Subject: Anthropology

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Paper No. : 02 Social Cultural Anthropology
Module : 16 Kinship: Definition and Approaches

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Description of Module	
Subject Name	Anthropology
Paper Name	02 Social Cultural Anthropology
Module Name/Title	Kinship: Definition and Approaches
Module Id	16

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Summary

Learning outcomes

After studying this module:

- You shall be able to understand the discovery, history and structure of kinship system

- You will learn the nature of kinship and the genealogical basis of society

- You will learn about the different approaches of kinship, kinship terminology, kinship usages, rules of descent, etc

- You will be able to understand the importance of kinship while conducting fieldwork.

The primary objective of this module is:

- To give a basic understanding to the students about Kinship, its history of origin, and subject matter

- It also attempts to provide an informative background about the different Kinship approaches.

INTRODUCTION

The word "kinship" has been used to mean several things-indeed; the situation is so complex that it is necessary to simplify it in order to study it. "Kinship relationship" has several referents, which must be kept sharply separated analytically. There are biological referents, behavioural referent and linguistic referents (among others). According to the dictionary kinship has to do with relationships by blood; or consanguinity; affinity with relationships brought by marriage. All cultures distinguish various categories of kins and affines, and these categories, with their associated pattern of rights and obligations, make up what social anthropologists call kinship system. In some societies every individual is, or think he is, related by kinship or affinity to everyone else: in others, including most western ones, a man's kins and affines are limited for practical purposes to a few close relatives. But in every society some relationships of kinship and affinity are culturally recognized. Biologically not only human beings but all animals have "kinship". But the vital point is that unlike other animals, human beings consciously and explicitly use the categories of kinship to define social relationships.

1. HISTORY OF KINSHIP STUDY

The scientific study of kinship systems is only a century old, but in that brief period it has engendered more controversy and a great variety of theoretical formulation than have most aspects of human society. The early studies concentrated on the terminological systems for the most part and utilized then as evidences for historical relationships or as survivals of assumed earlier stages of society based or promiscuity and group marriage. The anthropologist **Lewis Henry Morgan** was the founder of kinship studies. He watched the Iroquois, a Native American group in the North eastern United States. He was mostly interested in what was keeping societies together. He was the first to state the different types of kinship systems that exist, in his book, called '*Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family'*. English scholar **Radcliff Brown** brought the kinship studies in the new state by involving *comparative method.* **Evans Pritchard**, through his study of the Nuer revealed its importance in political organization. **Fortes** through his "Dynamics of Clanship" among Taiiensi of Ghana discussed descent groups in details. **G.P. Murdock's** "social structure" and **Levi-Strauss's "**Elementary Structure of Kinship" are other classics in the kinship literature.

2. MEANING AND DEFINITION

Kinship refers to a principle by which individuals or groups of individuals are organized into social groups, roles, categories and genealogy by means of kinship terminologies. Kinship is the method of

reckoning relationship. In any society, every normal adult individual belongs to the 2 different nuclear families. The family in which he has born and reared is called the "*family of orientation*". The other family to which he establishes relation through marriage is called the "*family of procreation*". The universal fact of individual membership in two nuclear families gives rise to the kinship system. As the name implies, it is a system of different relationships where individuals are bound together by complex interlocking and ramifying ties.

- According to Claude Levi Strauss, "Kinship and its related notions are at the same time prior and exterior to biological relations to which we tend to reduce them".

- L.H. Morgan defines kin terms are, "reflected the forms of marriage and the related makeup of the family (system of consanguinity and affinity of woman family 1871).

- A.R. Radcliffe: Brown (1952)- agreed that "Kinship terms are like signposts to interpersonal conducts or etiquette , with the implication of appropriate reciprocal right, duties privileges and obligations.

- MacLennan: agreed that kinship terms are merely forms of solution and was not related to actual blood ties at all.

- According to J. Beattie, "Kinship is not set of genealogical relationships; it is set of social relationships".

3. KINSHIP APPROACHES

To get a comprehensive view on kinship system, two types of approaches are required. At first, one has to delineate the structure of kinship roles; secondly, he has to find out associated behaviour to each structure and role in order to know the functional utility of the structure.

3.1 STRUCTURE OF KINSHIP ROLES

The bond of kinship embraces a great range of people for which a whole group of related persons is hold as an entity. Although it is not a social group but shows the character of groupings as well as institution together. The structure of kinship roles not only reveals the types of relationship but also the specific kinship terms in a society. As per the types of relationships, kins are primarily divided into two groups.

-The real or the actual kins

-The virtual or the artificial kins

The term *virtual kin* is applied to the ceremonial kin and the social kin, i.e., the kin relations that have been ceremonially established and formed as a result of keen social contact. On the other hand the *real kins* are the well organized relations formed through blood connection or through marriage. The kins that possess blood relation among them are called *consanguineal kin*. But the kin relations that develop due to marriage are called *affinal kin*. For example, in a family the relationship between the spouses comes under affinal kinship, where as the relationship between the parents and a child can be marked under consanguineal kinship. An adopted child is treated as one's own biologically produced offspring. So it is also treated as consanguineal kin. Kinship is generally traced from an ego. All persons having relationship with the ego are defined in terms of kinship status. A father stands as a primary consanguineal kin to his children and mother is the primary affinal kin to the father. When a person is related to ego through a primary kin, he is called the secondary kin. Father's father, father's sister, mother's mother, wife's mother, brother's wife, sister's son etc., are the secondary kin to the ego. Secondary kins may also be classified into secondary consanguineal kin and secondary affinal kin basing on the nature of tie. Similarly, primary relatives of the secondary kin are ego's tertiary kins. For example, father's sister's husband wife's brother's son, daughter's husband's sister etc., belongs to the group of tertiary kin. More remote relationships than tertiary are designated as distant kins. Both the consanguineal and affinal relatives can be classified into primary kin, secondary kin, tertiary kin and distant kin considering the degree of nearness in the relationship.

3.2 KINSHIP TERMINOLOGIES

Kinship terms are the terms of addresses, which are used among the kinsmen of a society to designate the kins of different types. There are personal names but all societies use some specific kinship terms among the relatives, which are used extensively. An intermediate form is also found between personal name and kinship term. It is called *teknonymy*. For instance, a person having a son or daughter is often called as "father of ____ (child's name)", or mother of ____ (child's name)".This is the combination of parental term and child's name instead of referring the personal name or particular kinship term. Such terms are very important as they sometimes reflect social phenomena. Study of kinship nomenclature is still a significant method of study, which was first undertaken by Morgan after coining various kinship terms from different parts of the world. He divided the kinship term into 2 major divisions and named them as *classificatory kinship system* and *descriptive kinship system*.

- Classificatory kinship system: In the classificatory system all relatives were classed in categories following a strict logic. All of them were referred by the same term of designation.

- Descriptive kinship system: In the descriptive system, there is a separate term for every kin whereby each such term describes the exact relation of ego with the kin in question.

In reality, the words "Classificatory" and "Descriptive" refer to the kinship terms only, not to the whole system of terminology.

G.P. Murdock had identified six major systems of terminology on global basis. They are as follows:

- The Eskimo system
- The Hawaiian system
- The Iroquois system
- The Omaha system
- The Crow system
- Sundanese system

Murdock in his detailed analysis of kinship presents an elaborate scheme for understanding kinship terminology. According to him kinship terms are technically classified in 3 different ways:

- **By the mode of use**

Basing on the mode of use the kinship terms can be divided into two sections. Some terms are for direct addressing and others are for indirect reference. A "*term of address*" is used to call a relative, where as "*term of reference*" is used to designate a relative for speaking about him/her to a third person.

- **By the linguistic structure**

When classified according to linguistic structure, kinship terms are distinguished as elementary, derivative and descriptive. An elementary term is an irreducible word like in English "Father" "Nephew" which cannot be analyzed into components having kinship meanings. Therefore called "elementary term" A derivative term is one which combines two or more elementary terms to denote a specific relative. A derivative term is like grandfather, father-in –law, step daughter, etc.

- **By the range of application**

Here the kinship term is differentiated into two groups-denotative term and classificatory term. *Denotative terms* applied to the relatives of a single kinship category, defined by the generation, sex and genealogical connection. For example, the English terms, brother, sister, daughter, son-in-law, etc., denote several persons with the same designation. In contrast, *classificatory term* is the term that applies to the persons of two or more kinship categories. For instance, in English the term grandmother stands for both mother's mother and father's mother, uncle may be brother of any one f the parents or may be husband of father's sister or mother's sister.

3.3 KINSHIP USAGES

The study of kinship does not restrict itself with the description of the kins or basis of their classification or general forms of kinship behaviour. There are certain special kinship usages, which hold special significance in respect to the non- literate societies.

- **Avanculate**

This is a queer usage found between a mother's brother and his sister's children. Among some matrilineal societies, maternal uncle assumes many of the duties of father as a matter of convention. His nephew and niece remain under his authority. They inherit his property also. Such a relationship exists among the Trobriand islanders of Melanesia, the Fijians, the African tribes and the Nayers of south India.

- **Amitate**

This kind of usage is more or less similar to the avanculate and found among the patrilineal people. Here, father's sister gets great respect and prime importance. She is more than mother to her nephew and exerts her authority on him in many events of life. In fact, it is a social mechanism, which protects father's sisters from falling into neglect, especially in situations when they are driven off from their in-laws house. Polynesian Tonga, Toda of South India etc., communities exhibit this type of kinship usage.

- **Couvade**

This is another strange usage of kinship between a husband and his wife. Toda and Khasi community of India can be cited as examples. Here the husband is compelled to undergo an austere life whenever his wife gives birth to a child. He has to maintain a strict diet and to observe a number of taboos along with the wife. Anthropologists regard couvades as a symbolic representation of establishing paternity on the child. Some years back, this particular usage was popular among the Nayers of South India, Ainus of Japan and also a few communities of China.

- Avoidance

In most of the societies, the usages of avoidance act as an incest taboo. A father-in-law avoids his daughter- in –law according to traditional social norm. Same relation prevails between a mother-in –law and between husband's elder brother and younger brother's wife. This is actually a protective measure against incestuous sexual relation among close relatives who remain in face to face contact every day.

- Joking Relationship

It is just the opposite type of kinship usage in contrast to "avoidance". This special privileged relationship indulges in testing each other by different kinds of jokes including vulgar sexual jokes. Usually such relationships exist between a man and his wife's younger sisters or between a woman and her husband's younger brothers, between cross cousins, between grandparents and grand children. Joking relationships are found in tribal as well as in Hindu society.

Anthropologists considers the kinship terms in a society as extremely functional as well as resistant to change. These terms not only distinguish the relatives but also indicate the form of families, rules of residence, rules of descent and many other important features of a social system.

3.4 RULES OF DESCENT

In almost all societies kinship connections are very significant. An individual always possesses certain obligations towards his kinsmen and he also expects the same from his kinsmen. The rules, which affiliate each person to a particular and definable set of kin, are called rules of descent. Such rules vary from society to society. Succession and inheritance is related to this rule of descent. The word "succession" denotes the transmission of rights and the word "inheritance" refers the right over the parental property. Usually both the rights go hand in hand. However, three rules that have been identified regarding the descent are as follows:

- **Unilineal Descent**: The principle whereby descent is traced either through paternal or maternal line.

- **Patrilineal Descent (or Agnatic)**:In this type, descent from an ancestor down through a series of male links. For example-through the ancestor's son, his son, his son's son, his son's son's son. Male dominate position, power and property. Found in East and South Asia and Middle East.

- **Matrlineal Descent (or uterine):** In this type, descent from an ancestress down through a series of female links. For example- through daughter, daughter's daughter, daughter's daughter's daughter.

- **Double Descent**: A system whereby two sets of social groups or categories exists (for different purposes) in the same society, one based on patrilineal descent and the other on matrilineal descent. For example- Among Yako of Nigeria.

- **Cognatic:** Descent from an ancestress through a series of links that can be male or female or any combination of the two.

- **Bilateral Descent:** The principle whereby descent is traced through males (i.e., father) and female (i.e., mother).

- **Ambilineal Descent:** The principle whereby descent is reckoned through male or female links with without order.

3.5 DESCENT GROUP

A descent group is a social group whose members talk about common ancestry.

Lineage: A consaguinal kin group produced by either of unlinear descent is technically known as lineage. It produces only persons who can actually trace their common relationship their common relationship through a specific series of remembered genealogical linkage in the prevailing line of descent. A lineage generally includes ancestors of five to six generations in a sequence. Lineage may be of 2 types-patrilineage and matrilineage. A lineage is always strict exogamous unit. It helps in smooth maintained of the purity and pollution relating to birth and death. All members of a lineage full psychology unity. Lineage provides social security to its members. It co-operates all the members of a lineage in the economic field for example in agriculture. During the time of crises the lineage members united and co-operate each other.

Clan: Clan is a unilineal kinship group larger than a lineage. Here the members are supposed to be descendant from a common ancestor but the genealogical links are not specified. Clans are exogamous in nature. Clans can be categorized into several types: Patrilineal clan, matrilineal clan, Ancestral clan, totemic clan, territorial can, etc.

Phratry: An interrelation between two or more clans makes phratry. It is therefore, a larger unilineal descent group than a clan. A phratry may or may not be exogamous. For example, 13 clans among Crow Indains are found to be grouped into 6 nameless phratries, 4 of which are not strict in the rules for the marriage.

Moiety: It is the largest unilineal social group, which result from the splitting of a society into two halves on the basis of descent. The word moiety comes from the French word meaning "half" Moieties may be exogamous or endogamous.

According to Webster clan is a social group comprising a number of households the head of which claim descent from a common ancestor (Social structure G.P. Murdock). Evidences of organization collective activity or group functions are characteristics of clan.
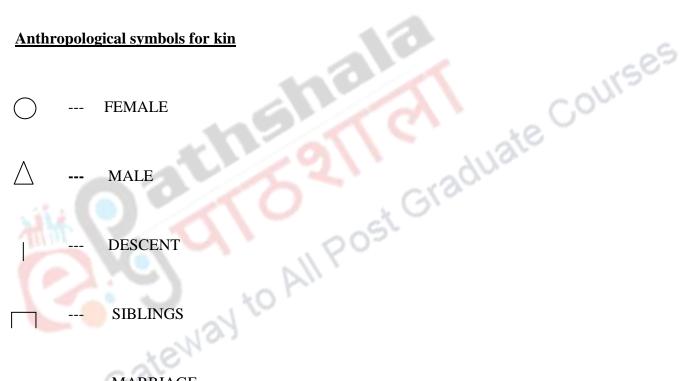
4. UNIQUENESS OF KINSHIP IN ANTHROPOLOGY

In anthropology, kinship is the web of social relationships that form an important part of the lives of most humans in most societies, although its exact meanings even within this discipline are often debated. Anthropologist Robin Fox states that "the study of kinship is the study of what man does with these basic facts of life – mating, gestation, parenthood, socialization, sibling ship etc. Human society is unique, he argues, in that we are working with the same raw material as exists in the animal world, but [we] can conceptualize and categorize it to serve social ends. These social ends include the socialization of children and the formation of basic economic, political and religious groups. It is of interest to anthropologists because it has also political, religious, and economic aspects. Actor's models of kinship relation can be seen as their insight into the workings of society .i.e. a model and explanation of dynamics and relationships.
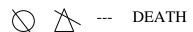
Kinship deserves the quality of a unique branch of study. In a given society it defines the functions each every social unit. Also its ubiquity bears the interest to find out its variance of structure in different social environment. A society's structure person into categories or position according to a number of principles and the most important principle is kinship. As Nelson and Grabner have mentioned in the book Reading in Kinship and social structure the importance of kinship in the study of society are given below.

- Kinship systems are universal.

- Kinship systems are always important through in differing degrees in the structure of all human societies.

- In the majority of societies traditionally studied by anthropologist's kinship has been one of the major organizing principles.

- Kinship systems are relatively to identify and tend themselves to fairly simple analysis.

Anthropological symbols for kin

○   ---   FEMALE

△   ---   MALE

| ---   DESCENT

⌐   ---   SIBLINGS

=   ---   MARRIAGE

⊘ ⧄   ---   DEATH

Summary

Kinship refers to a principle by which individuals or groups of individuals are organized into social groups, roles, categories and genealogy by means of kinship terminologies. Kinship is the method of

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