

Kinship: Meaning, Types and Other Information

Meaning of kinship:

Man does not live alone in society. From birth till death he is surrounded by a number of people. Some of these people are his relatives, some are friends some are neighbours while all others are strangers and unknown to him. He is bound to all those people who are related to him either on the basis of blood or marriage.

The relations based on blood or marriage may be close or distant. The bond of blood or marriage which binds people together in group is called kinship. According to the Dictionary of Anthropology, kinship system includes socially recognized relationships based on supposed as well as actual genealogical ties. These relationships are the result of social interaction and recognized by society.

Types of Kinship:

Kinship is of two types:

(i) Affinal Kinship, and

(ii) Consanguineous Kinship.

(i) Affinal Kinship:

The bond of marriage is called affinal kinship. When a person marries, he establishes relationship not only with the girl whom he marries but also with a number of other people in the girl's family. Moreover, it is not only the person marrying who gets bound to the family members of the girl but his family members also get bound to the family members of the girl.

Thus, a host of relations are created as soon as a marriage takes place. For example, after marriage a person becomes not only a husband, but he also becomes brother-in-law and son-in-law. Here it may be noted that in English language a number of relations created by marriage are referred by the same term. Thus, the same term 'brother-in-law' is used for bahnoi, sala, jija and sadahu. On marriage a person also becomes foofa, nandoi and mausa.

Likewise a girl on marriage becomes not only a wife but also becomes daughter-in-law, she also becomes chachi, bhabhi, devrani, jethani, mami etc. Thus, marriage creates a host of relationships which are called affinal kin.

(ii) Consanguineous Kinship:

The bond of blood is called consanguineous kinship. The consanguineous kin are related through blood whereas the affinal kin are related through marriage. The bond between parents and their children and that between siblings is consanguineous kinship. Siblings are the children of the same parents.

Thus, son, brother, sister, uncle (chacha), elder uncle (taoo), nephew and cousin are consanguineous kin. i.e., related through blood. In this connection it may be pointed out that

blood relationship may be actual as well as supposed.

Among polyandrous tribes the actual father of a child is unknown. An adopted child is treated as if it were one's own biologically produced child. Thus, blood relationship may be established not only on biological basis but also on the basis of social recognition.

Degree of Kinship:

On the basis of nearness or distance relatives can be classified in several categories. Some relatives are very close, direct and near, for example, father-son, sister-brother, husband-wife. They are called primary kin. According to Dr. Dubey, there are eight such primary kins. They are husband-wife, father-son, mother-daughter, father-daughter, mother-son, younger-elder brothers, younger-elder sisters and sister-brother.

Secondly, there are secondary kins:

They are primary kin of primary kin. In other words, they are related through primary kin. They are not our primary kin but are the primary kin of our primary kin, hence our secondary kin. For example, father's brother (chacha), sister's husband (bahnoi) are secondary kin. The father is my primary kin and his brother is the primary kin of father. Therefore, father's brother is my secondary kin, the primary kin of primary kin. Similarly, sister is my primary kin but her husband is my secondary kin.

Thirdly, there are tertiary kins:

They are the secondary kin of our primary kin or primary kin of our secondary kin. Thus the wife of brother-in-law (sala) called sarhaj in Hindi is tertiary kin because brother-in-law is my secondary kin and his wife is the primary kin of brother-in-law. Similarly the brother-in-law of my brother is my tertiary kin because the brother is my primary kin and his brother-in-law is the secondary kin of my brother.

According to Murdock, there are thirty-three secondary and 151 tertiary kins of a person.

Kinship Terms:

Kinship terms are those terms which are used in designating kin of various types. Morgan made an important study of kinship terms.

He classified these terms into:

(i) Classificatory system, and

(ii) Descriptive system.

(i) Classificatory System:

Under the classificatory system the various kins are included in one category and all referred to

by the same term. Thus, the term 'uncle' is a classificatory term. It is used for chacha, mama, mausa, foofa, taoo, etc. Similarly the Sema Naga of Assam use aja for mother, father's brother's wife, mother's sister.

Among Kuki clans, hepu is used for father's father, mother's father; mother's brother; wife's father; mother's brother's son; wife's brother; wife's brother's son. Thus, people of various age groups are designated by the same term. Among Angami Naga, the same term is used for members of opposite sexes. The word shi stands for elder brother's wife; mother's brother's wife; father's brother's wife. In Hindi the word 'Samadhir' is a classificatory term as it refers to father and mother of daughter-in-law and of son-in-law.

(ii) Descriptive System:

Under descriptive system one term refers to only one relation. It describes the exact relation of a person towards another. For example, father is a descriptive term. Similarly, mother is a descriptive term. In Hindi we have mostly, descriptive terms, Thus, the terms chacha, mama, mausa, taoo, sala, bahnoi, nandoi, bhanja, bhatija, bhabhi, devar, etc. are descriptive terms and designate the speaker's exact relation. It may be remarked that there is no place in the world where either the pure descriptive or the pure classificatory system is used. Both the systems are found prevalent.

Kinship Usages:

The study of kinship system does not end with the description of various kinds of kin and the basis of their classification but it also includes the study of behaviour patterns of different kins. Every relationship involves a particular type of behaviour. The behaviour of a son towards his father is one of respect while the behaviour of husband towards wife is one of love. The behaviour of a brother towards his sister is one of affection. There are some usages which regulate the behaviour of different kin. These usages are called kinship usages.

Some of these usages are the following:

(i) Avoidance:

In all societies the usage of avoidance is observed in one form or another. It means that the two kins should remain away from each other. In other words, they should avoid each other. They should not only avoid sexual relationship but in some cases avoid seeing the face of each other. Thus, a father-in-law (sasur) should avoid daughter-in-law. The purdah system in Hindu family illustrates the usage of avoidance.

Different explanations have been given for the usage of avoidance. Two of them are functionalist explanations given by Redcliff Brown and G. P. Murdock. According to them, avoidance serves to forestall further and more serious trouble between relatives. The third is the Freudian explanation according to which avoidances represent a sort of institutionalized neurotic symptom.

(ii) Joking Relationship:

It is the reverse of avoidance relationship. Under it a relation is permitted to tease or make fun of the other. The relationship between devar-bhabhi, jija-sali is joking relationship. The joking may amount to exchange of abuse and vulgar references to sex.

(iii) Teknonymy:

The word 'teknonymy' has been taken from the Greek word and was used in anthropology for the first time by Taylor. According to this usage, a kin is not referred to directly but he is referred to through another kin. A kin becomes the medium of reference between two kins. Thus, in traditional Hindu family a wife does not utter the name of her husband. She calls him through her son or daughter. He is referred to by her as the father of Guddu or Tunnu.

(iv) Avunculate:

This kinship usage is a peculiar feature of matriarchal system. It gives to the maternal uncle (mama) a prominent place in the life of his nephews and nieces. He has special obligations towards them which exceed those of father. He has a prior right over their loyalties. He comes first among all male relatives. ,

(v) Amitate:

When a special role given to the father's sister it is known as amitate. The father's sister gets more respect than the mother.

(vi) Couvade:

This is a queer usage which is found among many primitive tribes like the Khasi and the Toda. Under this usage the husband is made to lead the life of an invalid along with his wife whenever she gives birth to a child. He refrains from active work and takes sick diet. He observes the same taboos which are observed by his wife. This kinship usage thus involves the husband and wife.

Kinship usages accomplish-two major tasks. First, they create groups: special groupings of kin. Thus marriage assigns each mother a husband, and makes her children his children, thereby creating a special group of father, mother and children, which we call "family".

The second major function of kinship usage is to govern the role relationships between kin; that is, how one kinsman should behave in a particular kinsman's presence, or what one kinsman owes to another. Kinship assigns guidelines for interactions between persons. It defines proper, acceptable role relationship between father and daughter, between brother and sister, between son-in-law and mother-in-law and between fellow lineage members and clansmen. Kinship thus acts as a regularizer of social life and maintains the solidarity of social system.

It may, however, be noted that rules governing the relationship between a pair of kinsmen may be highly "patterned", in some societies to allow little leeway for spontaneity or individual differences, while in other societies, such rules may be less "patterned" so as to leave much

room for individualized behaviour. The Hindu society has absolute maximum of patterned kin behaviour.