

Unit 12

Descent and Alliance Approaches to the Study of Kinship in India

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Learning Objectives

After reading Unit 12, it is expected that you would be able to:

- Explain the descent and alliance theories (given in Appendix 1 attached to Unit 12), which some scholars have used to study the kinship systems of North and South India;
- Examine the application of the two approaches to the study of kinship systems in India; and
- Understand clearly that in unit 12, the discussion of the two approaches to the study of kinship systems refers to the patterns found among the numerically dominant Hindu population.

12.1 Introduction

Units 9, 10 and 11 have provided you an understanding of the social institutions of family, household and marriage in India. In order to fully understand the social relationships involved in family and marriage we need to raise our level of cognition to yet another level of abstraction, namely, rules, norms and patterns that govern the construction of social relationships in family and marriage. These are kinship rules, norms and patterns.

In India, a country of immense diversity in its regions and communities, we find a wide range of kinship systems and it is not easy to present an overall picture of these kinship systems. We may make an effort to talk about the two major geographical regions, the north and south of the country. Even the sociological literature has highlighted features of North and South Indian kinship systems. This does not imply that there are no other varieties of kinship systems in some parts of both North and South India (for details of such systems see Jain 1996: 151-270 and Uberoi 1994).

In order to study the North and South Indian kinship systems, sociologists have followed some approaches and Unit 12 discusses the application of descent and alliance approaches to the study of kinship systems in North and South India (for familiarising yourself with basic concepts in the study of kinship systems and descent and alliance theories of kinship, you need to read Appendix 1 before reading Unit 12). For a comparative perspective of kinship systems in North and South India you can refer Unit 9 Kinship II in Block 3 of ESO-12 of IGNOU's B A Programme).

12.2 Application of Descent Theory to the Study of Kinship System in North India

For purposes of describing the kinship systems found in India, Irawati Karve (1953: 93) identified four cultural zones, namely the Northern, the Central, the Southern and the Eastern zones. You can locate the northern zone, according to Karve, between the Himalayas to the north and the Vindhya ranges to the south. In this region, the majority of the people speak languages derived from Sanskrit. Some of the main languages spoken in the region are Hindi, Bihari, Sindhi, Punjabi, Assamese and Bengali. In such a large region, you cannot say that there exists just one kinship system. The differences of language, history and culture have brought about a high degree of variation within the region. You may, however, try to look at the pattern of kinship organisations of the communities in this region on the basis of broad and general features. You can describe the basic structure and process of kinship system in this area in terms of four features (mentioned in Appendix 1), namely (A) kinship groups, (B) kinship terminology (C) marriage rules, and (D) ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin. Let us take up each of these features to discuss the kinship system in North India.

A) Kinship groups

Sociological studies in various parts of North India show that social groups, such as i) patrilineage, ii) clan, iii) caste/subcaste and sometimes also iv) fictive kinship provide the basis for cooperation or conflict among the people and therefore we now discuss each of these groups.

i) Patrilineage:

You can say that broadly speaking unilineal descent groups are the basis of kinship organisation in North India. When you trace the lineage membership of a group on the basis of shared descent in one line, you can name it a unilineal descent group. In North India, you find mostly patrilineal descent groups. This means that you trace the descent in the male line from father to son. Members of patrilineages cooperate as well as fight in various situations. Let us find out how this takes place in terms of a) cooperation, b) conflict and c) inheritance of status and property.

a) Cooperation:

Members of a patrilineage cooperate in ritual and economic activities. They participate together in life cycle rituals. In settlement of disputes, the senior men of the lineage try to sort out the matter within the lineage. Cooperation among lineage members is strengthened because they live close together in the same village. As the farm-lands of lineage members are normally located in the same village, they set up their houses almost next to each other. In this situation, there is constant exchange of material resources from the household of one member to another. Lewis (1958: 22-23), Minturn and Hitchcock (1963: 237), Berreman (1963: 173) and Nicholas (1962: 174) describe the pattern of co-operation in their studies of kinship patterns in North India. From their studies of the kinship systems you can say that these studies follow the descent approach because they examine the pattern of cooperation and conflict in descent groups.

b) Conflict:

Lineage members help each other, but fights or conflicts also characterise kinship relations among them. For example, T.N. Madan (1965: 201) shows

how in a Kashmir village, rivalry among brothers leads to partition of the joint family. Later, this rivalry takes more intense form in the relationships between the children of brothers.

c) Inheritance of status and property:

Transmission of status and property from one generation to the next takes place according to certain rules. In North India, the status and property generally pass in the male line. In other words, you find a predominantly patrilineal mode of inheritance in North India. For this reason, the composition of patrilineage becomes very important. The lineage members cooperate for economic and jural reasons. They share jural rights and therefore they cooperate in order to continue possessing the rights. They also fight among themselves about who is to get more benefits from those rights. Pradhan (1965) has described how the Jats and other landowners of Meerut and other districts around Delhi have a certain portion of the village lands and how it cannot be transferred out of the lineage. To keep the land within the lineage, its male members have to remain united. Land ownership in this case becomes the main principle of their social organisation.

After discussing patrilineage as a characteristic feature of kinship groups in North India, you can now move to the discussion of clans, the second feature of kinship groups in North India.

- ii) **Clan:** A lineage is an exogamous unit. This means that a boy and a girl of the same lineage cannot marry. A larger exogamous category is called the clan. Among the Hindus, this category is known as *gotra*. Each person of a higher caste among the Hindus belongs to the clan of his/her father and cannot marry within the clan or *gotra*. One usually knows about the common ancestor of lineage members as an actual person. But the common ancestor of a clan is generally a mythical figure. In rural areas, often the members of a lineage live in close proximity and therefore have greater occasions for cooperation or conflict. Common interests or actions do not characterise the relationships among clan members because they are usually scattered over a larger territory and their relationships are often quite remote. You would observe that it is common to find these relationships assuming significance only in the context of marriage. That is why we will now discuss caste/ sub-castes as the third characteristic feature of kinship groups in North India. Castes/ subcastes are the endogamous units within which marriage takes place.
- iii) **Caste and subcaste:** Besides lineages and clans, the kinship system operates within the families of the caste groups, living in one village or a nearby cluster of villages. As mentioned earlier, castes are endogamous, i.e., one marries within one's caste and people belonging to one caste group are kinsmen in the sense that they are already related or can be potentially related to each other. Caste-fellows generally come forward to help each other when others challenge their honour and status. They may also hold rituals together and help each other economically.

Subcaste is the largest segment of caste and it performs nearly all the functions of caste, such as endogamy and social control. In this respect, you can say that the internal structure of the subcaste would provide you the framework within which you can observe the operation of the kinship system. The members of a subcaste cooperate as kinspersons. They, depending on the context, work together as equals in the sphere of ritual activities and political

allies in socio-economic activities (for examples of the studies of subcaste see Box 12.3).

Box 12.1 and 12.2 are part of Annexure 1 at the back of the unit.

Box 12.3: Examples of the Studies of Subcaste

Vidyarthi (1961: 53-57), in his study of a very small subcaste, has shown that it is possible to trace one's relationship with most members of the subcaste. On the other hand, in the case of a subcaste spreading over many villages, one may be limited to maintaining relations with only a part of the total number of kin.

Klass (1966) in his study of marriage rules in Bengal calls a subcaste as one's 'effective *jati*'. This refers to all those people of the sub-caste with whom one actually has relationships of cooperation or conflict.

Among the subcaste kin, we need to also include those related to a person through marriage. Here, generally a person's kin through the mother are called uterine kin and those through the spouse are known as affinal kin. These relatives are not members of one's family or lineage or clan. They are expected to help and support a person and, actually do so when an occasion arises for such an action. While a person belongs to only one lineage, one clan or one sub-caste, the person would always have a string of relatives who do not belong to the person's lineage/clan/sub-caste.

We have already mentioned how sociologists like Radcliffe-Brown (1958), followed the descent approach to study kinship systems, and explained the fact of a special place of the relationship between a person and his/her mother's brother.

At the end of our discussion of kinship groups in North India, it is not out of place to mention two more sets of relationships, which assume significance in some situations. They pertain to fictive kin relationships and the relationships one maintains with step-siblings and other step-relatives.

Fictive kin and step relatives: You need to also mention, in passing, the recognition of fictive kinship among both urban dwellers and villagers. Often, people who are not related either by descent or marriage, form the bonds of fictive kinship with each other. We find the evidence of such a practice in many tribal and village studies. You may refer to the studies by B. Bandopadhyay (1955), L. Dube (1956), S.C. Dube (1951), S.K. Srivastava (1960) and L.K. Mahapatra (1968, 1969). On the basis of common residence in a village in North India, unrelated individuals may usually behave like brothers (see Box 12.4 for an explanation of fictive kin relationships). Similarly, residents in a Mumbai chawl, hailing from a common place of origin, may behave like a clan group.

Box 12.4: An Explanation of Fictive Kin Relationships

Mahapatra (1969) points out that fictive kinship is a mechanism to provide kin-like mannerisms to those who are not ordinarily found to be so related in a particular situation. For example, in North India, where village **exogamy** is a normal practice, it is rare to find a brother to a daughter-in-law living in the same locality. She can get a brother only through a fictive relationship.

In the urban context, you must have frequently come across small children who call any older man 'uncle' and an older woman 'aunty'. This shows how easily we make use of kinship idiom in our day-to-day behaviour towards total strangers. These transitory relationships do not however assume much importance in terms of actual kin ties and behaviour associated with them.

There are hardly any sociological studies of kin relationships among step-siblings and other step-relatives. This is a new area for exploration for sociologists of the younger generation.

We will now discuss characteristic features of the second aspect of kinship system in North India, namely kinship terminology.

B) Kinship terminology

Let us find out how an analysis of the various kinship terms used in the linguistic regions of the northern zone would help us to understand the kinship structure, its make-up and the behaviour associated with each term. We will first take up i) the descriptive nature of North Indian kinship terms and then discuss ii) social behaviour and kinship terms signifying social behaviour.

i) Descriptive nature of North Indian kinship terms

The kinship terminology is the expression of kinship relations in linguistic terms. In the case of North India, we can call the system of terminology as descriptive. This is because the kinship terms generally describe the relationship from the point of view of the speaker. In a few words, even the most distant kin relationships can be accurately described. Unlike the English terms, uncle, aunty, cousin, which do not reveal age, patrilineal/ matrilineal ties, the North Indian kinship terms are very clear. For example, when we say *chachera bhai*, it can be easily translated as father's younger brother's (*chacha's*) son, who stands in the relationship of a brother (*bhai*) to the speaker. Similarly, *mamera bhai* means mother's brother's (*mama's*) son. According to Dumont (1966: 96), the North Indian kinship terminology is descriptive in the sense that it describes elementary relationships in three steps starting from Ego or the speaker.

Step 1: The elementary relationships of filiation upwards and downwards, siblingship (sister/ brother) and marriage comprise the first set of terms.

Step 2: Then we have the relationships of the second order. These are formed by combining two elementary relationships, i.e. filiation + filiation, filiation + siblingship, siblingship + filiation, marriage + filiation, marriage + siblingship.

Step 3: The third order of relationships is represented by filiation + marriage + filiation. Further, for Dumont (1966), the North Indian kinship terminology is not a classificatory type of terminology because it does not classify the kinship terms according to the number of principles of opposition. All the same, to emphasise the patrilineal descent, North Indian kinship terminology observes a clear-cut distinction between parallel and cross-cousins. The children of one's brother are *bhatija* (for male child) and *bhatiji* (for female child). The children of one's sister are *bhanja* (for male child) and *bhanji* (for female child). A person's parallel relatives are members of his/her descent

group and therefore they also live nearby in the same village. In contrast, a person's sister's children or cross relatives are members of a different descent group. They are also residents of a different place. This distinction between brother's children and sister's children, which is made in the North Indian kinship terminology, is also of importance in the context of kinship system in South India (about this we will discuss later in this Unit). Now we see how kinship terms signify social behaviour.

ii) Social behaviour and kinship terms signifying social behaviour

Irawati Karve (1953) gave a list of kinship terms in North Indian languages. She made use of kinship terminologies to describe and compare kinship systems in various parts of India. She studied the terms and also used the findings for understanding the influences, which played a part in shaping them (see Box 12.5 for another example).

Box 12.5: Analysis of Indo-Aryan Kinship Terms by G. S. Ghurye

Besides Irawati Karve, we can also give another example of the analysis of Indo-Aryan kinship terms made by G.S. Ghurye (1946, 1955). He highlighted the jural and ideological aspects of kinship systems through a comparison of kinship terms in North Indian languages. For example, among the Sarjupari Brahmins the term 'maan' refers to the bride-taker. In ideological terms, 'maan' reflects the high status of the bride-taker as compared to the bride-giver. In jural terms it denotes the fact that bride-takers do not share property with the bride-givers (for a discussion of the term 'maan' see Jain 1996).

The very usage of kinship terms also makes clear the kind of behaviour expected from a kin. For example, Oscar Lewis (1958: 189), in his study of a North Indian village, described the pattern and relationship between a person and his elder brother's wife. This is popularly known as *Devar-Bhabhi* relationship, which is characteristically a joking relationship.

A contrast to this 'joking' relationship is the behaviour of avoidance between a woman and her husband's father. Similarly, she has to avoid her husband's elder brother. The term for husband's father is *shvasur* and for husband's elder brother is *bhasur*. *Bhasur* is a combination of the Sanskrit word *bhratr* (brother) and *shvasur* (father-in-law), and is, therefore, referring to a person like the father-in-law.

Let us at this stage complete a 'Reflection and Action Exercise' to grasp the linkages between kinship terms and social behaviour.

Reflection and Action 12.4

Write down the kinship terms in your language for the following relationships.

Father, father's brother, Father's brother's son, Father's father, Father's father's brother's son, Brother, Brother's son, Mother's brother, Mother's father, Mother's brother's son, Mother's sister, Mother's sister's husband, Father's sister, Father's sister's husband.

Now, distinguish your consanguines and affines among these relatives. Next, write each set of relationships in short form. In addition, highlight the clear-cut distinctions, if any, between the relatives as reflecting in the kinship terms in your language. Finally, work out if any of the above kin terms explicitly connote either 'joking' or avoidance relationship.

C) Marriage Rules

Every time a marriage takes place, new kinship bonds come into being. This shows you clearly the relevance of marriage rules for discussing the patterns of kinship organisation. In the context of North India, you find that people have a good idea of categories of people one cannot marry. In sociological terms, you can express this norm by saying that there are negative rules of marriage in North India. You can also say that marriage is allowed only outside a defined limit. Later we will also talk about the limits within which marriage is permitted to take place.

Rules of exogamy

Let us see first find out what the limit or the rule of exogamy is in North India and what is the four clan rule that sets another limit of exogamy in North India.

i) Clan Exogamy

Marriage shows very clearly the boundaries of one's natal descent line. No man is allowed to marry a daughter of his patriline. In North India lineage ties upto five or six generations are generally remembered and marriage alliances are not allowed within this range. In such a situation the lineage turns into the clan and we speak of *gotra* (clan) and *gotra bhai* (clan mates). Widely used Sanskrit term *gotra* is an exogamous category within a subcaste. Its main use is to regulate marriages within a subcaste. Two persons of similar *gotra* cannot tie the knot.

Apart from the clan exogamy, there is also the four clan rule to draw a line to separate those men and women, who can and cannot marry each other.

ii) The four clan rule

In Irawati Karve's (1953: 118) words, according to this rule, a man must not marry a woman from (i) his father's *gotra*, (ii) his mother's *gotra*, (iii) his father's mother's *gotra*, and (iv) his mother's mother's *gotra*. In other words, this rule prohibits marriage between two persons who share any two of their eight *gotra* links. This means that the rule of exogamy goes beyond one's own lineage. Another related kind of exogamy, which exists in North India, is village exogamy. A village usually has members of one or two lineages living in it. Members belonging to the same lineage are not permitted to intermarry.

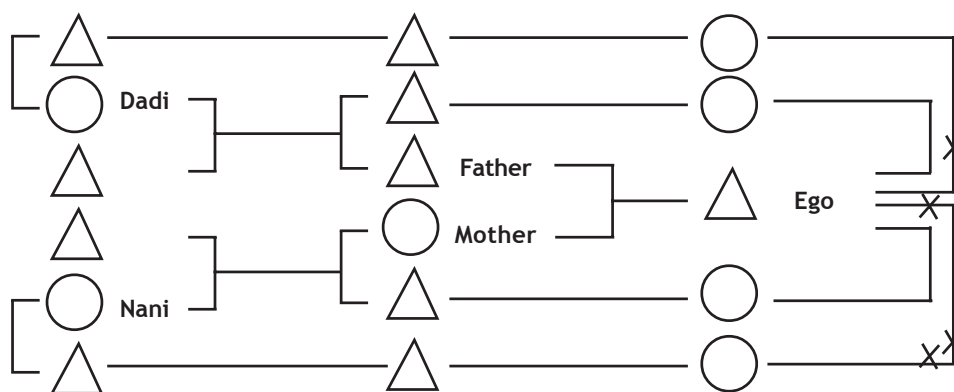


Fig. 12.3: The Four – Clan Rule

This principle extends even to the villages, which have more than two lineages. In other words, a boy and a girl in a village in North India are like a brother and sister and hence cannot intermarry.

It is important here to give you a word of caution. We have spoken about lineage, clan and subcaste in relation to organisation of kinship patterns. But we have not mentioned the terms like *kutumb*, *biradari*, *khandan*, *bhai bandh* etc. These denote various colloquial meanings of the general terms (lineage, clan and subcaste) in local languages. The local terms are used in various contexts to signify different levels of kinship arrangements. In our discussion, we have limited ourselves to social structure and function in broad terms and avoided conflicting usages of local terms.

Let us now look at the groups within which marriage is preferred/prescribed, in the context of North India. This refers to the rules of endogamy.

Rules of endogamy

As mentioned earlier, the kinship system operates within the families of the caste groups living in one village or a nearby cluster of villages. Castes are endogamous. This means that one marries within one's caste. Let us look at the rules of marriage within one's caste/ sub-caste.

Marriages within the sub-caste

Associated with local terms is the idea of the status of various units within the subcaste. Taking the example of the Sarjupari Brahmin of Mirzapur district in Uttar Pradesh, studied by Louis Dumont (1966: 107), we find that each of the three subcastes of Sarjupari Brahmins of this area is divided into three 'houses' (kin groups or lineages), which range hierarchically in status. The marriages are always arranged from lower to higher 'house'. This means that women are always given to the family, which is placed in the 'house' above her 'house'. In this context, we can also refer to the popular saying in North India that 'the creeper must not go back'. The same idea is reflected by another North Indian saying that '*pao pujke, ladki nahin lejaing*' (i.e. once we have washed the feet of the bridegroom during the wedding ceremony, we cannot accept a girl from his family, because this will mean that we allow that side to wash our feet or allow the reversal of relationships). This shows clearly that marriage rules among Brahmins and other higher castes in North India maintain a hierarchic relationship between the bride-givers and bride-takers. In terms of negative rules of marriage in North India, the above description reflects the rule that a man cannot marry his father's sister's daughter or his patrilineal cross-cousin. This is called the rule of no reversal and can be shown in a diagram like this:

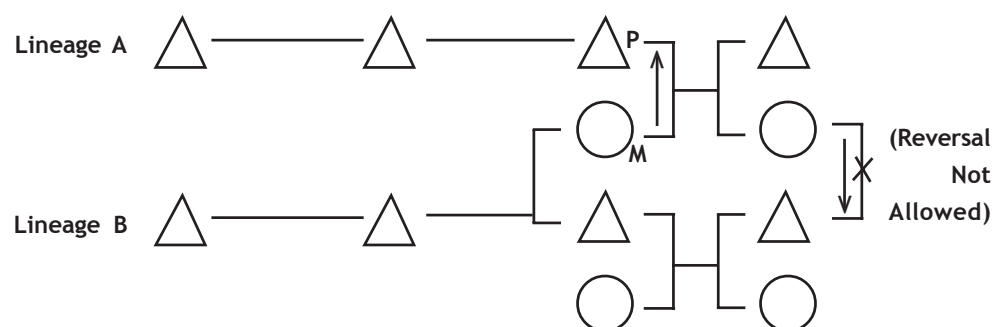


Fig. 12.4: The Rule of No Reversal

Lineage B has given the woman (M) in marriage to the man (P) of lineage A. P is given the high ritual status of 'pao puj' in marriage ceremonies. If P's daughter is married to the man of lineage B, then P will have to give the same high ritual status to the man of lineage B. But lineage B is, according to the rule of hypergamy, lower to lineage A and therefore, this marriage will be a reversal of roles. In North India, such a reversal is not allowed and thus, we find the rule of prohibition on marriage with patrilateral cross-cousins.

Another principle should also be mentioned here and this is the rule of no repetition. This means that if the father's sister has been married in a family (*khandan*), one's own sister cannot be given in marriage to that same family (Dumont 1966: 104-7). The term family or *khandan* is here used as a smaller unit of a lineage. This rule of no repetition implies the negative rule of prohibition on the marriage with matrilineal cross-cousins. In other words, a man cannot marry his mother's brother's daughter. This can be depicted in a simple kinship diagram like this:

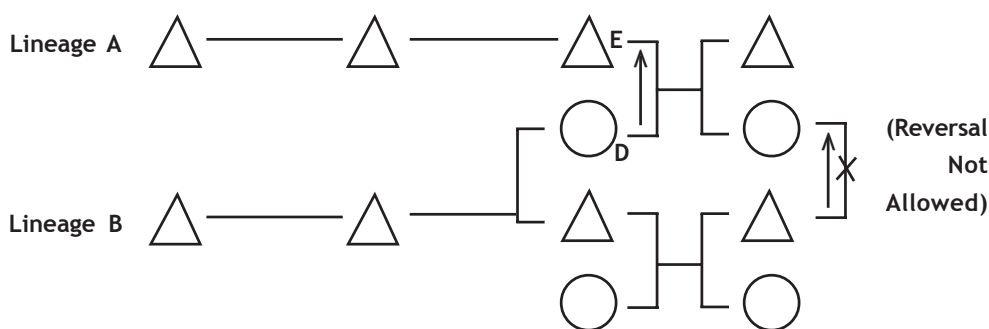


Fig. 12.5: The Rule of No Repetition

Lineage B has given woman D in marriage to the man E of lineage A. In the next generation, if a woman is again given in marriage to a man of lineage A, then a repetition will occur. A prohibition on repetition shows that matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is barred in North India. Thus, we find that both patrilateral and matrilineal cross-cousin marriages are not allowed in North India. In other words, the two rules- the rule of no reversal and the rule of no repetition- put together define the negative rules of marriage in North India.

Highlighting the structural implications of marriage rules in North India, T.N. Madan (1965) in his study of the Kashmiri Pandits distinguishes three classes of wife-givers and wife-takers (these are the terms used by T.N. Madan in the place of bride-taker and bride-giver, used in this unit) from the perspective of the household: (i) those who give wives to it and those who take wives from it, (ii) those who give wives to those in class (i) and (iii) those who take wives from class (i). These three classes have unequal relationships. However, honour and prestige go in the opposite direction to women in marriage. This means that wife-takers are superior to wife-givers and by the fact of giving a wife to a group, one receives honour and prestige within one's own group. The following diagram shows how the rule of hypergamy in North India acts as a form of exchange between, women and dowry on the one hand and prestige and honour on the other.

Here, A, B and C are patrilineages which are ranked by high to low status. The upward arrows indicate that lineage C has given the woman and dowry to the man of lineage B. As bride-giver, lineage C is lower to B and lineage B is lower to A. The rule of hypergamy accords lower status to bride-givers.

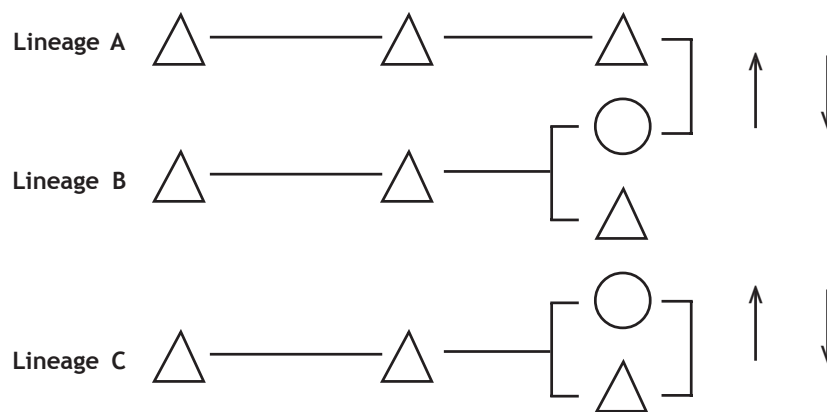


Fig. 12.6: Hypergamy in North India as an Exchange

At the same time by giving the women and dowry to high-status lineages, the lower status lineages gain prestige and power within their groups. Thus, the downward arrows indicate the movement of prestige and honour in the direction opposite to women and dowry. In other words, women and dowry are exchanged for prestige and honour among the hierarchically arranged lineages of a subcaste/caste in North India.

D) Ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin

Ceremonial exchange of gifts on the occasions of life cycle rituals provides us with the understanding of a patterned behaviour among various categories of kin. Generally, the bride-givers, in correspondence with their inferior status vis-a-vis bride-takers, initiate the process of gift-giving during marriage and continue to give greater amounts of gifts. In other words, you can say that gift-giving and receiving is a well-defined social activity See Box 12.5 for two examples of ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin.

Box 12.5: Two Examples of Ceremonial Exchange of Gifts among Kin

L. Dumont (1966: 91) has pointed out that mother's brother (uterine kin) and wife's brother (affinal kin) have similar ceremonial functions. Not only this, as wife's brother becomes, after a few years, mother's brother to the children, there is little difference between the two.

A.C. Mayer (1960: 232) has described in his study of kinship in a village in Malwa that all gifts given by one's mother's brother are called *mamere*. In contrast to the gifts given by the mother's brother, there are gifts known as *ban*, given by one's agnates. *Ban* is the term used also for the gift, which is given by other relatives such as the groom's sister's husband to the groom's wife's brother. This shows that the groom's sister's husband (or father's sister's husband in the context of the ascending generation) is viewed to be a part of agnatic kin vis-a-vis the groom's wife's brother (or mother's brother for the ascending generation).

In sociological vocabulary you can put the same thing in this way. You look at the groom's sister's husband (zh) or father's sister's husband (fzh) as a wife-taker. Similarly, we look at the groom's wife's brother (wb) or his mother's brother (mb) as a wife-giver. Now if the gift to A's wife-givers (i.e. mother's brother or wife's brother) by A's wife-taker (sister's husband or father's sister's husband) and by A's agnates are known by the same term '*ban*' then we can say that in opposition to A's wife-givers, his agnates and wife-takers have been merged into one category. This is so because for the groom's

wife's brother (or mother's brother) the groom is a wife-taker and groom's wife-taker is his sister's husband or father's sister's husband. These two sets of wife-takers are on one side and the wife-givers are on the other.

To this example of ceremonial gift-giving at a wedding, we can add one more in Box 12.6.

Box 12.6: Another Example of Ceremonial Gift-Giving

Dumont (1966: 93-5) has shown a similar distinction being made between wife-givers and wife-takers (the terms used by Dumont) in the context of gift-giving at the end of mourning in a village of Gorakhpur district in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. Here, the main mourner is generally a son or an agnate of the deceased. The ceremony of tying a turban on the head of the main mourner is done by an affine who has taken a wife. In other words, preferably sister's husband (zh) or father's sister's husband (fzh) ties the turban. Then again for the ceremony of *shaiyyadan* (gift of a bed), a sister's husband (zh) or father's sister's husband (fzh) is asked to receive the gift. This ceremony emphasises their status as wife-takers. The priest clearly asks for those who have taken the daughters to come forward for receiving the *shaiyya* (bed). Thus, of the two kinds of affines (the wifes-taker and wife-giver) the affines of the wife-taking type are preferred over the affines of wife-giving type. In the hypergamous situation, wife-takers are higher than the wife-givers and therefore in ceremonial gift-giving they remain as the recipient while the wife-givers remain at the giving end.

F.G. Bailey (1957) in Orissa and Oscar Lewis (1958) in Rampur have also recorded the flow of gifts from affinal kin (wife's relatives) and uterine kin (mother's relatives). According to A.C. Mayer (1960), the function of the gifts made by uterine and affinal kin is similar, i.e. to enhance the status of wife-takers. In sociological terms, we say that this type of exchange of gifts shows the hypergamous nature of marriage in North India. In other words, the woman is always given into the group which is higher in status, and the flow of gifts from the family maintains this distinction forever. This, in turn, explains the nature of kin relationships in North India.

12.3 Application of Alliance Theory to the Study of Kinship System in South India

South India comprises the geographical area covered by the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. People of the four states speak languages of the Dravidian family. Quite like North India, the South too has its share of diverse kinship systems. The state of Kerala is distinct for its matrilineal system of descent and the practice of inter-caste hypergamy. Also, despite common elements, each of the four states has its own socio-cultural patterns of kinship. Just as we did in the case of North Indian kinship, we will focus on common elements in terms of the four major aspects of kin relationships, namely i) kinship groups, ii) kinship terminology, iii) marriage rules and iv) ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin.

i) Kinship groups

You can categorise kin relatives in South India in two groups namely, the patrilineage and the affines.

Patrilineage: Quite like in North India, in South India too, the fact of relating to various categories of kin beyond one's immediate family means a close interaction with members of one's patrilineage. Owing to patrilocal residence, the lineage members get the chances for frequent interaction and cooperation. The ties of descent and residence constitute a kin group. You may observe that each of the two regions, South and North India, has such a group. For example, in her study of the Brahmins of Tanjore district, Gough (1955) describes patrilineal descent groups, which are distributed in small communities. Each caste within the village contains one to twelve exogamous patrilineal groups (For another example see Box 12.7).

Box 12.7: Example of Kin Groups among the Pramalai Kallar of Madurai

In his study of the Pramalai Kallar of Madurai in Tamil Nadu, Dumont (1986) describes kin groups in terms of patrilineal, patrilocal and exogamous groups, called *kuttam*. All members of the *kuttam* may form the whole or a part of one or several villages. It may be subdivided into secondary *kuttam*. Each *kuttam* bears the name of its ancestor, which is also the name of the chief. The name is inherited by the eldest son who is also the holder of the position of chief in the group. The ritual activities, in which the *kuttam* members participate, show its significance as a unit of kinship organisation. During harvest season, when food is plenty, all the members of the group are invited and they collectively worship in the temple of the *kuttam*. In the economic sphere, as land is owned by the male members of the *kuttam*, we find that after the death of the father, there are frequent fights between brothers or coparceners, as opposed to the free and friendly relations among affinal relatives. Thus, it is said amongst the Kallar that brothers or coparceners do not joke. The coparceners are known as *pangali*. In the classificatory system of South Indian kinship terminology, they are opposed to the set of relatives, known as *mama-machchinan*.

Affinal Relatives: The kin group of affinal relatives (those related through marriage) is opposite to a patrilineage. Beyond the patrilineage are the relatives who belong to the group in which one's mother was born, as well as one's wife. A person's uterine or *mama* (from mother's side) and affinal or *machchinan* (from wife's side) kin comprise a common group of *mama-machchinan*. This group of relatives includes also the groups in which a person's sister and father's sister are married. Dumont (1986) has described the nature of interaction between a patrilineage and its affines to be always cordial and friendly.

Indirect Pangali: If group A is one's patrilineage and group B is one's *mama-machchinan* (uterine and affinal kin), then members of group C, which is *mama-machchinan* of group B, will become classificatory brothers to people in group A. The term for such classificatory brothers is *mureikku pangali* (see Dumont 1950: 3-26). These relatives, though called a kind of *pangali*, are never equal to actual coparceners or sharers of joint patrilineal property. Beyond this circle of relatives, the rest are only neutral people.

Let us now discuss the South Indian kinship terminology, which places particular emphasis on affinal relationships. Those who follow the alliance approach are particularly interested in affinal relationships.

ii) Kinship terminology

Kin relationships in Dravidian languages follow a clear-cut structure with precision. According to Louis Dumont (1986: 301), main features of this system are that a) it distinguishes between parallel and cross-cousins and b) it is classificatory. Let us discuss these two features.

a) **Parallel and cross-cousins:** Parallel cousins are those who are the children of the siblings of same sex. This means that children of two brothers, or of two sisters, are parallel cousins to each other. Cross-cousins are those who are the children of the siblings of the opposite sex. This means that children of a brother and a sister are cross-cousins.

The kin terminology in South India clearly separates the two categories of cousins for the reasons that parallel cousins cannot marry each other while cross-cousins can. If the system of terminology did not distinguish between the two categories, there would have been utter confusion in the minds of the people. But as any speaker of one of the four Dravidian languages will tell you, there is never any doubt as to who is one's parallel cousin, with whom you behave as a brother/sister and who is one's cross-cousin with whom one is to remain distant and formal. The parallel cousins are referred as brothers/sisters. For example, in Tamil, one addresses all parallel cousins *annan* (elder brother) or *tambi* (younger brother) and *akka* (elder sister) or *tangachi* (younger sister). Cross-cousins are never brothers/sisters. For example, in Tamil, one refers to cross-cousins as *mama magal/ magan* (mother's brother's daughter/ son) or *attai magal /magan* (father's sister's daughter/ son). The following diagram will further clarify this simple formulation.

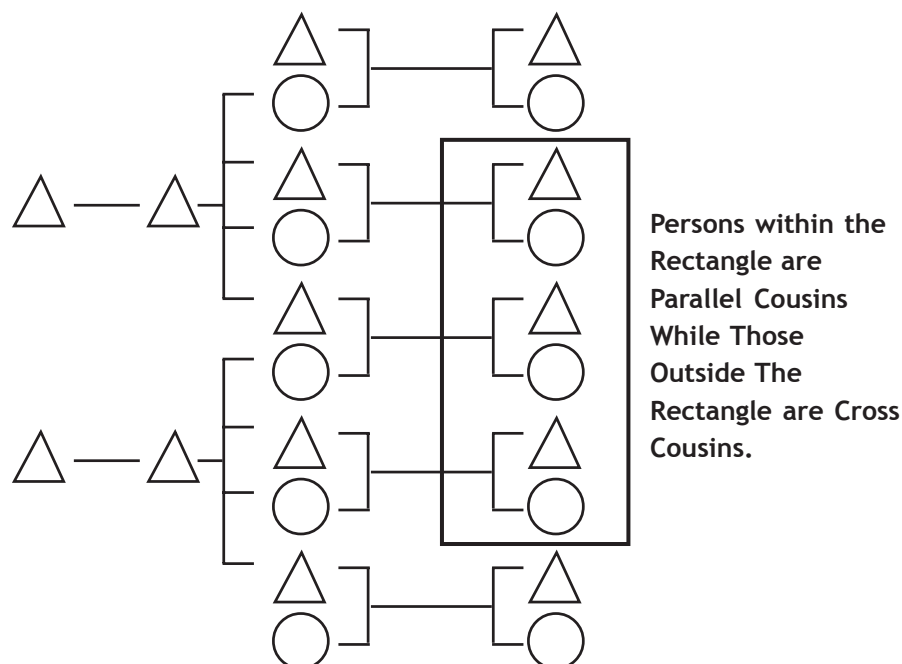


Fig. 12.7: Two Categories of Cousins

This system of kinship terms agrees with the practice of marriage among close relatives. It separates all descent lines into those with whom one can marry and those with whom one cannot marry. The terminology clearly tells that in a person's own generation, males are either one's brothers or brothers-in-law. Similarly females are either sisters or potential spouses. You can argue that in this very sense, Morgan (1981:394) described the Dravidian kinship terminology as 'consistent and symmetrical'.

For the sake of comparison, let us clarify that in North India, all cousins (be they parallel or cross) are considered consanguines or brothers/sisters. They are not allowed to marry each other. Then in this respect, you can see how North Indian kinship system is different from the one in South India and how the kinship terminology reflects this distinction.

b) **Classificatory nature of kinship terminology:** You can say that the Dravidian kinship terms are a mirror image of the kinship system in South India because classificatory nature of terminology matches perfectly with the distinction between parallel and cross-cousins. The terminology becomes classificatory in the following manner.

The person's own generation is terminologically divided into two categories.

- a) One group consists of all the brothers and sisters, including one's parallel cousins and the children of the father's parallel cousins.
- b) The other group comprises cross-cousins and affinal relatives such as wife/husband of the category 'a' (above) relatives. In Tamil, this category is called by the term of *mama-machchinan*.

You can also see how the two classes of kin divide relatives in one's own generation and in both ascending and descending generations.

One's own generation: This bi-partition applies to the whole generation of a person. In other words, all one's relatives in one's own generation are systematically classified in this way. There is no third category of relatives. People falling into either category are not considered to be relatives. The Tamil term for category (a) is *pangali*, which means 'those who share'. The word *pangali* has connotations of both the general and the specific kind. In its general sense, it refers to classificatory (*murei*) brothers, who do not share a joint property. They are all reckoned as *pangali* (brothers). In its specific sense, the word '*pangali*' refers to strictly those people who have a share in the joint family property. Here we are more concerned with the classificatory (*murei*) connotation of this term.

The two categories (*pangali* and *mama-machchinan*) are both opposed and exclusive to each other. This classification, which has been explained above in terms of relatives in one's own generation, applies to groups, lineages, villages and so on. This bi-partition applies to both the generation above one's own and the generation below one's own.

Affines of affines: The principle of classifying relationships into the categories of *pangali* and *mama-machchinan* extends to even those who are the affines of one's affines. As we have already seen, the rule is that one has to assign a class to each relative. If A is the affine of B who is an affine of C, then the relationship between A and C has to be, according to the above formulation, that of a *murei pangali* or classificatory brother. This is so because anyone who is related to you, and is not your *mama-machchinan* then has to be your *murei pangali* or classificatory brother.

Age and sex distinction: By separating the older and younger relatives, the ego's generation is divided into two parts. Similarly, the father's generation is also divided into two parts. In Tamil, brothers and sisters and parallel cousins older to ego are called *annan/akka*, respectively, and those younger to ego are called *tambi/tangaichi*, respectively. In the same way all brothers/

sisters and parallel cousins older to one's father are called *periyappa/periyamma* and younger one's are *chittappa/sinnappa/chithi/sinnamma*, respectively.

The sex distinction is paired, says Dumont (1986: 302), with the alliance distinction. As soon as a distinction is not necessary for establishing an alliance relationship it is merged. This is what we find in the case of kin terms applied in grand-parental and grand children's generation. For the generation of one's grandchild, one does not distinguish between one's son's and daughter's children. Both are referred in Tamil, as *peran* (grandson) or *peththi* (grand daughter). Similarly, maternal grandfather/mother and paternal grandfather/mother are designated by a common term *tata* for grandfather and *patti* for grandmother. Merging of the sex distinction in generations of grandparents and grandchildren shows the boundaries where the relationship of alliance ceases to matter and the two sides can be assimilated into one category.

The above description of kinship terminology in South India should not give you the impression that there are no variations in this general picture. In fact, particular features of kinship terms in specific regions are of great interest to sociologists. For example, Louis Dumont (1986: 301-9) has discussed in particular, features of kinship among the Pramalai Kallar of Tamilnadu. But here we are concerned with only the general and broad scheme of kinship terminology.

iii) Marriage Rules

Positive rules of marriage characterise the kinship system in South India. This means that preference for a particular type of alliance in marriage is clearly stated and practised. You may remember that in the context of North India negative rules of marriage tell us whom one should not marry. In South India the marriage rules are quite clear about who one should/ can marry.

Three types of preferential marriage rules:

The preferential marriage rules are of the following three types.

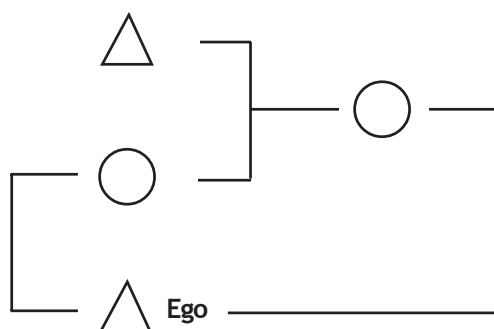


Fig. 12.8: Marriage with Elder Sister's Daughter

i) In several castes in South India, the marriage between a man and his elder sister's daughter gets the first preference. Among the matrilineal societies like the Nayars, this is not allowed. A simple diagram will show this positive rule of marriage in patrilineal South India in the following manner.

Here, ego is married to his sister's daughter.

ii) Next category of preferred marriage is the marriage of a man with his father's sister's daughter (fzd). In other words, we can also say that a woman marries her mother's brother's son (mbs). In this kind of marriage, the principle of return is quite evident. The family, which gives a daughter, expects to receive a daughter in return in marriage. In other words we can say that when ego marries her mbs, she is given in marriage to the family from which her mother had come. Thus, the principle of return is followed in this type of preference. Often, this process takes two generations to materialise. With the help of a kinship diagram we will see how this rule operates.

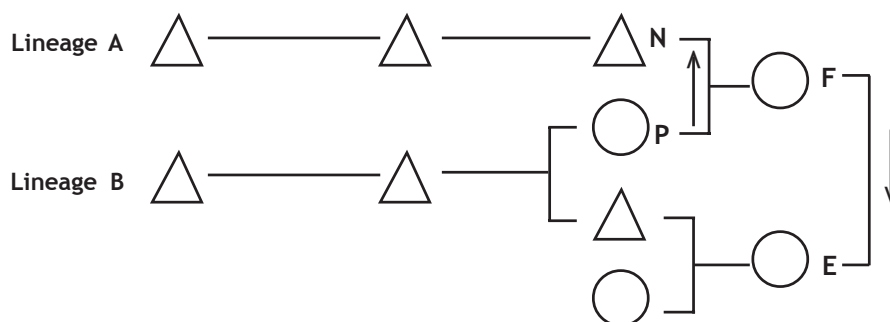


Fig. 12.9: The Rule of Return in Marriage

Lineage B gave the woman (P) in marriage to the man (N) of lineage A. In the next generation, lineage A gave the woman (F) to the man (E) of lineage B. Thus, a man's marriage with his patrilateral cross-cousin reflects the positive 'rule of return' in South India.

iii) The third type of preferential marriage is between a man and his mother's brother's daughter (mbd). In a way, this is the reverse of (ii) above. Some castes, such as the Kallar of Tamil Nadu, Havik Brahmin of Karnataka, some Reddy castes of Andhra Pradesh, allow only this type of cross-cousin marriage. In the castes, which have type (iii) of preference, there is always an underlying notion of superiority or hypergamy. This is not present in South India to the extent that is found among the bride-takers in North India. But in this type of marriage, the principle of no-return or a 'vine must not be returned' is practised and therefore the bride is given only in one direction. The bride-takers are considered to be somewhat higher to bride-givers. This unidirectional process is shown in the following diagram.

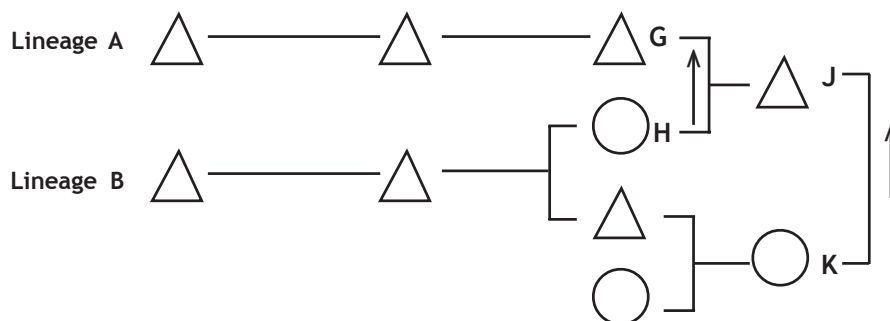


Fig. 12.10: The Rule of No Return or The Rule of Repetition

Lineage B gave the woman (H) to the man (G) of lineage A. In the next generation lineage B gave again a woman (K) to the man (J) of lineage A. Here a man's marriage to his matrilineal cross-cousin indicates the positive 'rule of repetition' among some castes in South India.

When one set of brother and sister marry another set of brother and sister, there is no distinction between patrilineal and matrilineal cousins in the cases of marriage of their children. In such a case the question of preference for (ii) or (iii) type does not arise, because the children of each set are cross-cousins to the other and they can and do marry. In the above three types of preferential marriage in South India we find a definite tendency towards marriages within a small kin group. This group is just outside one's immediate family. The family seeks to strengthen the already existing kin relationships through marriage. Thus, a woman may find that by marrying her mother's brother (mb) her mother's mother (mm) and mother-in-law are one and the same person. Or, if she marries her mother's brother's son then her mother's mother and her husband's father's mother are one and the same person. These examples go to show that marriages take place within the limited kin group. This also shows that village exogamy is not practised in South India. The agnates and affines can be found living in the same village. Affines in South India, living in the same village, are commonly involved in each other's social life. This kind of situation is rare in the context of kin groups in North India. But there are some other restrictions regarding marital alliances in South India. We shall now look at them. See Box 12.8 for restrictions regarding marital alliances.

Box 12.8: Restrictions regarding Marital Alliances

What are the restrictions imposed with regard to marriage between certain relatives? In certain castes a man can marry his elder sister's daughter but not his younger sister's daughter. Also a widow cannot marry her deceased husband's elder or younger brother or even his classificatory brother. Here we find that for each individual, the prohibited persons for marriage differ. Then there is, of course, the rule that a person cannot marry in one's own immediate family and one's lineage. The lineage in the case of the Kallar subcaste is known as *Kuttam* (Dumont 1986: 184). All individuals in the lineage are forbidden to marry persons of the lineage.

iv) Ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin

The process of gift-giving and taking reflects the principles governing the separation/ assimilation of various categories of kin relationships. This is the reason why we look at this aspect of kinship behaviour. You can distinguish between two categories of gifts and counter-gifts in South India from certain persons to other persons or from certain groups to other groups.

- a) Gifts passing from the bride's family to the groom's family or the reverse can be seen as a series of exchanges between affines. This is one category of gift-exchange.
- b) The other category of gift-giving and taking occurs within each of the two groups. We can call it internal exchange of gifts. It is sometimes possible for a person to make/receive gifts from both sides. Because of the positive rules of marriage between relatives, often certain individuals are placed in the positions of receivers and givers at the same time. In other words, there is a process of merging of relationships (complete Reflection and Action 12.5 to identify the examples of both categories of gifts).

Reflection and Action 12.5

Fill in the blank spaces and thereby identify both categories in examples from ethnographic studies made in South India.

Louis Dumont (1986: 256) in his study of the Pramalai Kallar subcaste of Tamil Nadu mentions a gift of money from the bridegroom's father to the It is known as '*parisam*'. The bride's father uses this money to get jewels for his daughter. But he is expected to spend twice the amount he receives. Thus, we may say that the bride's jewels are paid for half-in-half by the two families. This particular ceremony marks the of the giving and taking of gifts between It continues for a period of at least three years.

Then, the birth of the first child gives rise to another cycle of gift-exchange. In fact, among the Pramalai Kallar, when the newly weds set up an individual household after three years of marriage or after the birth of a child, the provide the household articles. This gift is called '*vere pona sir*', literally meaning 'the gift for going apart'. So from '*parisam*' to 'the gift for going apart', we witness the series in which a gift is made and it is returned after 'doubling' its content. The series begins with a gift from the groom's side and ends with a gift from the bride's side. Thus, though there is a of gifts between affines on both sides, it is quite clear that the ends up paying more. In other words, gifts from the groom's side are mere excuses for getting more gifts from the bride's side.

Having seen the nature of gifts passing from the bride's family to the groom's family, now we also discuss the gifts given and taken within each group of

At weddings, both in the bride's house and in the groom's house respectively, a collection (usually in the form of cash) is taken from the relatives present at the occasion. This is called the '*moy*' among the non-Brahmin castes in South India. The same is practised by the Brahmins under the name of 'writing the *moy*'. A person is given the charge of recording the amount of cash/kind given by a particular person. In this gift-giving also, there is the principle of One gives '*moy*' to those who have already given or will give on similar occasions. Louis Dumont (1986: 256) tells us that among the Pramalai Kallar, the mother's brother is the first person to contribute to the *moy*. After the mother's brother other relatives make their contribution. Usually the money thus collected goes towards the expenses incurred for the marriage feast.

In the cycle of gifts, the role of the mother's brother is quite prominent. After a child is born to a family, the mother's brother gives gifts on various occasions in the child's life. Among the Pramalai Kallar (see Dumont 1986: 256) the mother's brother gives to his sister's son at birth a gift of land or money. In a way, we can say that the gifts given by are a continuation of the series, which started at the mother's wedding. Then we called it an of gifts between Now, the mother's brother- an affine of ego's father, is merged in relation to the affines in ego's generation, among the common relatives of one group, either of the bride/or the groom. Secondly, the special place of the gifts made by the points to the obligation the female side has to the male side. This is seen in the continuity maintained by the relatives on the mother's side in terms of gift-giving even to the next

You may say that in the context of kinship behaviour at ceremonial exchanges of gifts in South India, the element of reciprocity is present, though the bride-givers have to pay more gifts than they receive. In comparative terms, you may also say that in North India, the gifts travel from the bride givers to bride-takers in a unidirectional manner. As a result, the bride-givers, in turn, receive the enhanced prestige and status in their own community. In South India, the positive rule of marriage means that gifts are exchanged among close relatives. There is always the difference in the amount of gifts both sides exchange but their flow has to remain both-sided. It cannot be as unidirectional as it is in North India (for a comprehensive comparison of North and South Indian kinship systems see Unit 9 in Block 2 of ESO 12 of IGNOU's B A Programme.)

12.4 Conclusion

In Unit 12 you have focused on four major aspects of kinship structures to discuss the application of descent and alliances approaches to understand kinship patterns found in North and South India. The four aspects refer to kinship groups, kinship terminology, marriage rules and ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin.

12.5 Further Reading

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Jain, Shobhita 1996. *Bharat mein Parivar, Vivah aur Natedari*. Rawat Publications: Jaipur.

Karve, I. 1994. "The Kinship Map of India". In Patricia Uberoi (ed.) *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi.

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Approaches to the Study of Kinship Systems

In simple words you can say that kinship system refers to a set of persons, whom we recognise as relatives by virtue of blood or marriage relationship. I hope you will be able to identify in one category the family relationships and in the other category the marriage relationships. These are two basic social relationships we are all familiar with from close quarters.

In Sociology, we use a technical term, consanguinity, to denote all blood relationships and affinity to denote all relationships through marriage. It should not be difficult for you to give examples of the two types of kin relationships. Let us quickly complete a Reflection and Action exercise to find out if you can really do so.

Reflection and Action 12.1

Identify and sort out the following examples of kin relationships into the two categories we have just referred to.

Examples

Mother and son, father-in-law and daughter-in law, mother and daughter, father-in-law and son-in-law, father and son, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, father and daughter, mother-in-law and son-in-law, sister and brother, two sisters-in-law, two sisters, two brothers, two brothers-in-law.

Place each of the above examples in one of the two categories of Consanguinity and Affinity.

As we go further in our discussion of kin relationships, you will discover that such seemingly simple categories are not actually all that simple. But for the time being, as the initial step to enter the discourse on kinship systems, this exercise is both sufficient and interesting.

It would not be wrong to say at this point that it is the social recognition of these relationships that is more important than the actual biological ties. You may already know that networks built around kin relationships play a significant role in both rural and urban social life in India.

Let us now look at the main approaches to the study of kinship in India, that is the ways in which sociologists have explained the systems of kin relationships found in society in India.

Sociologists have described, compared and analysed the kinship-related findings from various regions of India. We may classify their approaches to the study of kinship under two headings (i) the Indological approach and (ii) the anthropological/ sociological approach. Let us discuss each of the two approaches.

i) Indological approach

You would agree with me if I say that the social institutions of Indian society have their roots in literary and learned traditions of the country. Many sociologists have used textual sources to explain the ideological and jural

bases of our institutions. You can cite the example of K.M. Kapadia (1947), who has used classical texts to describe Hindu kinship system. Similarly, you can give another example of P.H. Prabhu (1954), who bases his description of Hindu social organisation on Sanskrit texts. I would add the examples of Irawati Karve (1940, 43-44 and 1958) and G.S. Ghurye (1946, 1955). Both of them have extensively worked on the Indian kinship system. Both have explained kinship pattern in different regions of India on the basis of textual sources. They have taken a socio-historical perspective to discuss the various kinship systems. In this sense, the Indological approach to the study of kinship has provided a framework to understand the elements of continuity and transformation in the system.

ii) Anthropological/sociological approach: descent and alliance

Anthropological and sociological studies have looked at kinship systems from the point of view of descent and alliance. Some of you may ask: what is meant by the terms, ‘descent’ and ‘alliance’? For a short answer to the question see Box 12.1 and for a detailed answer see Unit in Block 3 of ESO 11 of IGNOU’s B A programme.

Box 12.1: Meaning of the Terms ‘Descent’ and ‘Alliance’

Descent refers to “membership of a group, and to this only” (see Rivers 1924: 85-88) You can use the term ‘descent’ with reference to groups of individuals with shared interests or property. According to Needham (1971: 10), there are six possible ways of transmitting group membership from parents to children. They are i) patrilineal (from father to offspring), ii) matrilineal (from mother to offspring), iii) duolineal or bilineal (transmission of one set of attributes from father to offspring and transmission of another set of attributes from mother to offspring), iv) cognatic (transmission of attributes equally from father and mother to offspring), v) parallel (a rare form of transmission in which descent lines are sex-specific, that is men transmit to male offspring and women transmit to female offspring), vi) cross or alternating (another rare form of transmission, in which men transmit to female offspring and women transmit to male offspring).

In simple words, alliance refers to positive and negative rules governing the marriage bond. Kinship comprises both descent relationships and relationships arising out of marriage alliance. Levi-Strauss (1949) gave importance to the marriage bond and analysed elementary structures, which prescribe (positive rules) and proscribe (negative rules) marriage with certain category of relatives. Looking at marriage alliance in this manner has provided a rich set of anthropological/ sociological findings, which have helped us to understand kinship systems in a comprehensive manner.

Let us now discuss the descent and alliance approaches to the study of kinship

Descent approach

Kin relationships give concrete shape to establishing clear-cut corporate social units. You and I, in fact each one of us, belongs to a cooperating and closely bound group of people. As a member of the group, you can depend upon the help and support of such people. You would observe that such cooperating local groups are always larger than elementary families of spouses and their children. When these groups are recognised or defined on the basis of shared descent, we call them descent groups.

In India, we generally find the patrilineal and matrilineal descent systems and of the two, patrilineal system is more common. The description and analysis of kin relationships in a descent group have given us a fairly comprehensive sociological understanding of certain types of kinship systems in India (see Box 12.2).

Box 12.2: Examples of the Studies of Descent Groups

Gough (1956) studied Brahmin kinship in a Tamil village and discussed the unity of the lineage with corporate rights on land. She focused on roles and inter-personal relationships in the wider kinship.

Madan (1965) analysed the role of kinship as an organising principle in the Kashmiri Brahmin society. He brought out the strong patrilineal ideology, a characteristic of kinship system of the Kashmiri Pandits.

The study of descent groups helped our understanding of patrilineal kinship system in North India. Sociologists/ anthropologists like, A.C. Mayer, T.N. Madan, Oscar Lewis in their studies of kinship organisation in North India, followed the descent approach. They described in detail various levels of kin groups and their activities.

In sociological studies, sociologists have used in the past such terms as 'line', 'lineal', 'lineage' etc. with or without the prefix 'patri' or 'matri' in the following four different ways.

- a) To denote corporate descent groups, i.e. lineage proper.
- b) To denote the chosen line of inheritance, succession etc. in a given society.
- c) In the study of relationship terminologies, we use the expression "two line prescription" to refer to terminological structures, which are consistent with "bilateral cross-cousin marriage".
- d) Regardless of which lines (matriline or patriline or both) we choose for the above three purposes, lineal relatives refer to one's ascendants or descendants. Lineal relatives are those who belong to the same ancestral stock in a direct line of descent. Opposed to lineal relatives are collaterals; they belong to the same ancestral stock but not in a direct line of descent.

The first three usages are context specific, that is, they refer to particular situations. Here, we emphasise social relations and groups and sociologists study them in terms of interaction, norms and values of a particular society. For example, following the lineage or descent approaches, scholars like Radcliffe-Brown (1924), have discussed the relation between mother's brother and sister's son in patrilineal societies. They use the idea of 'complementary filiation', i.e. the relationship an ego has with the relatives on the mother's side in a patrilineal society. In a matrilineal society it refers to the relationship an ego has with the relatives on the father's side. In a patrilineal society a person's maternal group is the affinal group of that person's father. This is the group, from which the person's father has taken a wife. For this reason some sociologists like to consider the question of affinity in its own right, rather than as a complementary set of relationships. You may say that in the descent approach, the emphasis is on social organisation of descent groups. Consequently, there is very little focus on the 'affinity' aspect of relationships.

Let us now look at the approach, which focuses on relationships arising out of marriage alliance.

Alliance approach

Kin relationships entail also the patterns and rules of marriage. When you find a sociologist paying special attention to these aspects of kinship, you can say that he/she is following the alliance approach to understand the patterns of kinship. Many studies of kinship in India have focused on marriage as an alliance between two groups and on kinship terminology, as a reflection of the nature of alliance. Because of their concentration on relationships arising out of marriage, you can safely say that these studies follow the alliance approach.

The main exponent of this approach was Louis Dumont (1950, 1953, 1957 a and b, 1959, 1962 and 1966). He focused on the role played by marriage in the field of kinship in South India. Dumont focused on the opposition between consanguines and affines as reflected in the Dravidian kinship terminology, and made an important contribution to our understanding of kinship system in India in general and of South India in particular. Following the implications of Levi-Strauss's theory, Dumont (1971: 89-120) applied to South India a structural theory of kinship that brought out the repetition of intermarriage through the course of generations. This pattern highlighted the classification of kinspersons into two categories of parallel and cross relatives.

The alliance approach to the study of kinship has helped sociologists to discuss and explain the distinction between bride-givers and bride-takers. In addition, it has also included the discussion on the notion of hypergamy (i.e. the bride-takers are always superior to bride-givers), practice of dowry in relation to hypergamy and ideas of exchange in marriage.

Sociologists and anthropologists followed the descent approach to explain the kinship system in North India. This they did in the context of the four aspects of kin relationships. For the sake of consistency in our delineation of both the approaches, we will continue to use the same four aspects for discussing also the alliance approach in the context of kinship system in South India. You will find the four aspects briefly discussed below.

- i) **Kinship groups:** Kin relationships provide both a method of passing on status and property from one generation to the next and effective social groups for purposes of cooperation and conflict. You need to identify the form of descent or of tracing one's relationships. In other words, you find out the social groups within which relatives cooperate and conflict. These social groups constitute kinship groups.
- ii) **Kinship terminology:** The list of terms used by the people to refer to their kin relationships expresses the nature of kinship system. This is why by describing kinship terminology you are able to throw light on the kinship system. Most features of the kinship system of any society are usually reflected in the way kinship terms are used in that society. Generally a person would apply the same term to those relatives who belong to the same category of kin relationships. In this case, these relatives would also occupy similar kinship roles.

A comparison and analysis of the various kinship terms helps us to understand the kinship structure, its make-up and the behaviour associated with each term. You can say that kinship terms provide the context and the idiom for

our social relationships. In this sense, kinship terms do not just tell us about biological and social relationships. They help us to look at the whole way of social life. Only by studying the language, values and behaviour of the particular people can we fully appreciate the significance of their kinship terms. Often the same kinship term is used to denote different meanings in different contexts. This is the reason why the study of kinship terms is closely associated with the study of language and culture.

In describing a kinship terminology, it is usual to denote the speaker by the name of ego. The word 'ego' means I in Latin and refers to the first person singular pronoun. The speaker or ego can be either the male or the female. Secondly kinship terms can be divided into two types. One type covers the terms of address. This means that certain kinship terms are used when people address each other. Then there are those terms, which are used for referring to a particular relationship. These are known as terms of reference. Sometimes, the two types may be expressed by one term only. Thirdly, you would also like to learn how to write long kinship terms in short. For example, if you wish to write mother's brother's daughter, you may do so by writing 'mbd'. Take another example, father's sister's daughter's son can be stated as 'fzds'. Here, 'z' stands for sister and 's' for son. In the same way you can write in short ffbd for father's father's brother's daughter. This method of writing kinship terms is useful when one is describing various sets of kinship terms. At this point you need to complete 'Reflection and Action' exercise in order to practise writing kinship terms in shorthand.

Reflection and Action 12.3

Write in short form the following kinship terms. Father's father, Father's mother, Father's brother, Father's brother's wife, Father's brother's son, Father's brother's daughter, Mother's brother, Mother's brother's wife, Mother's brother's son, Mother's brother's daughter, Mother's sister, Mother's sister's husband, Mother's sister's son, Mother's sister's daughter. Check your short forms with those of other students in your Study Centre.

- iii) **Marriage rules:** Just as kinship groups describe the form of kinship system found in a society, so also rules for marriage, categories of people who may/may not marry each other, relationships between bride-takers and bride-givers provide the context within which kin relationships operate. Talking about these issues gives us an understanding of the content of kin relationships. It is therefore necessary to speak of marriage rules for understanding any kinship system.
- iv) **Exchange of gifts:** Sociologists like to describe social relationships between various categories of relatives. As there are always two terms to any relationship, kinship behaviour is described in terms of pairs. For example, the parent-child relationship would describe kinship behaviour between two generations. This sort of description is possible only when you make a study of the kinship system of a particular social group. In the context of our discussion in Unit 12, we would focus on the chain of gift giving and taking among the relatives for understanding the behavioural aspects of kinship system. This discussion gives us an idea of how kinship groups interact and how particular persons play their kinship roles.

You will find that by describing the above four dimensions of the kinship system in relation to North and South India, you will be able to obtain a

fairly general picture of the patterns of kinship in the two regions. Before proceeding to the next section, it is important to mention one more feature of your study of kinship systems. You need to learn about kinship diagrams, which are graphic representations of fairly complicated kinship structures.

Kinship diagrams: The depiction of kinship diagrams makes it not only much easier to grasp the nature of different types of kinship groups, marriage rules and their implications but also presents the possibilities of visually comparing them with other kinship systems. Sociologists and anthropologists invariably use them for explaining various kinship structures. For following those in your books and constructing your own kinship diagrams you need to simply remember the following rules.

- The symbol \triangle refers to a male and the symbol \circ refers to a female. When these symbols are shown in black, i.e., \blacktriangle and \bullet , it means that the particular male or female is dead.
- The symbol [refers to sibling relationship. It expresses brother/brother, sister/sister or brother/sister relationships. The symbol], on the other hand, expresses the husband-wife or the marriage relationship.
- A horizontal line connecting the symbols [and], denotes filiation or the relationship between the parent/s and child/children.

Thus, with the use of above symbols, kin relationships are expressed to denote genealogical connections and to depict the structure of kinship groups. Let us take an example and see what the following diagram shows.

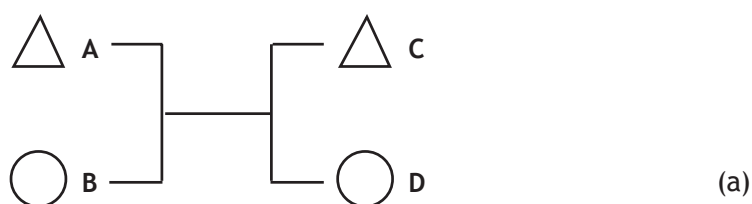


Fig. 12.8: Basic Kinship Diagram

This diagram shows that A is married to B, and C and D are the children of A and B. This simple diagram can be extended endlessly with the help of the same symbols. In this example you can further show that both C and D have their spouses and children. We can show that C is married to E, and G, H and I are the children of C and E. Similarly, D is married to F, and J, K and L are the children of D and F. This diagram will also show that GHI are the cross-cousins of JKL and that A and B are grandparents of G, H, I, J, K and L. Similarly, you can also locate mother's brother of J, K and L and father's sister of G, H and I. This diagram is drawn in the following manner:

Thus, with the use of above symbols, kin relationships are expressed to denote genealogical connections and to depict the structure of kinship groups. Let us take an example and see what the following diagram shows.

The diagram shows that A is married to B, and C and D are the children of A and B. This simple diagram can be extended endlessly with the help of the same symbols. In this example you can further show that both C and D have their spouses and children. We can show that C is married to E, and G, H and I are the children of C and E. Similarly, D is married to F, and J, K and L are the children of D and F. This diagram will also show that GHI are cross-cousins of JKL and that A and B are grandparents of G, H, I, J, K and L. Similarly, you

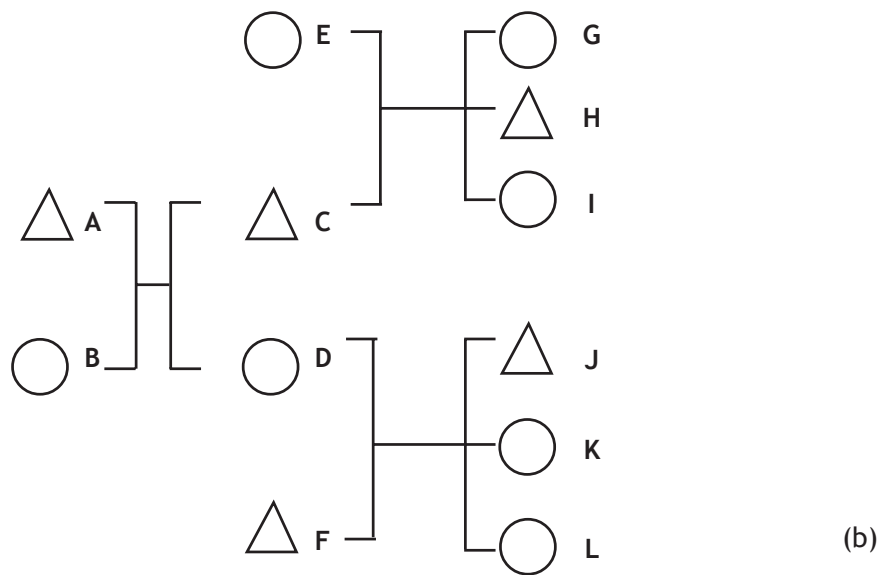


Fig. 12.2: Elaboration of Basic Kinship Diagram

can also locate mother's brother of J, K and L and father's sister of G, H and I. The elaborated diagram would look like the one given in Figure 12.2.

We shall be using some simple kinship diagrams to explain the implications of marriage rules in both North and South India. Having established our frame of reference, we can now begin to look at the application of the descent approach to the study of kinship system in North India.