

## Kinship

“Blood is thicker than water” goes an old saying. When we are in distress, we look forward for help to our relatives. Likewise, tribal society is also closely knit by kinship relations. Evans-Pritchard, while working among the Nuer, a tribal group of Africa, found that relatives have an important place in their life. He further says that a Nuer holds a person who is his relative as very close to him. Therefore, if you want to get help from a Nuer, you have to identify yourself as one of their kinsmen. If this kind of identification is convincingly made, the Nuer would accept you as his own man; else you are an enemy.

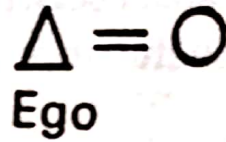
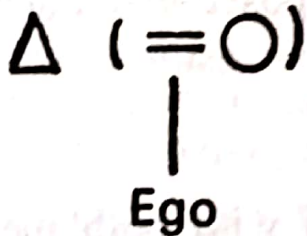
## TYPES OF KINSHIP

In all societies people are bound together in groups by various kinds of bonds. The most universal and the most basic of these bonds is that which is based on reproduction, an inherent human drive, and is called *kinship*. The desire for reproduction gives rise to two kinds of bonds. Firstly, there is the bond between spouses and their relatives on either side; and secondly, there is the bond between parents and their children, and that between *siblings*, i.e., children of the same parents. The first kind of bond, which arises out of a socially or legally defined marital relationship, is called *affinal kinship*, and the relatives so related are called *affinal kin*. The affinal kin are not connected to each other through blood, which is the case with relatives of the second kind enumerated above, who are called *consanguineous kin*. The relationship based on blood-ties is called *consanguineous (same blood) kinship*.

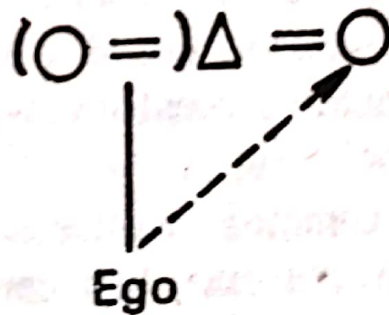
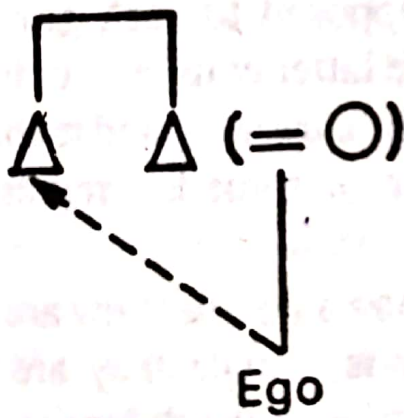
In this connexion it is necessary to point out that in determining consanguineous kinship it is not the biological fact that is important but social recognition. Among many primitive societies the role of a father in the birth of a child is unknown, as among the Trobriand Islanders of Melanesia for instance. Among them it is the wife's husband who is conventionally accepted as father. Among the polyandrous Toda, until another brother makes the ceremonial presentation of a bow and arrow to the common wife, all children born to her of several brothers are regarded as the children of that brother who last performed the ceremony, even though he may have been away or dead for a long time. Here is an instance where ignorance of the biological role of fatherhood

## ✓ DEGREE OF KINSHIP

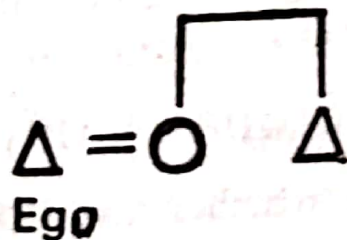
If a person is related to ego directly, then he is ego's *primary kin*; e.g., one's father is one's primary consanguineous, and one's wife one's primary affinal kin.



Any kin related to ego through primary kin, themselves being primary kin of ego's primary kin, are our kin of the *secondary degree*; e.g., ego's father's brother, or ego's stepmother are ego's secondary consanguineous kin, and secondary affinal kin respectively.



Likewise one's wife's brother is one's affinal secondary kin.



This relationship may be expressed as

$$\Delta [=] \Delta$$

Likewise, the secondary kin of our primary kin and the primary kin of our secondary kin will be our *tertiary kin*. The degree of kinship can thus be calculated, at least theoretically, to the *n*th degree.

7 Why is kinship so important in social anthropology? Following can be the answers:

- (1) It is through kinship that a person earns his livelihood. Traditional occupational knowledge is given through this organization. It is kin who make all efforts for the welfare and of the person.
- (2) The career of the individual is planned and executed by kinsmen. It is very common to find in India the Marwaris settled in different parts of country, are running their business through kinship ties. If one member of a kin group goes to Mumbai, the migrant group would grow in big size in a couple of years. The tribals are also drawn through kinship ties to different cities.
- (3) It is through kinship that matrimonial arrangements are made. It is common to find the bio-data of the prospective groom and bride contain details about the affinal and agnate kin. This clearly shows the importance of kinship in the settlement of marriage.
- (4) On the death of a person the mourning period is observed according to the degree of relationship with the deceased. Birth, marriage and death are the three basic occasions when there is a serious and careful reckoning of kin.
- (5) Kinship is related to all the other aspects of society such as economy, celebration of festivals, worship and folkways.
- (6) The social organization of a society revolves round kinship. If we examine the organization of a particular society we see that kinship is its integral part.
- (7) I.P. Desai, the noted sociologist, has empirically established that the institution of family is nothing but a part of wider social relations. According to him, kinship has its origin in biology but its legitimacy extends to relationship. In the west, on the other hand, some anthropologists such as Schneider have argued that kinship is related to biology and blood ties. However, anthropological research generally analyzes it as cultural classification of people. And, as aspects of group formation.

The importance of kinship is very great in social anthropology. It is the kin group which takes care of one's livelihood, career, marriage, protection and social identity. The importance becomes all the more stronger among the tribals as they reside in unfriendly and inhospitable environment in the hills and forests. We have enough empirical evidence to suggest that the survival of a tribal in poverty and deprivation is almost impossible without the support of the kin group. For instance, on occasion of marriage, among the Bhils, the relatives carry maize bread for the guests; on occasion of death the kinsmen also provide meals to the bereaved family. From cradle to grave, the strength of succour lies in kinship.

## **KINSHIP TERMS**

**Kinship terms are the terms used in designating kin of various types. The study of kinship terms is as old as anthropology as a modern science is. The first significant contribution to the study of kinship terms was made by Morgan, who published his important conclusions as regards the study of kinship terms in the second half of the last century. Morgan studied kinship terms from all parts of the world and coined the still-used nomenclature for the two broad categories of kinship terms, viz.,**

the *classificatory* and *descriptive* systems of kinship terms.

Under a classificatory system several people, lineal as well as collateral, and often even affinal, are all referred to by the same term of designation. The term classes them as similar. Such terms refer more to relationship rather than to kin. Against this, a descriptive term of designation describes the speaker's exact relation towards him/her whom he/she is referring to or addressing. Thus, 'uncle' is a classificatory term but 'father' is a descriptive term. Rivers refers also to a third family system of terms. Such terms refer to the members of a single biological family individually.

There is no place in the world where either the pure descriptive or the pure classificatory system of nomenclature is used. Nephews, cousins and in-laws are some examples of classificatory terms used by modern Western society. However, Morgan was of the view that as we move away from backward primitive societies towards the so-called civilized societies we simultaneously move away from classificatory towards descriptive kinship terms. Some examples may now be considered.

The Sema Naga of Assam use *aja* for mother; father's brother's wife; mother's sister. The first two terms are indicative of levirate and the first and the third of sororate. The term *apu* is used for father; father's brother; mother's sister's husband, indicating marriage of several sisters to husbands who are brothers. *Ami* is used for father's sister; wife's mother; husband's mother; husband's brother's wife. The first two terms indicate cross-cousin marriage.

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 (generations) are designated by a single term.

Among Angami Naga, *shi* stands for elder brother; wife's elder sister; husband's elder brother; elder sister's husband; elder brother's wife; mother's brother's wife; father's brother's wife. Thus here we find the same term being used for members of opposite sexes.

In popular Hindi, *samadhin* is the only classificatory term; it refers to father and mother of daughter-in-law and of son-in-law.)

Morgan's study of kinship terms had a pseudo-historical bias underlying it; he was always intent upon building evolutionary hierarchies.

W.H.R. Rivers has given an interpretation of the significance of kinship terms. He has said that terms of kinship refer to social usages



which are antecedent to their use. For example, the use of the term *mama* by a particular class of Indians for a particular class of people is to be referred to the social functions of these persons for explanation. Thus, Rivers also tries to explain, when his theory so demands, certain kinship terms by speculating upon the former existence of now-vanished kinship usages. However, it must be accepted that so long as River's explanation is not merged with Morganian speculation it is a useful manner of interpreting kinship terms. Thus, among the Oraon *tachi* stands for father's sister; mother's brother's wife; mother's sister; and mother-in-law. This term indicates the presence of cross-cousin marriage and sororate which are in vogue in this tribe. Some other examples have already been cited. However, there are limitations on the applicability of this explanation.

## What is Kinship?

The central fabric of kinship is biology as stated earlier. It is because of biology that we find kinship in all human societies. But kinship varies from society to society. In a matriarchal society, the mother's brother occupies a pivotal place; on the other hand, in a patriarchal society, the father's brother occupies the important place. Thus, the classification of kin is based on culture. Kinship has now been developed into a full-fledged theory. John Lewis defines it in very simple and general terms:

Kinship is a social recognition and expression of genealogical relationships. It is not only actual but may be based on supposed ties of blood.

Lewis' approach to kinship is genealogical or based on descent. Descent could be traced from mother or father, or in some cases, both. Lewis also says that kinship relations could also be extended to persons who are treated as being on par with blood or marital kin.

A.R. Brown, who is credited to have conducted fieldwork among three tribes of western Australia (1913), has defined kinship as follows:

Kinship is genealogical relationship recognized for social purposes and made the basis of the customary relation of social relations.

Brown's thesis is that kinship lies at the root of genealogical relations but its social extensions constitute the meaning of kinship. The importance of kinship, Brown further says, is reckoned on the occa-

sions of various customs observed during births, marriages, deaths and festivals.

Yet another definition of kinship is given by Charles Winick, who observes:

Kinship system may include socially recognized relationship based on supposed as well as actual geneologicalties.

## 10 KINSHIP USAGES

Within each kin group, whether it is a particularist family, or an

extension thereof, like the joint family or the sib, there are certain types of coactive behaviour patterns which exhibit a regularity, a more or less permanent and definite structure. Such types of behaviour, verbal and non-verbal, constitute kinship usages. Some of these usages, universally found, are described below. )

## *Avoidance*

Among some tribal communities face-to-face relations among some kin is avoided. For instance, a daughter-in-law does not directly talk to her father-in-law and her husband's elder brother. Similarly, it is expected of a mother-in-law to avoid direct talk with her son-in-law. Avoidance has been a tradition not only among the tribals but also among low-caste people. However, in urban families, this type of behaviour is fast disappearing.

## *Joking Relationship*

There are some kin relations with whom it is not considered improper to exchange jokes freely. Some tribals are foul mouthed and in jokes they would not hesitate to use vulgar language which would be out of place if the kinsmen around him are not of the right kind.

## *Teknonymy*

When the relatives are addressed through some medium it is called teknonymy. Usually children are used as a medium of teknonymy. For instance, if a tribal has to address his wife he would address her with the name of his son and daughter. Even among caste Hindus the usage of teknonymy is seen. Tylor and Frazer have also referred to the practice of teknonymy.

## *Avunculate*

This kind of kin behaviour is found in the matrilineal society. The status of the mother's brother is quite respectable. Relations with him are both joyful and pleasant. Avunculate behaviour is also found among the primitive groups of Africa and Australia.

### *Amitate*

This behaviour is mainly related to the father's sister. It is peculiar to patriarchal societies. In this behaviour a high status is given to father's sister. Among Todas in India the father's sister officiates at the cremation ceremony.

### *Couvade*

In kinship system couvade is related to the wife's delivery period. When she suffers from the pangs of labour her husband is also expected to exhibit similar pains in a dramatic way. In the Khasi tribe the husband does not wash his clothes or cross a river till the child is born. Couvade indicates the intimate relations between husband and wife.

To conclude, kinship behaviour which has become standardized among the tribals is not seen much any more. The tribal groups like other groups of the country have experienced vital change. They have acquired new values, new lifestyle and new patterns of behaviour. Even the tribals in Africa and Australia have witnessed changes. A large number of them have taken to modernization. After Tylor and Frazer recorded these forms of behaviour, almost a century has gone by and much intervention and modernization have come about in the life of the tribals in all parts of the world. ))

Kinship is the central part of human behaviour. When social anthropology claims to understand mankind as a whole, and tries to study the similarities and differences in human societies, the study of kinship is primary. It is easy to bring out differences in human society through kinship behaviour. Social anthropology in India has not explored the field of kinship among the tribals much. Likewise, very little has been done in building theories of kinship behaviour. However, the European including British, and the US social anthropology have done some substantial work in the field of kinship. The notable theoretical contributions in kinship refer to Morgan, Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Levi-Strauss, Rivers, Fortes, Evans-Pritchard and many more anthropologists.

In India, we have a few scholars like Iravati Karve who have done some work in the field of kinship. Her study *Kinship Organization in*



*India* (1965) is an outstanding contribution, which is both historical and empirical. Besides, she has focused on the whole country.