.

The elementary structure talks mainly about two exchanges:

- **Restricted Exchange:** This exchange takes place between two groups for example one group is wife-giver; the other is wife-taker. The exchange of women takes place between these two groups only.
- **Generalized Exchange:** It involves various groups and the exchange takes place in a circular fashion.

3.2. The complex structure: It talks about the negative marriage rules. Here the choice of marriage partner is based on non-kin criteria.

The positive and negative rules of marriage can be understood in Indian context. In Northern India the marriage rules can be called as negative rules, as there is prohibition on marrying cousin up to several degrees. One cannot marry a person up to seven degrees on father's side and up to five degrees on mother's side. Clan exogamy and hypergamy is practised. One has to avoid his own *gotra* also while marrying.

While in Southern India, the rules of marriage are positive as one can marry his elder sister's daughter, he can also marry his father's sister's daughter. Here the family which takes a daughter returns back a daughter to the former.

Exogamy strengthens the inter-group relationships and thus promote social relationships.

4. KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

Kin terms are the labels used to refer and address various kins and affines. Morgan was the first one to observe that kinship terminology could serve as a basis of classification. In different systems, the kin terms differ drastically. In some systems all the men of parental generation of both father's and mother's side are brought under the same kin term. While in other systems there are different terms for

father's brothers and mother's brothers. The kinship terms for descent differ significantly from those of kinship terms used for affines.

The basic kinship terms are of two types, i.e.

Term of Reference: It is more formal term used to denote a person. For example: The term Mother, Father are term of Reference

Term of address : This is the term used while talking to the kin. This differs from place to place. For example: The terms Maa, Papa are terms of address in Indian context.

classification of kinship terms:

L. H. Morgan (1871) on the basis of his observation in North American Indian societies established two systems of terminology such as follows:

4.1. Classificatory system: According to this system, single term is used for calling more than one type of kin. Normally the similarity in age, group, sex and same generation is the basis for this categorization. In some societies, those kins who have same status and position are called out by same kin term.

Classificatory kinship terminology places lineal and collateral kins into the same category.

4.2. Descriptive system: In this system, every kin is designated by a different kin term. Separate terms are used to refer different kins. It distinguishes between lineal and collateral kins.

For example: In English societies the term Brother and sister are descriptive as they are used to refer to the son and daughter of one's parents only. But in North India the term *Bhai* and *Bahen* is used to refer to the son and daughter of one's parents and also for cross and parallel cousins. The term Uncle and Aunt are also classificatory terms.

L. H. Morgan as an evolutionist viewed this system of classification in evolutionary perspective. He considered classificatory system to be the characteristic of simple societies which are less differentiated while descriptive terminology to be a feature of more advanced and modern societies. But this idea is not very absolute as even in modern Western societies the classificatory terms like Uncle, Aunt , brother-in-law and sister-in-law are also used.

W.H.R. Rivers talked about the significance of kinship terms. He accounted that kinship terms came into existence with some marriage practices. Today even if those cultural practices have vanished, the kinship terms associated with them still exist. So by studying kinship terms, we can trace those marriage customs and practices. This can be proved as a significant finding in case of simple societies which generally lack written records of the past.

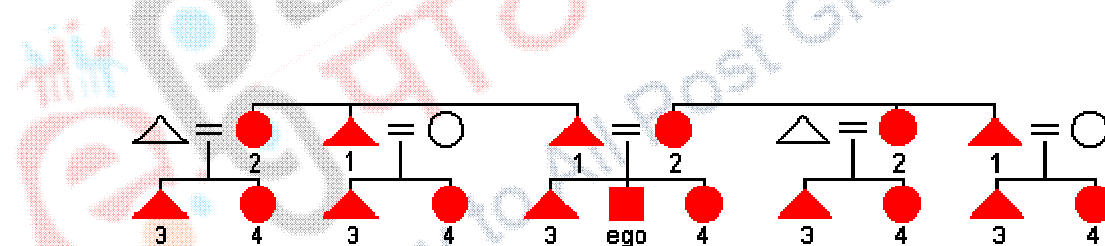
Kroeber related kinship terms with the language spoken by any society. According to him kinship terms are just a method to distinguish various kins.

Radcliffe Brown also emphasized on kinship and kinship terminology after he edited a collection of African Kinship studies. According to him, kinship terminology can be used as a key to unlock any social structure. In simple societies kinship is the basis of social organization, and is associated with a particular kinship terms. Thus, by studying the kinship system and terminology of a society its social structure can be understood. He also emphasized upon the study of kinship functionally.

There is another classification of kinship terminology given by G.P. Murdock (1949). Murdock took ego's generation as the basis of his classification and gave ethnical geographical labels to it. He classified kinship terms in six categories which are explained as follows:

- **Hawaiian terminology:** This distinguishes only between sex and generation. In this system of terminology siblings and cousins are classified alike by one or two terms distinguished by sex. There is no distinction between direct and collateral relations. The members on both the father's and mother's side are considered more or less equally. It doesn't distinguish between cross and parallel relatives.

This terminology is classificatory in nature.



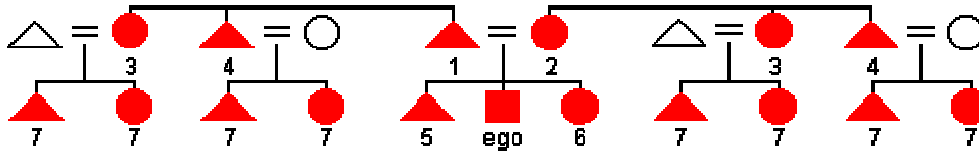
(http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_5.htm)

Fig: Hawaiian system

Example: It can be observed in Hawaiian Polynesians. In North India, siblings are denoted as *Bhai*=brother, *Didi*=sister.

Another example of Hawaiian terminology can be seen in Zeme tribe in Assam and Manipur where the word **Asi** is used for sister, brother, all cross and parallel cousins, sister-in-law and brother-in-law as well. There is no distinction between genders.

- Eskimos terminology:** It has both classificatory and descriptive terms, it provides different terms for nuclear family members. It also distinguishes between lineal and collateral relatives. The lineal relatives have descriptive terms while the collateral kins have classificatory terms. It also differentiates between siblings and cousins but all types of cousins are put together in one category. The English language kinship term comes under this category.

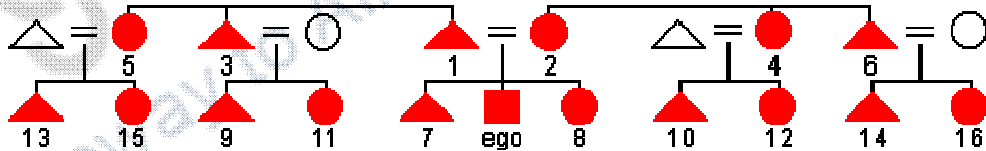


(http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_5.htm)

Fig: Eskimos System

Example: Eskimos terminology is mainly used by Euro americans as well as by some food foraging societies like Inuits and Eskimos. It is generally found in bilateral societies where the dominant kin group is kindred.

- Sudanese terminology:** This system provides different labels to each genealogical position. It is descriptive in nature. Siblings are differentiated from cousins.



(http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_5.htm)

Fig: Sudanese System

Example: In North Indian families, ego's parental generation has different name.

Father's elder brother = tau

Father's elder brother's wife = tai

Father's younger brother = chacha

Father's younger brother's wife = chachi

Father's sister = bhua

Father's sister husband = phufa

Mother's brother = mama

Mother's brother's wife = mami

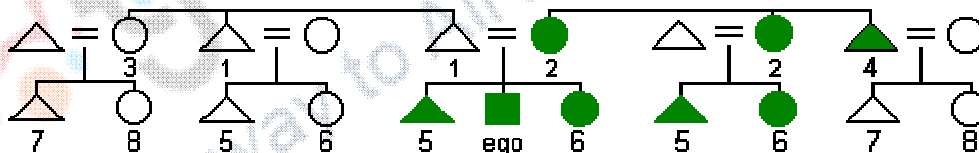
Mother's sister = mausi

Mother's sister's husband = mausa

• **Iroquois terminology:** This was named for Iroquoian Indians of northeastern North America's woodlands.

It distinguishes between cross and parallel relatives. Father and father's brother are referred by same term and mother and mother's sister are referred by same term. Father's sisters and mother's brothers are given different terms. In one's generation the brothers, sisters and parallel cousins (i.e the children of father's brothers and mother's sisters) are placed into same kin term. This might be due to the fact that father and father's brother are placed into same category so is the case with mother and mother's sisters.

Cross cousins are referred by different terms, sometimes designated as spouses.



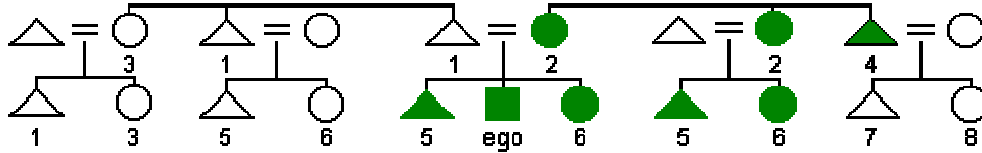
(http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_6.htm)

Fig: Iroquois system.

Examples: It is widespread terminology, used in rural Chinese societies also.

In India, this terminology is used by Ao Naga tribe of Nagaland where parallel cousins are called as *oti*(male), *oya*(female) and cross cousins are called as *amo*(male), *oku*(female).

- **Crow terminology:** In this system relatives on father's side have more classificatory terms while on the mother's side have more descriptive terms. In this system members belonging to father's matrilineage are put under the same kin term.

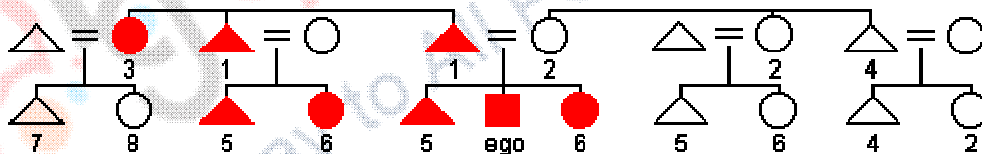


(http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_6.htm)

Fig: Crow System

Example : Father's sister and Father's sister's daughter are called by the same term. (**FZ = FZD**)

- **Omaha terminology:** This system can be understood as a reverse of Crow terminology. Here the relatives on mother's side have more classificatory term while on the father's side have more descriptive term. In this system members belonging to mother's patrilineage are put under the same kin term.



(http://anthro.palomar.edu/kinship/kinship_6.htm)

Fig: Omaha System

Example: Among Sumi Naga tribe of Nagaland the mother's brother and mother's brother's son are put under the same kin term. (**MB = MBS = Ingu**).

There is another kinship terminology that have been studied recently i.e. Dravidian kinship terminology. The Dravidian language has resemblance with Sanskrit language. Morgan also found resemblance between Dravidian and Iroquois kinship terminology.

Levi-Strauss founded for the principle of reciprocity which is accomplished by Cross-cousin marriages i.e an important marriage rule prevailing in Southern India. After Levi-Strauss's theory of importance of Dravidian Kinship system, have been explored by several scholars to find insights into the system.

5. SUMMARY:

- Kinship is the social recognition of the bonds a person share with his blood relatives and affinal relatives. Kinship recognizes the ties of blood ties of marriage.
- Kinship acts as a basis for social groups principle.
- The status and identity is recognized by the means of kinship relations.
- The kinship is based on two main types of bonds i.e descent and affinal ties.
- There are several people like mother-in-law, father-in-law, husband, wife who are linked to us through the bond of marriage, they are known as affinal relatives or affines, while those who are linked to us through blood relations are known as consanguines or consanguineal relatives.
- The descent which determines an individual's relationship with his/her ancestors, varies considerably depending upon whether the ancestry is traced through maternal line (matrilineal), paternal line(patrilineal) or by both (cognatic descent)
- Several marriage exchanges (alliances) take place in human society, which lead to the formation of social bonds between different groups.
- Kinship terms used to address the kins differ dramatically from place to place. Various classifications have been given to understand various types of kinship terms. Kinship terms have proved to trace the marriage practices and customs and are important phenomena in anthropology.