

**Structure**

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**8.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After going through this unit, you should be able to

- define the kinship system
- describe the main approaches to the study of kinship system in India
- discuss major aspects of North Indian kinship system.

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**8.1 INTRODUCTION**

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So far you have learnt about the social institutions of family and marriage in India. As family takes its form with the help of kinship rules, norms and patterns, it is necessary that we learn about the different forms of kinship in India. This will then provide you with a holistic understanding of social relationships involved in family and marriage.

Since India is a land of immense diversity, its different regions reflect different systems of kinship. In the limited scope of two units, it is not possible to even outline all the various types of kinship systems found in India. As the country's two major geographical divisions, the north and the south, present two distinct forms and have been described in sociological literature as such, we introduce you to the North Indian and South Indian systems of kinship. You must remember that this does not mean that there are no further varieties of kinship systems in certain pockets of both North and South India. Indeed, India's north eastern

parts, as well as, other regions in its west and south provide many other types. To have a glimpse into these systems you may like to read the books and articles mentioned in the section on Further Reading and List of References. The studies and articles that have been used in our units to discuss kinship in North and South India essentially describe and analyse kinship systems found among the numerically dominant Hindu populations.

In this unit we first define the kinship system and then discuss main approaches to the study of kinship systems in India. Next, the unit focuses on the major aspects of patrilineal kinship system in North India.

## 8.2 DEFINITION OF KINSHIP SYSTEM

Unit 7 of the first electric course in Sociology gave a simple definition of the kinship system. It said that the kinship system refers to a set of persons recognised as relatives either by virtue of a blood relationship or by virtue of a marriage relationship. In sociology, all blood relationships are known by a technical term, **consanguinity**. Similarly, all relationships through marriage are given the term **affinity**. For example, the relationships between mother and son/daughter, sister and brother/sister, father and son/daughter are consanguinal, while relationships between father/mother-in-law and daughter-/son-in-law are affinal.

Mostly, it is the social recognition of these relationships that is more important than the actual biological ties. Networks built around kin relationships play a significant role in both rural and urban social life in India.

In order to describe in the span of two units (8 and 9) the patterns of kinship in North and South India, we first give you an idea of the main approaches to the study of kinship in India.

## 8.3 MAIN APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF KINSHIP SYSTEM IN INDIA

Sociological studies of kinship in India cover descriptions, comparisons and analytical problems based on the findings from various regions. Approaches to the study of kinship can be broadly classified under two headings (i) the **Indological approach** and (ii) the **Anthropological approach**. Here, we will discuss these approaches one by one.

### 8.3.1 Indological Approach

As the social institutions of Indian society are rooted in literary and learned traditions, many sociological studies have made use of textual sources for explaining the ideological and jural bases of our institutions. For example, **K.M. Kapadia** (1947) has used classical texts to describe Hindu kinship. *Hindu Social Organisation* by P.H. Prabhu (1954) is also based on Sanskrit texts. Similarly, **Irawati Karve** (1940, 43-44 and 1958) and **G.S. Ghurye** (1946, 1955) have extensively worked on Indian kinship system. Both have used textual sources to explain kinship pattern in different regions of India from a **socio-historical perspective**. We can, therefore, say that **Indological approach to the study of kinship has provided a framework to understand the elements of continuity and change in the system** (see Jain 1994).

### 8.3.2 Anthropological Approach: Descent and Alliance

Anthropologists have looked at kinship systems from the point of view of **descent** and **alliance**.

#### A) Descent Approach

Kinship in our society is used for establishing clear-cut corporate social units. Each one of us is a member of such a cooperating and closely bound group of people. One can depend upon the help and support given by such people. 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, anthropologists call them **descent groups**. Formally speaking there are **six possible avenues for the transmission of descent group membership, from parents to children**. These are

- i) **patrilineal** — where descent is traced in the male line from father to son,
- ii) **matrilineal** — where descent is traced in the female line from mother to daughter,
- iii) **double (duolineal or bilineal)** — where descent is traced in both the father's line as well as mother's line for different attributes such as **movable property in one line and immovable in another**,
- iv) **cognatic (bilateral)** — where attributes are transmitted equally through both parents. Here no unilineal groups can be formed but group structure can be cognatic, that is, the group of kinpersons on the father's and mother's side. Membership can be acquired through either the father or the mother,
- v) **parallel descent** — a very rare form of descent where descent lines are sex specific. Men transmit to their sons while women to their daughters, and finally
- vi) **cross or alternative type descent** — this is also very rare. Here men transmit to their daughters and women to their sons.

In India, we generally find the patrilineal and matrilineal descent systems. 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. For example, E.K. Gough (1956) has discussed the unity of the lineage with corporate rights on land. She has focused on roles and inter-personal relationships in the wider kinship. T.N. Madan (1965) has studied the **role of kinship as an organising principle in the Kashmiri Brahmin society**. He has brought out the strong patrilineal ideology that characterises kinship system of the **Kashmiri Pandits**. In section 8.5.1, we will see in detail how the study of descent groups has helped our understanding of patrilineal kinship system in North India. Sociologists like, A.C. Mayer, T.N. Madan, Oscar Lewis while studying kinship organisation in North India, have taken the descent approach. They have described in detail various levels of kin groups and their activities.

In sociological studies the terms 'line', 'lineal', 'lineage' etc. with or without the prefix 'patri' or 'matri' have in the past been used in at least four different ways.

- i) they have been used to denote corporate descent groups, i.e., lineage proper,

- ii) often employed to denote the chosen line of inheritance, succession etc. in a given society,
- iii) in the study of relationship terminologies the expression “two line prescription” has sometimes been used to refer to terminological structures which are consistent with “bilateral cross-cousin marriage”,
- iv) regardless of which lines (matriline or patriline or both) are chosen 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 who belong to the same ancestral stock but not in a direct line of descent.

All of these usages, except the fourth, are context specific. i.e., they refer to particular situations. Here, social relations and groups are emphasised and sociologists study them in terms of interaction, norms and values of a particular society. For example, some scholars, following the theory of lineages or descent groups, 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 ego has with the relatives on the mother's side in a patrilineal society. In a matrilineal society it refers to the relationship ego has with the relatives on his 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. We may say that in descent approach, the emphasis is laid on social organisation of descent groups. As a result, there is little focus on the 'affinity' aspect of relationships. Now, in the next sub-section we look at the approach, which focuses on relationships arising out of marriage alliance.

### B) Alliance Approach

Another concept that figured prominently in the study of kinship systems in India is that of alliance. Kinship includes the consideration of the patterns and rules of marriage. When a sociologist pays special attention to these aspects of kinship, we 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, we say that these studies follow the alliance approach. The main exponent of this approach is Louis Dumont (1950, 1953, 1957 a and b, 1959, 1962 and 1966). He has emphasised the role played by marriage in the field of kinship in South India. By showing the opposition between consanguines and affines as reflected in the Dravidian kinship terminology, Dumont has made an important contribution to our understanding of kinship system in India in general and of South India in particular. He has applied to South India a structural theory of kinship. It brings out the repetition of intermarriage through the course of generations. This pattern highlights the classification of kinsmen 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.

In unit 9 of this Block we will focus on most of these aspects in relation to South Indian kinship. Now we turn to various dimensions of kinship systems in both North and South India. A discussion of these dimensions in the following section will provide us with a framework for our discussion of kinship systems in both North and South India.

## 8.4 DIMENSIONS OF KINSHIP SYSTEM

In order to describe the features of kinship systems found in North and South India, we need to focus on certain aspects. Here, we are going to identify four aspects.

- i) **Kinship Groups:** Kin relationships provide both a method of passing on status and property from one generation to the next effective social groups for purposes of cooperation and conflict. So we need to identify the form of descent or of tracing one's relationships. In other words, we speak of the social groups within which relatives cooperate and conflict. That is why, we need to describe 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, we 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.

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 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 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 we wish to write mother's brother's daughter, we may do so by writing **mbd**. Take another example, father's sister's daughter's son can be described 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.

### Activity 1

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. In the two units on kinship system in North and South India, we are not dealing with any particular social group. We cannot therefore describe kinship behaviour. Instead we consider 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 kinship roles are played by particular kin persons. Here, in the units 8 and 9, we shall look at behavioural aspect of kinship that is expressed in ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin.

In this way, we feel that by describing the above four dimensions of the kinship system in relation to North and South India, we will be able to give you a fairly general picture of the patterns of kinship in the two regions.

Before ending this section on dimensions of kinship systems, let us also mention that the depiction of different types of kinship groups, marriage rules and their implications is made much easier by the help of kinship diagrams. Sociologists and anthropologists invariably use them for explaining various kinship structures. For following a kinship diagram you need to simply remember the following ways of drawing kinship diagrams.

### Kinship Diagrams

- i) The symbol  $\Delta$  refers to a male and the symbol  $\circ$  refers to a female. When these symbols are shown in black, i.e.,  $\blacktriangle$  or  $\bullet$ , it means that the particular male or female is dead.
- ii) 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.
- iii) Thirdly, 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.

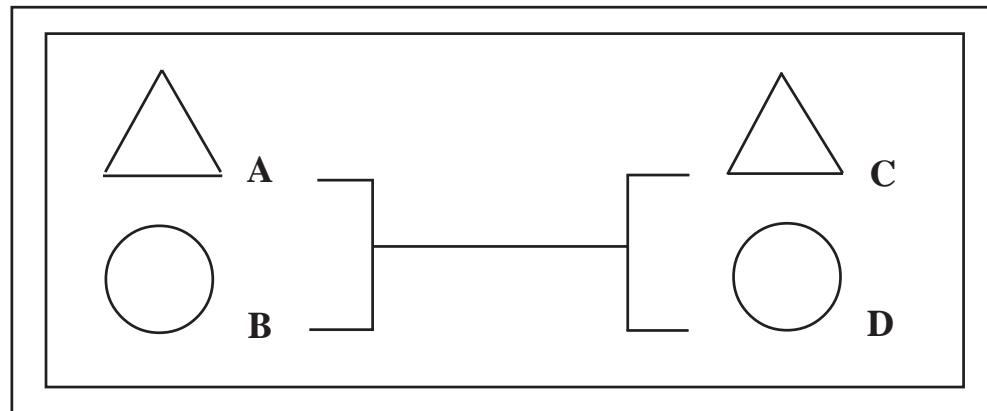


Fig. 8.1: Basic kinship diagram

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 and they are now dead. 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.

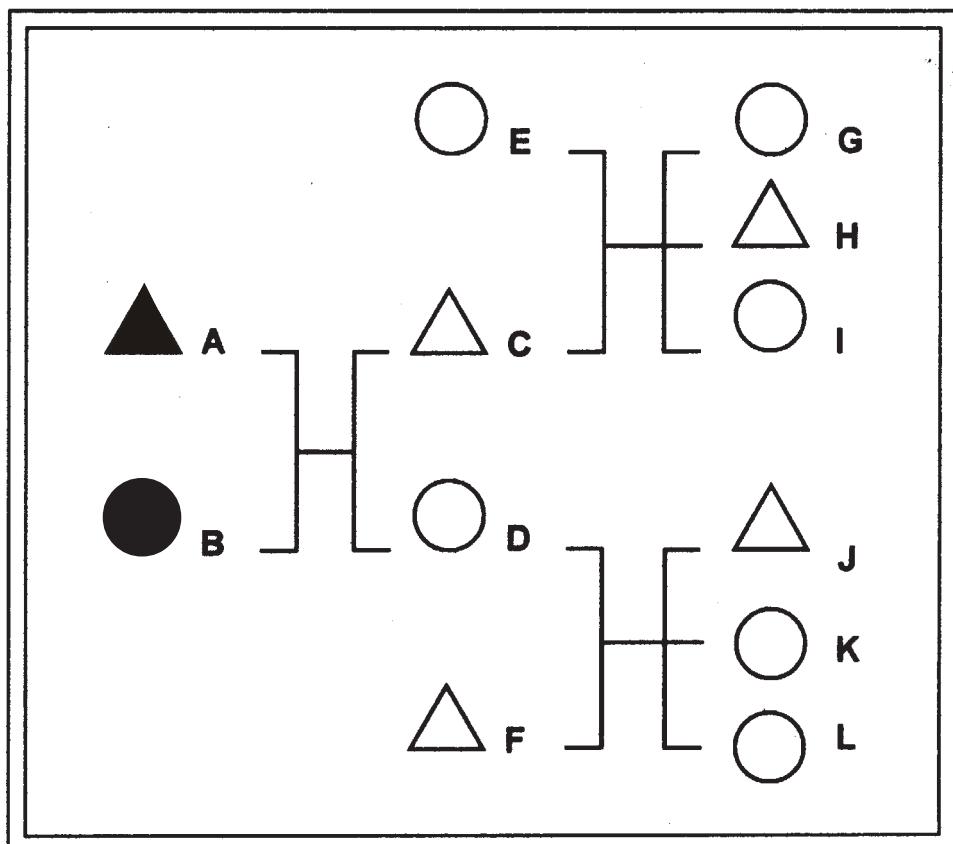


Fig 8.2: Elaboration of basic kinship diagram

In this unit we shall use some simple kinship diagrams to explain the implications of marriage rules in both North and South India.

### Check Your Progress 1

i) Define, in six lines, with examples, consanguine and affinal categories of kin.

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ii) List the two approaches to the study of kinship in India.

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## 8.5 KINSHIP SYSTEM IN NORTH INDIA

Let us first define what we mean by North India. For purposes of describing the kinship systems found in India, Irawati Karve (1953: 93) identified four cultural zones the Northern, the Central, the Southern and the Eastern zones. The northern zone, according to Karve, lies 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 these languages are Hindi, Bihari, Sindhi, Punjabi, Assamese and Bengali. In such a large region, we cannot say that there is one kinship system. The differences of language, history and culture bring about a high degree of variation within the region. We 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. We can describe the basic structure and process of kinship system in this area in terms of four features (mentioned in section 8.4) that is i) kinship groups, ii) kinship terminology iii) marriage rules, and iv) ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin. Now, we take up each of these features to discuss the kinship system in North India.

### 8.5.1 Kinship Groups

Sociological studies in various parts of North India show that social groups, such as patrilineage, caste, subcaste provide the basis for cooperation or conflict among the people. We now discuss these groups.

i) **Patrilineage:** We can say that broadly speaking kinship organisation in North India is based on unilineal descent groups. When the lineage membership group is traced on the basis of shared descent in one line, we call it a unilineal descent group. In North India, we have mostly patrilineal descent groups. This means that the descent is traced in the male line from father to son. Members of patrilineages cooperate as well as show antagonism in various situations. Let us see 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. This pattern of cooperation is amply described in the studies of kinship patterns in North India by Lewis (1958: 22-23), Minturn and Hitchcock (1963: 237), Beremen (1963: 173), Nicholas (1962: 174). In terms of theoretical approach to the study of kinship we 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 conflict also characterises 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**

From one generation to the next, transmission of status and property takes place according to certain rules. In North India, these generally pass in the male line. In other words, we have a predominantly patrilineal mode of inheritance in North India. For this reason, composition of patrilineage becomes very important. Thus, the lineage fellows cooperate for economic and jural reasons. They share jural rights and therefore they cooperate in order to keep the rights. However, 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. Thus, it becomes a main principle of their social organisation. Let us now discuss the second kinship group.

ii) **Clan:** A lineage is an exogamous unit, i.e., 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 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. The members of a lineage live in close proximity and therefore have greater occasions for cooperation or conflict. Common interests or action do not characterise the relationships among clan members because they are usually scattered over a larger territory and their relationships are often quite remote. These relationships do become significant only in the context of marriage. That is why we will discuss this point once again in section 8.5.3 on marriage rules.

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 castes are endogamous, i.e., one marries within one's caste, people belonging to one caste group are kinspersons 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, we can say that the internal structure of the subcaste would provide us the framework within which we can see the operation of 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. As Vidyarthi (1961: 53-57) has shown in the case of a very small subcaste, one may 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 this part of the total as one's 'effective jati' i.e., those people of the sub-caste with whom one actually has relationships of cooperation or conflict.

Among the subcaste kin, we should also include those related to a person through marriage. Here, generally a person's kin through mother are called uterine kin and those through 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 each other and, actually do so when an occasion arises for such an action. While a person belongs to only one lineage, one clan or one subcaste, he would always have a string of relatives who do not belong to his lineage/clan/subcaste.

Here we should mention how sociologists, following the descent approach to study kinship systems, try to explain the fact of special place of the relationship between a person and his/her mother's brother. For example, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1958) went to the extent of coining a new term to express this relationship. Following the principle of filiation (i.e., the relationship between a father and son in the case of a patrilineal society), a person's relationship with his mother's brother is to be understood by the idea of filiation on mother's side or the principle of 'complementary filiation'. Without going into further details about this theoretical issue, we would like to tell you that those following the alliance approach like to explain the same fact in terms of repetition of intermarriage through generations.

iv) **Fictive Kin:** We should also mention, in passing, the recognition of fictive kinship among 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.

Mahapatra (1969) points out that fictive kinship is a mechanism to provide even such kin who are not ordinarily found 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 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.

### Check Your Progress 2

i) Name in one line the three kinship groups in North India.

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ii) Discuss in four lines, the bases of cooperation and conflict among members of a patrilineage in North India.

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#### 8.5.2 Kinship Terminology

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. In other words, 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 relationship. They help us to look at the whole way of social life. Only after studying the language, values and behaviour of the particular people can we fully appreciate the significance of their kinship terms. Many times 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. Here, we discuss how this is the case in relation to the kinship terms used in the linguistic regions of the northern zone.

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, patrilateral/matrilateral 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 L. Dumont (1966: 96), the North Indian kinship terminology is descriptive in the sense that it describes elementary relationships starting from Ego. The elementary relationships of filiation upwards and downwards, siblingship (sister/brother) and marriage comprise the first set of terms. 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. 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. However, to emphasise the patrilineal descent, we find a clear-cut distinction made 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. This we will see in section 9.2.2 of unit 9. Now we see how kinship terms signify social behaviour.

## ii) Social Behaviour

Irawati Karve (1953) has given a list of kinship terms in North Indian languages. She makes use of kinship terminologies to describe and compare kinship systems in various parts of India. She studies the terms and also uses the findings for understanding the influences which have played a part in shaping them. 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 has 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.

## iii) Kinship Terms Signifying Social Behaviour

The very usage of kinship term 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, has 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.

As a contrast to the 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, like father-in-law.

### Activity 2

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.

### 8.5.3 Marriage Rules

Because every time a marriage is contracted, new kinship bonds come into being, we can clearly see the relevance of marriage rules for discussing the patterns of kinship organisation. In the context of North India, we find that people know whom not to marry. In sociological terms, the same thing can be expressed by saying that there are negative rules of marriage in North India. We can also say that marriage is allowed only outside a defined limit. Let us see what this limit or the rule of exogamy is in North India.

#### i) **Clan Exogamy**

Belonging to one's natal descent line is best expressed in matters of marriage. 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.

#### ii) **The Four Clan Rule**

In this connection, you may refer to the four-*gotra* or four-clan rule, already shown in Figure 7.1 of Unit 7. 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. 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 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. Now we look at the groups within which marriage is preferred/ prescribed, in the context of North India.

#### iii) **Marriages within the Subcaste**

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 own. 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 le jainge*' (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 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 patrilateral cross-cousin. This is called the rule of no reversal, as depicted in Figure 8.3.

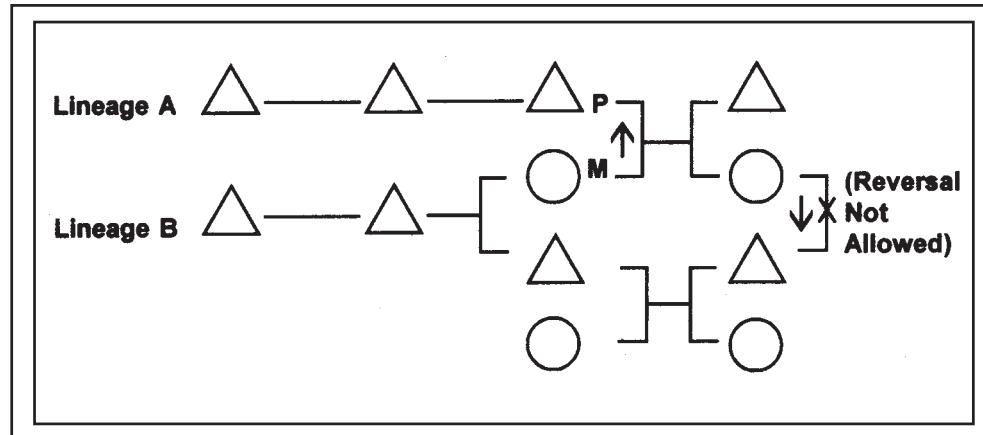


Fig. 8.3: The rule of no reversal

As shown in figure 8.3, 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. It is 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 used here as a smaller unit of a lineage. This rule of no repetition implies the negative rule of prohibition on the marriage with matrilateral cross-cousins. In other words, a man cannot marry his mother's brother's daughter. This can be depicted in a simple kinship diagram (see Fig. 8.4).

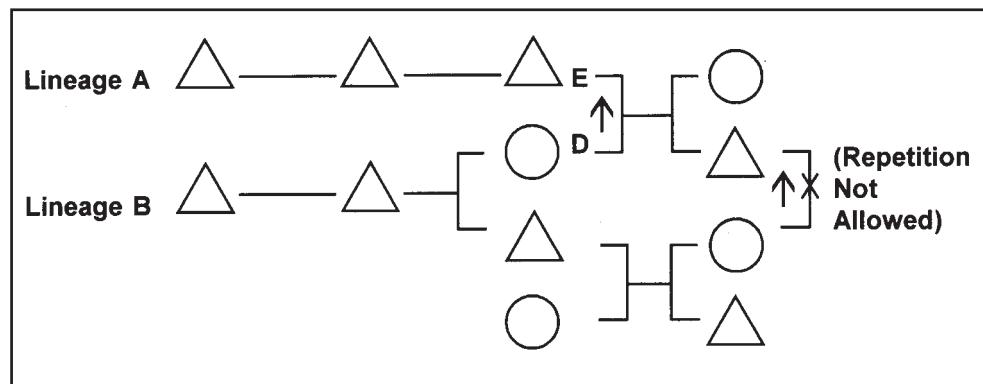
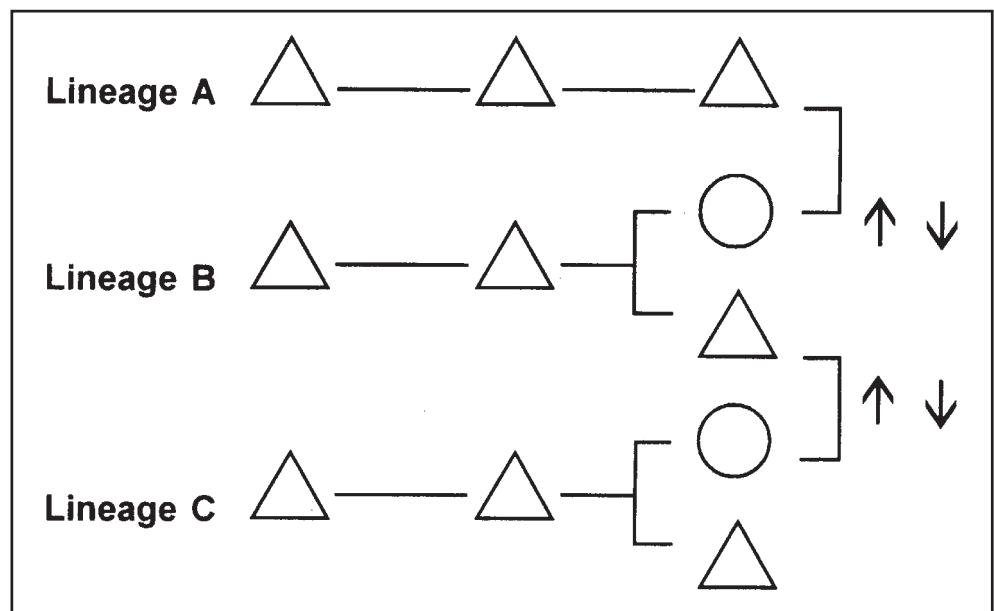


Fig. 8.4: The rule of no repetition

As depicted in Figure 8.4, lineage B has given women 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 matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is barred in North India. Thus, we find that both patrilateral and matrilateral 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 it wives 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. Figure 8.5 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.



**Fig. 8.5: Hypergamy in north India as an exchange**

In figure 8.5, 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-givers, the lineage C is lower to B and the lineage B is lower to A. The rule of hypergamy accords lower status to bride-givers. 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.

#### 8.5.4 Ceremonial Exchange of Gifts among Kin

#### Kinship-I

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 Jain 1996 b). Let us take two examples of this behaviour.

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 we can put the same thing in this way. We 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 wedding we can add one more, given by L. Dumont (1966: 93-5). He has shown a similar distinction being made between wife-givers and wife-takers (the terms used by L. 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, the turban is preferably tied by sister's husband (zh) or father's sister's husband (fzh). 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 wife's-taker and wife-giver) the affines of the wife-taking type are preferred over the affines of wife-giving type. In the hypergamous situation (as has already been explained in section 8.5.3 on marriage rules) wife-takers are higher than the wife-givers and therefore in ceremonial gift-giving they remain at the receiving end while the wife-givers remain at the giving end.

Flow of gifts from affinal kin (wife's relatives) and uterine kin (mother's relatives) have also been recorded in the studies made by F.G. Bailey (1957) in Orissa and Oscar Lewis (1958) in Rampur. 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.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

i) What is the significance of learning kinship terms? Use three lines for your answer.

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ii) Explain the four-clan rule of marriage in North India. Use seven lines for your answer.

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## **8.6 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit you have learnt about the definition of kinship system and then about the main approaches to the study of kinship system in India. The unit has focused on major aspects of kinship patterns found in North India. These aspects have been discussed in terms of kinship groups, kinship terminology, marriage rules and ceremonial exchange of gifts among kin.

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## **8.7 KEYWORDS**

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<b>Affinity</b>	Relationship by marriage is described as 'affinity'.
<b>Agnate</b>	Related through male descent or on the father's side
<b>Alliance</b>	In the context of kinship studies, the bond between two families following a marriage is described as relationship of 'alliance'.

<b>Clan</b>	A group united by a common ancestor is called a clan. In the context of Indian society, subcaste sharing a common <i>gotra</i> is called a clan.
<b>Consanguinity</b>	It refers to the state of being related by blood. All blood relatives of a person are his/her consanguine.
<b>Descent</b>	Derivation from an ancestor is called descent. There are various ways of derivation and hence different systems of descent are found in human societies.
<b>Endogamy</b>	When marriage is specifically required within a group, this specification is called the rule of endogamy.
<b>Exogamy</b>	When marriage is specifically required outside a group, this specification is called the rule of exogamy.
<b>Hypergamy</b>	When marriage is specifically required in an equal or higher social group or subcaste, this specification is called the rule of hypergamy.

## 8.8 FURTHER READING

Dube, Leela 1974. *Sociology of Kinship*. Popular Prakashan: Bombay

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

Karve, Irawati 1953. *Kinship Organisation in India*. Deccan College Post-Graduate Research Institute: Poona

Madan, T.N. 1965. *Family and Kinship A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir*. Asia Publishing House: New Delhi

Uberoi, Patricia (ed.) 1994. *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi

## 8.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

### Check Your Progress 1

- Persons related by blood are called consanguinal relatives. Persons related through marriage are known as affinal relatives. Relationship between father and son/daughter or between brother and brother/sister is an example of consanguine relationship while the relationship between a person and his wife's brother can be given as an example of affinal relationship.
- The two approaches to the study of kinship in India are a) Indological and b) anthropological.

### Check Your Progress 2

- The three kinship groups in North India are (a) patrilineage, (b) clan and (c) subcaste.

**Family, Marriage and Kinship**

- ii) In ritual and economic sphere, members of a patrilineage come together. Living side-by-side they exchange a number of services, material resources among each other. Lineage members often face conflicting interests when it comes to property matters. Brothers fight over land and other property.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Learning of kinship terms helps us in two ways. Firstly, it tells us about the makeup of the kinship system, secondly, it also throws light on behaviour-patterns associated with each relationship to which the term is applied.
- ii) The four-clan rule is used in North India to explain the limit of exogamy. It says that a person cannot 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*.