
UNIT 5 FAMILY

Structure

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

A study of this unit would enable you to:

- define the term family;
- explain the concept of family as one of the social institutions of society;
- describe the various forms of family;
- explain the nature and characteristics of family;
- distinguish the social functions of family; and
- describe the role of family in contemporary modern society.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units, in Block 1, we have taught you some basic concepts. We also gave a good idea about simple and complex societies. In this unit we introduce you to the definition of the family, family as a social institution and variations in the family form. We also explain the biological basis of the family. Important features such as social functions of the family, roles and the importance of the family in industrial society are also brought out in this unit.

The basic unit of the social structure in every society is the family. This is as true among simple societies as within the complex, modern societies. However, it varies in internal organisation, in its degree of autonomy and in the sanctions and taboos by which it is protected and perpetuated. Its universality, its persistence through time and under widely variant cultures, and its necessity for biological and social reasons should be an effective reply to the 'prophets of doom' who fear that the family is of less significance today than in earlier times. The specific pattern of family life in any given social structure is the product of the mores and varies with time and place and peoples. Therefore, the family has been seen as a universal social institution, as an inevitable part of human society. It is built around the needs of human beings to regularise sexual behaviour and protect and nurture the young ones.

It is the unit in which resources are pooled and distributed for consumption, around which residence is organised and domestic tasks are performed. The social organisation is associated with such emotive issues as love, marriage, home and child bearing. It is the family that gives us our principal identity our social status and even our very name, which is the lable of this identity in the larger society of which we are a part. This unit will give you an idea about the family as a social institution, the discussion will be kept at a sociological level.

5.2 DEFINITION OF FAMILY

The early and classical definitions emphasised that the family was a group based on marriage, common residence, emotional bonds, and stipulation of domestic services. The family has also been defined as group based on marital relations, rights and duties of parenthood, common habitation and reciprocal relations between parents and children. Some sociologists feel that the family is a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction.

In recent times the concept of family is viewed in terms of certain criteria applicable to all societies. For instance, it is felt that the family is a primary kinship unit, which carries out aspects of the sexual, reproductive, economic and educational functions. Keeping in view these definitions, we generally picture a family as a durable association of husband and wife with or without children, or a durable association of a man or woman along with children. Thus, members in the family live together, pool their resources and work together and produce offspring. A family is also viewed as an adult male and female living together with their offspring in a more or less permanent relationship such as marriage which is approved by their society. These definitions point out the basics or the minimum essentials of the family as a special kind of social grouping: (i) it involves a sexual relationship between adults of opposite sexes; (ii) it involves their cohabitation or living together, (iii) it involves at least the expectation of relative permanence of the relationship between them; and (iv) most important of all, the relationship is culturally defined and societally sanctioned-it is a marriage. Marriage and the family are not just something people become involved in on their own. Some of the ways in which they must relate to each other are decided for them by their society. It is a well known and recognised fact that marriage is the basis for the family. Since reproduction and control over it has been the concern of all societies, marriage as a legal institution becomes a crucial factor. Marriage is recognised as a special kind of relationship since it is the one in which families are created and perpetuated, and the family is the ultimate basis of human society.

5.2.1 Family as an Institution

In the previous block of this course, ESO-11 you learnt about social institution and how family is one of the pivotal and most significant institution of all societies.

There are various forms of family found all over the world; but most sociologists and anthropologists agree that universally the most common features of a family is that it is composed of individuals related to each other by blood, marriage, or adoption.

Family, like any other institution of society forms around complex, socially significant problems, solving the problems of social existence is critical to collective living in all societies. George Murdock (1949; 4-11) lists four important functions served by the nuclear family, these functions serve to resolve four major problems of society. According to him the nuclear family along with other social institutions, serves to:

- i) regulate sexual relations;
- ii) account for economic survival ;
- iii) controls reproduction; and
- iv) socialises children

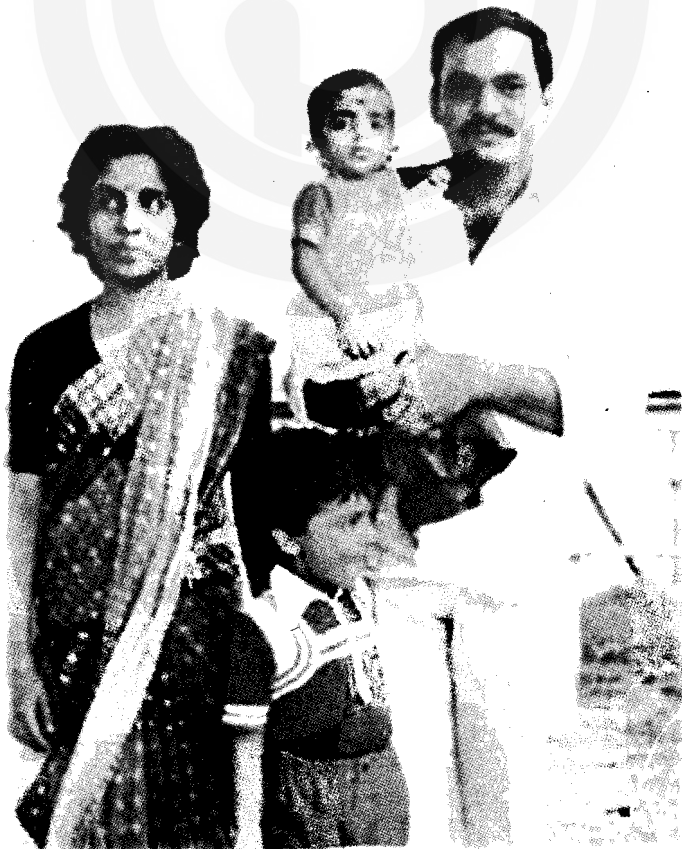
Out of all these functions, some thinkers believe that socialisation of children is one of the most central tasks of the family. Thus, one can see that family, as an institution, helps solve the problem of regulating sexual behaviour, surviving economically, reproducing new members of society and socialising them to become effective members of that society and culture.

5.2.2 Variations in Family Forms

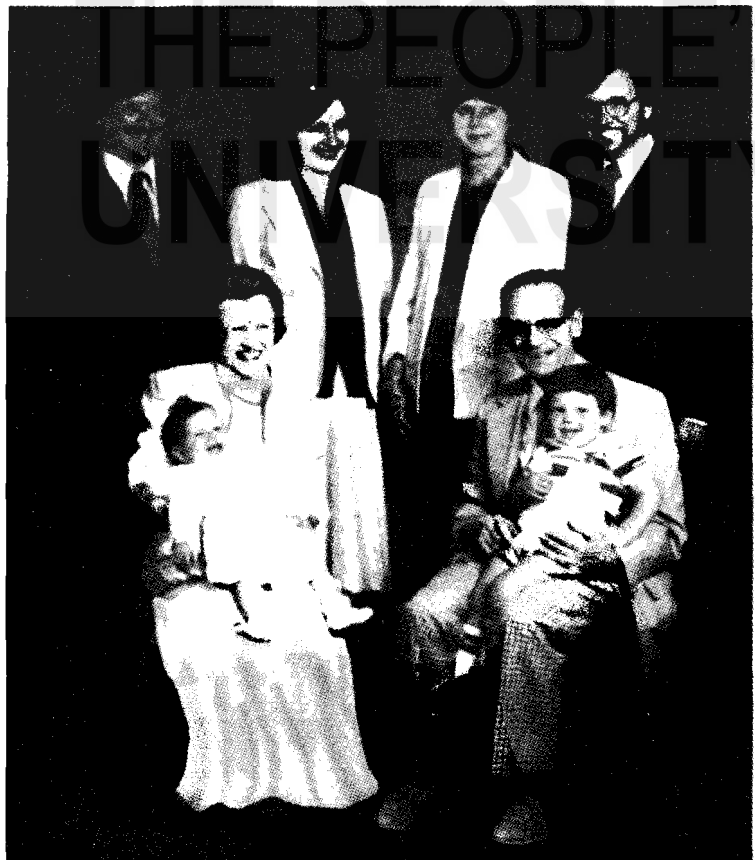
The bewildering variety of family forms, noticed in societies throughout the world in the course of human history, is a cultural phenomenon of considerable interest. For instance, with regard to **residence** some societies are **matrilocal** in their marriage and family customs, while others are **patrilocal**. In the former case, the young married couple takes up residence at the home of the bride's parents, whereas, in the latter type the couple takes up residence at the home of the bridegroom's parents. Residence in most parts of India is patrilocal in that it gives to the husband and not the wife the right to choose the place of residence after marriage.

The issue of **descent** as to who will be related to whom and how, is not as simple as it might first appear. Those who are socially defined by a given society as "related", are called **kin**. Therefore from the point of view of lineage, there are three different systems for tracing descent. In a **matrilineal society** descent is traced through the female line, and in a **patrilineal society** through the male line. It is also common to trace descent bilaterally in some societies.

From the point of view of **authority**, the pattern of dominance and subordination and decision-making in the family, two different patterns are visible in different societies. These are **patriarchy**-male dominant; **matriarchy**-female dominant. Most of the societies have the patriarchal pattern. However, in modern societies of today, social and cultural change is tending to establish more equalitarian pattern of decision-making in which authority is shared between the conjugal pair.



i) Nuclear Family



ii) Extended Family

Yet another distinction is made between the **conjugal family** or family by marriage on the one hand and **consanguine family** or family by blood on the other, based on the membership type of the family. While the conjugal family consists of parents and their children, the consanguine family is made up of either parent and the units' blood relatives, such as, mother, her children, her parents or father, his children, his parents etc.

Finally, we can also classify families into nuclear and extended types based on the way they are organised. The nuclear family consists of a married couple and their children. The extended family is commonly defined as the nuclear family plus all kin belonging to either side, living together. It may be pointed out here that a consanguineous family implies 'ties of blood'. Ties of blood means the relationship between parents and their children, between siblings; even cousins on both paternal and maternal sides. It implies no particular form.

5.2.3 Universal Nature of Family

As stated earlier, the family is the most permanent and pervasive of all social institutions. There is no human society without any family system. All societies both large and small, primitive and civilised, ancient and modern, have institutionalised the process of procreation of the species and the rearing of the young. It is a permanent and universal institution and one of the constants of human life.

However we need to point out here that the same type of family is not found everywhere. There are several types of family. For example in the West the nuclear family is found. This comprises the husband and wife together with their children. In Indian villages and in small towns the extended or joint family is found. In India, too, largely nuclear families are found but often, amongst the better off families in villages, especially where agricultural land is there or amongst the Communities involved in business and trade, one often finds the large joint or extended family. This form of family has people living in it of two, three or sometimes four generations under the same roof.

5.2.4 Biological Basis of the Family

The institution of the family is to be explained in terms of biological factor-the existence of two sexes and the sexual character of reproduction in the human species. It appears as a natural answer to the human sexual drive, a phenomenon solidly based in the biology of the human organism. Family provides legitimacy to all these biological activities with the support of marriage.

The family is characterised by its limited size. Because of this characteristic feature, family is identified as a primary group. It may include parents and their unmarried children or parents and their married as well as unmarried children. The bonds that tie together these limited number of members with limited common interests are the outcome of emotional factors such as love, mutual affection and solicitude. This emotional basis of the family makes it an ideally suitable primary social group in every society.

Activity 1

Examine the type of family in which you live, in terms of residence, emotional attachment, household, size etc. and write a short essay on "My Family and its Social Structure". Compare your answer with those of other learners at your study centre.

5.2.5 Common Residence and Nomenclature

The family is one of the most durable of all social institutions. Each family has a residence, an address and a name. We recognise any family with the help of the family name, location and address. A family can mean two quite different things depending upon the vantage from which we view it. For instance, the family in which one is a

child is the **family of orientation** and the family in which one is a parent is the **family of procreation**. Each family thus has common habitation for its living. Without a dwelling place, the task of child bearing and rearing cannot be adequately met. However, family as a concept has a wider meaning than mere household since a family can be spread out geographically sometimes but yet emotionally, socially and legally be known as a family. For example, a married couple may be living in two different cities or their children may be working somewhere else, even living in a different country/city; but they think of themselves as one family.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use space below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) Give a definition of the family. Use around three lines.

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2) What is the biological basis of the family? Discuss in about three lines.

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5.3 SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE FAMILY

The reasons for the endurance and universality of the family are largely grounded in the functions that it performs for individuals and for society. The major functions the family accomplishes are discussed below:

i) Member replacement and physical maintenance

In order to survive, every society must replace members who die and keep the survivors alive. The regulations of reproduction is centred in the family as are cooking and eating and care of the sick. Once children are born, they will be nurtured and protected within the family. It is the family that feeds, clothes and shelters them.

ii) Regulation of sexual behaviour

The family regulates sexual behaviour. Each and every member's sexual behaviour is influenced to some extent by what is learned in the family setting. The sexual attitudes and patterns of behaviour we learn in the family reflect societal norms and regulate our sexual behaviour. The sociological notion of sexual regulation should not be confused with repression. The norms, on the other hand, specify under what conditions and with what partners sexual needs may be satisfied.

iii) Socialisation of children

The family carries out the serious responsibility of socialising each child. Children are taught largely by their families to conform to socially approved patterns of behaviour. If the family serves society as an instrument for the transmission of culture, it serves the individual as an instrument of socialisation. A family prepares its children for participation in the larger world and acquaints them with the larger culture.

iv) Status transmission

Individual's social identity is initially fixed by family membership by being born to parents of a given status and characteristics. Children take on the socio-economic class standing of their parents and the culture of the class into which they are born, including its values, behaviour patterns and definitions of reality. In addition to internalising family attitudes and beliefs, children are treated and defined by others as extensions of the social identity of their parents. In short, family acts as a vehicle of culture transmission from generation to generation.

v) Economic activity

Until recent times, the family was an important unit of both production and consumption. The family produced most of the goods it consumed and consumed most of the goods it produced. But today, modern families mainly earn incomes. Thus, their principal function is that of the consumption of goods and services which they purchase. Because of the production of income the provision of economic support for family members is a major function of the modern family.

vi) Social emotional support

The family as a primary group is an important source of affection, love and social interaction. Caring for family members does not end with infancy and childhood. It is seemingly the nature of human beings to establish social interdependencies, not only to meet physical needs, but also to gratify emotional and psychological needs for response and affection as well as.

vii) Inter-institutional linkage

Each baby is a potential participant in the group life of the society. Family membership in a religious, political, economic, recreational and other kinds of organisations typically gives individuals an opportunity to participate in activities that might otherwise be closed to them. The family, then, not only prepares the individual to fill social roles and occupy a status in the community, but also provides the opportunities for such activity. Some institutions depend also on the way the family functions in this regard to insure their own continuity and survival.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note:** i) Use space below for your answers.
 ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.
- 1) Briefly discuss, in three lines, one important function of the family.

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5.4 ROLE OF FAMILY IN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

Many sociologists feel that the family has lost a number of its functions in modern industrial society. Institutions such as business, political parties, schools, welfare and recreational organisations, creche and play schools, now specialise in functions earlier performed only by the family. This reduces the dependency of the individual on his or her family and kin. The high rate of geographical mobility in industrial society decreases the frequency and intimacy of contact among members of the kin-family network. The

relatively high level of social mobility and the importance of ‘achieved’ status in modern society have weakened the importance of family and its extended form since it has less to offer to its members.

5.4.1 Importance of Family

However, this does not mean that the family is declining in importance. It has in fact become more specialised and its role is still vital. By structuring the personalities of the young and stabilising the personalities of adults, the family provides its members with the psychological training and support necessary to meet the requirements of the social system. In fact, the loss of certain functions of the family has made its remaining functions more important. The family’s responsibility for socialising the young remains important as ever. Even though the family has largely lost its functions as a unit of production, it still maintains a vital economic function as a unit of consumption. Parents of today are expected to do their best to guide, encourage, and support their children in their educational and occupational choices and careers. Compared to the past, parents are more preoccupied with their children’s health and emotional well being. State health and welfare provisions have provided additional support for the family and made its members more aware of the importance of health and hygiene in the home. In a nutshell, the family has adapted and is adapting to a developing industrial society. It remains as a vital and basic institution in society.

Across the span of history, the form and organisation of the family have varied, but in every social structure it has been a primary group and the basic unit of social organisation. Through the family the individual is a person with status, and children are reared and guided, and the cultural heritage is transmitted to succeeding generations. Families may be organised in an amazing variety of ways. Although the family is rooted in the biological nature of human beings, in human experience it is always a social institution which is governed by cultural norms.

With the growth of industry and the rise of cities, family life and family patterns have changed. The economic functions are largely transferred to outside agencies. Increasing emphasis is, however, placed on psychological values such as affection, companionship and emotional security.

The present is a period of transition. The family withstood the sweeping changes in the cultural pattern and found ways to adjust to each new situation. It will continue to survive, whatever further changes the future may bring.

Activity 2

Take 3 generations of your family, either you, your parents and their parents or you, your children and your parents (whichever is relevant to you). Identify two important changes in the emotional bond between different generations in your family and make a note of it. Compare your answer with other students at your study centre. Discuss this topic with your Academic Counsellor, as well.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use space below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) What is the role of the family in industrial society? Use around five lines for your answer.

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2) Why is the family still important in industrial society? Use around five lines for your answer.

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5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied various aspects of the institution of family. We began with definitions of the family and then studied variations in family forms. This included describing the biological basis of the family. The universal nature of the family and common residence and nomenclature therein were also described.

We then turned to a description of the social functions of the family. Following this the role of family in industrial society is explained. This part also emphasised the importance of the family and aspects of the industrial family.

5.6 KEY WORDS

- Conjugal family** : Family in which the members consist of spouses (married couple) and their children.
- Consanguine family** : Family in which the members are related by descent rather than by marriage.
- Extended family** : Family consisting of one or more married pairs, their children and other near relatives.
- Family of orientation** : The family into which one is born.
- Family of procreation** : The family of which the person concerned is a parent.
- Kin** : Those who are related through descent or marriage.
- Matriarchy** : Family dominated by the mother as head of the household.
- Matrilocal** : The practice whereby a married couple settles in the home of the wife's family.
- Mores** : Ideas of right and wrong which require certain action and forbid others.
- Nuclear family** : Family consisting of parents and their children only.
- Patriarchy** : Family dominated by the father as head of the household.
- Patrilocal** : The practice whereby a married couple, settles in the home of the husband's family.

5.7 FURTHER READINGS

- 1) Kapadia, K.M. 1966. *Marriage and Family in India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay.
- 2) Sutherland, R.L., Woodward, J.L., and Maxwell, M.A., (editors), 1961. *Introductory Sociology*, Oxford and IBH Publishing Company, Delhi.
- 3) Murdock, G.P., 1949. *Social Structure*, Macmillan, New York.

5.8 MODEL ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The family can be defined as group based on
 - a) Marital relations
 - b) Parenthood
 - c) Common residence
- 2) The biological basis of family is explained due to the existence of two sexes and reproduction. Further, it is the natural answer to human sexual urges.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) One important function of the family is to transmit the parents' status to the children. The children's social standing is related to the family.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The role of the family in industrial society has weakened quite a bit. Institutions like schools, business houses, political parties, recreational organisations, etc., reduce the role of the family. So, also does the high level of mobility.
- 2) The importance of the family in industrial society cannot be under-estimated. It still provides socialising functions, psychological training and so on. The family still performs economic functions (support), which allows children to get on in life.

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UNIT 6 MARRIAGE

Structure

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- 6.2 The Institution of Marriage
- 6.3 Forms of Marriage
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 - 6.3.2 Polygamy
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- 6.4 Mate Selection
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- 6.5 Changes in Marriage
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- 6.6 Let Us Sum Up
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6.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- explain the institution of marriage;
- describe the various forms of marriage;
- explain what is implied by mate-selection;
- discuss changes that have taken place in the institution of marriage; and
- explain marriage goals and stability in marriage.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will explain the institution of marriage. We will also explain various aspects connected with it. This will include discussion on forms of marriage. Such forms include monogamy, polygamy and rules such as those of endogamy and exogamy. We have also described mate-selection as an important aspect of marriage. Some of the related areas covered are love marriages, preferential marriages, and mate selection practices among tribals. The last part deals with changes in marriage, its forms, mate selection practices, age at marriage, and so on. We thus provide a full picture of the institution of marriage.

6.2 THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE

Marriage is an important and universal social institution of society. As a social institution, it provides a recognised form for entering into a relatively enduring heterosexual relationship for the bearing and rearing of children. It is thus primarily a way of regulating human reproduction. This reproduction, however, also has a sociological dimension. The right of sexual relationship, that universally accompanies marriage, provides legitimisation to the children born in wedlock; this legitimacy is of great importance in the matters of inheritance and succession. Besides, through marriage there comes into existence the family, a relatively stable social group, that is responsible for the care and training of children. In all these respects, then, marriage has historically provided the institutional mechanisms necessary for replacement of social members and thereby has been meeting the important prerequisites of human survival and society's continuance. However, these societal prerequisites do not encompass all the values and goals of marriage.

In some societies, particularly in the industrialised western societies, the chief aim of marriage is not only procreation but companionship, emotional, and psychological support are equally emphasised. The idea of companionship in marriage as a main feature, however, is a recent development. For the major part of human history, all societies have emphasised marriage to be a social obligation. It is invested with several familial, social and economic responsibilities.

Historically marriage has been found to exist in a wide variety of forms in different societies. Also it has been found to perform differing functions. Indeed, even the manner in which marriage partners are to be obtained reveals an astonishing variety of modes and customs. There is an almost endless variety in nearly everything concerning marriage. This has led to several definitions of what marriage is.

6.3 FORMS OF MARRIAGE

As has just been pointed out, above, and in Unit 5, marriage has a large variety of forms. These forms can be identified on the basis of the number of partners and rules governing who can marry whom.

In terms of the number of partners that can legitimately enter into matrimony, we have two forms of marriage, namely, monogamy and polygamy.

6.3.1 Monogamy

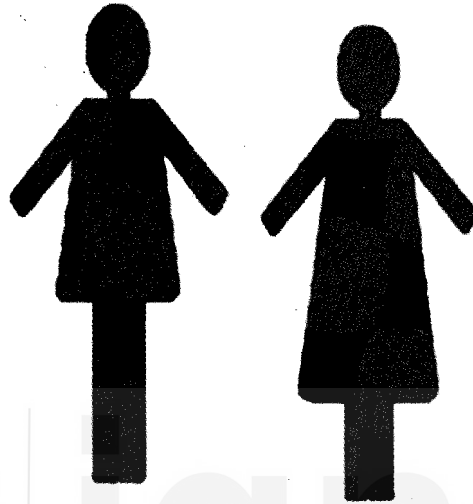
Monogamy restricts the individual to one spouse at a time. Under this system, at any given time a man can have only one wife and a woman can have only one husband. Monogamy is prevalent in all societies and is almost the universal form in all modern industrial societies. Even where polygamy (see Key Words) is permitted, in actual practice, monogamy is more widely prevalent. Due to constraints of financial resources and almost an even balance between the ratio of men and women in the population, a vast majority of individuals living in polygamous societies cannot have more than one spouse at a time.

In many societies, individuals are permitted to marry again often on the death of the first spouse or after divorce; but they cannot have more than one spouse at one and the same time. Such a monogamous marriage is termed as serial monogamy. Most western societies practise serial monogamy.

A society may also practise straight monogamy, in which remarriage is not allowed. Most upper caste Hindu females were obliged to follow the norm of straight monogamy prior to the enactment of Widow Remarriage Act of 1856, as until then widows were not allowed to marry again. These restrictions had not, however, pertained to men.

They were allowed to remarry after their spouse's death. However, in some lower castes, widow remarriage was permitted. In such a remarriage usually the deceased husband's brother was considered a preferred mate. This practice helped keep property within the family. It is also called levirate marriage.

Monogamy



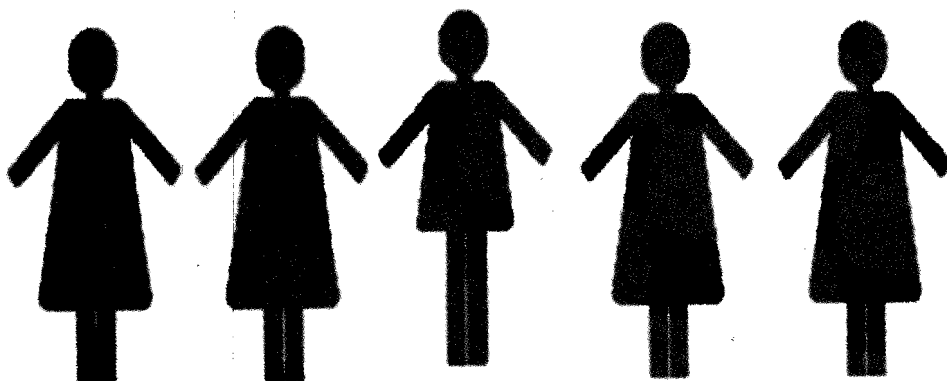
6.3.2 Polygamy

Polygamy denotes marriage to more than one mate at one time and takes the form of either: **Polygyny** (one husband with two or more wives) or **Polyandry** (one wife with two or more husbands).

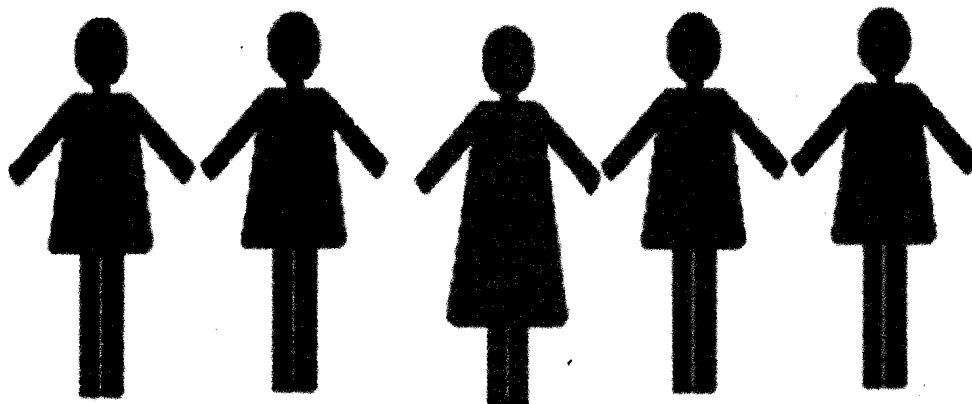
While monogamy is permitted in all societies, polygamy, in the form of **polygyny**, is the preferred form in several societies. **Murdock's** research, based on an analysis of 283 societies, revealed that 193 of these were characterised by **polygyny**, 43 were **monogamous** and only 2 practiced **polyandry**.

Preferential rules for the choice of wives/husbands are followed in some polygamous societies. In certain societies males marry the wife's sisters, and females their husband's brothers. Such marriages are termed as **sororal polygyny** and **fraternal polyandry**, respectively.

i) Polygyny



Male
+
Female



Polyandry

Among polyandrous societies, “fraternal” polyandry is by far the most common. In these societies, a group of brothers, real or classificatory, are collectively the husbands of a woman. This kind of polyandry has been found by the researchers in various parts of the world. Tibet has been described as the largest and most flourishing polyandrous community by Prince Peter. Polyandry is reported to be widely prevalent among some tribes in South India, Todas are considered a classic example of polyandrous people. In North India some groups of Jats are reported to be polyandrous.

Usually where economic conditions are harsh, polyandry may be one response of society, since in such situations a single male cannot adequately support a wife and children. Also, extreme poverty conditions pressurise a group to limit its population.

Activity 1

Which type of marriage has been frequently practiced by your family members and friends and why? Write a short note on “Type of Marriage in My Community” and discuss your note with other learners at your study centre.

6.3.3 Rules of Endogamy and Exogamy

All societies have prescriptions and proscriptions regarding who may or may not marry whom. In some societies these restrictions are subtle, while in some others, individuals who can or cannot be married, are more explicitly and specifically defined. Forms of marriage based on rules governing eligibility/ineligibility of mates is classified as endogamy and exogamy.

Endogamy requires an individual to marry within a culturally defined group of which he or she is already a member, as for example, caste. Exogamy, on the other hand, the reverse of endogamy, requires the individual to marry outside of his/her own group. Endogamy and exogamy are in reference to certain kinship units, such as, clan, caste and racial, ethnic or religious groupings. In India, even village exogamy is practised in certain parts of north India.

- i) Religious endogamy is one of the most pervasive form of endogamy. Most religious groups do not permit or like their members to marry individuals of other faiths. In addition, various groups in the social hierarchy such as caste and class also tend to be endogamous. Endogamy is a very important characteristic of the Indian caste system. Among Hindus, there are over three hundred castes/sub-castes and each one of them is endogamous. Despite modernising trends in India, which

have diluted caste restrictions in many respects, inter-caste marriages are still few and mostly limited to educated urban individuals. Although the norms of caste endogamy were widely prevalent, Hindu scriptures by allowing **anuloma** and **pratiloma** marriages, institutionalised, to a limited extent, inter-caste marital alliances. The **anuloma** marriage permits an alliance between a lower class woman and higher caste man, while the **pratiloma** marriage is an alliance between higher caste woman and a lower caste man. The former is referred to by the sociologists as hypergamy and the latter as hypogamy.

- ii) Rules of exogamy among Hindus are very specific. Hindus are traditionally prohibited from marrying in their own gotra, pravara and sapinda (gotra, pravara and sapinda refer to a group of individuals assumed to have descended from a paternal or maternal ancestor and are variously termed as clan, sib or lineage). The Hindu Marriage Act (1955) forbids marriage between sapinda, and specifies that marriage between two persons related within five generations on the father's side and three on the mother's side is void, unless permitted by local custom.

The exogamic rule, prohibiting marriage between siblings (brother-sister) and parent-child is followed in virtually all societies. Sexual relations between the members of an elementary nuclear family (other than parents) are termed as incest.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use space below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) Distinguish between monogamy and polygamy. Use about three lines.

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- 2) Write a brief note on endogamy and exogamy. Use about four lines.

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6.4 MATE SELECTION

The process whereby people choose marriage partners is called mate selection. While in some societies, individuals are relatively free to choose their mate from the 'field of eligibles', in some other societies those getting married have almost no say regarding whom they wish to marry. Even in the former situation individuals are not entirely free to choose their mates. Culture and social pressures, in subtle or explicit ways, do influence choice.

In all societies there is some notion of a 'good match'. Further, within endogamous limits also, certain relationships are preferred. Thus, mate selection is usually influenced by considerations of 'good match' and preferential mating.

In India, considerations of caste, religious and family background have traditionally been of great importance in selection of mates. In addition, looks of the girl and her competence as housewife, are also considered to be important. In urban middle class families, the earning capacity of the girl is also given considerable weightage, these days, in the selection of a bride.

6.4.1 Preferential Marriage

While some societies prohibit marriage between certain categories of relations (kins), other societies permit or even require certain kind of relatives to get married to. Thus marriage with particular cross cousins (father's, sister's or mother's brother's offsprings) are approved or permitted in many societies. Among Arabs and Muslims in India, marriage between parallel cousins (child of father's brother or mother's sister) is common. Possible reasons for permitting or preferring cousin marriages are: (a) family wealth is not dispersed as it remains within related family groups; and (b) relationships do not fade away as they are constantly renewed among offsprings of related families.

i) Marriage arrangements

In some societies, the decisions regarding mate selection are made by parents/ relatives; in some other societies individuals are relatively free to choose their own mates. Marriage arrangements thus tend to follow two patterns, namely, parent arranged (arranged marriage) and self-choice (love marriage)

ii) Arranged marriage

Traditional societies like India, where extended family network has been crucial, arranging marriage has been the concern of parents and elders. In additions, gains in terms of family prestige, economic prosperity and power (especially in affluent families) have also been sought through 'proper' marriage alliances. Consequently, marriage has been considered to be a serious matter which could not be left to the 'fancies' of the immature. As such, in traditional societies 'arranged' marriages have been the norm. Such marriages have also been unavoidable because in these societies there used to exist rigid sex-segregation, due to which marriageable young girls and boys could not come together and know one another. Even today, heterosexual intermingling is not widely prevalent, and young people especially girls, themselves, seem to prefer arranged marriages, which saves them from many psychological tensions which modern youth undergo in many of the western societies.

However it should be remembered that arranged marriages are rarely forced marriages; the needs and preferences of the young people getting married are not entirely ignored.

6.4.2 Love Marriage

In the western urban-industrial method of mate selection, individuals go through the process of dating and courtship, they make selections, based on the consideration of feelings for one another. This is termed as 'love marriage' by Asians/Indians. For, in such marriages, mate choice is done by the individuals concerned on grounds of mutual affection and love, rather than on pragmatic considerations of social status, wealth or other familial advantages. These 'love marriages' stress the individual's supreme right to love and be loved in a romantic-sensual sense. Such love is considered as the essence of happiness in marriage.

There is an important difference between love marriage and arranged marriage. Whereas in the latter at the individual's level one has vague expectations from marriage (in fact, individuals enter into it primarily for performing their social duty), in self-choice marriage there are great expectations of happiness and companionship from one's partner in marriage. However, these are not very easy to attain and retain in day-to-day life after marriage, where practical problems of existence confront the couple. Mature personalities are able to adjust to this gap between dream and reality. The less mature find it difficult to adjust. At times the gap between fantasy of romantic love and exigencies of practical life is so wide that the strain becomes impossible to bear and marriage ends in a failure.

Evidently such marriages involve a risk, and since the partners entering such a union had not done so for familial or social reasons, the love marriage tends to be more fragile than the arranged marriage. Many of the love marriages become unstable not so much because of the mistaken selection but because of non-fulfilled expectations in marriage.

Activity 2

Try to arrange a debate cum discussion with students at your study centre on the topic of "Love Marriage Versus Arranged Marriage in the Contemporary Urban Society; and Why?" Request your Academic Counsellors to Co-ordinate the debate.

6.4.3 Mate Selection among Tribals

Though premarital relationships among tribals are tolerated, and self-selection is permitted, all regular marriages are parent arranged. Even marriage by 'capture' is effected, in some tribes, at the instance or connivance of parents. Irregular marriages are effected through elopement, intrusion or forcible application of vermilion, all of which are eventually accepted by the parents and the families concerned, as signifying wedlock. In practice various other forms of mate selection are in existence. The more important among these are discussed below.

i) Selection by purchase and service

Mate selection 'by purchase' is the most prevalent practice. In this, bride-price has to be paid to the girl's parents. The amount of bride-price rates from a nominal price (as in case of Regma Naga) to such a high price (as in case of Ho) that many young men and women have to remain unmarried.

Some tribes (Gond) have found a way out of the high bride-price. The would-be groom lives and works in his would-be father-in-law's house as a suitor-servant for a number of years before he can ask for the girl's hand in marriage.

Another way of avoiding the payment of bride-price is through an exchange of girls/women among eligible families.

ii) Youth dormitories

Tribes having youth dormitories provide a wide scope for the youth to choose their mates. Therefore, marriage by mutual consent with parents approval has been the general practice. Where parents object, elopement is a solution. Eventually the parents welcome the couple's return.

iii) Selection by capture

Mate selection 'by capture' has been a feature of Naga, Ho, Bhil and Gond tribes. Among Nagas, female infanticide was resorted to because of fear of raids for bride capturing. Among the Gond capture takes place often at the instance of parents of the bride and amongst the Ho it is prearranged. Besides physical capture, there is also a ceremonial capture. Among Central Indian tribes peaceful captures are effected on the occasion of certain inter village festivals.

iv) Selection by trial

Mate selection by trial also exists among some tribals. A young Bhil has to prove his prowess before he can claim the hand of any girl. This is generally done through a dance game. On Holi festival, young women dancers make a circle around a tree or pole on which a coconut and gud are tied. The men folk make an outer ring. The trial of strength begins when a young man attempts to break the inner circle in order to reach the tree/pole. The women resist his attempt with all their might; and in case the

man is able to reach the tree and eat the gud and break open the coconut. He can choose any girl from the surrounding inner circle, as his wife.

Cases are reported among some tribals, where a girl desirous of marrying an unwilling mate thrusts herself on him, bears all humiliations and harsh treatment till the man yields. Such a marriage is termed as marriage by intrusion.

In addition to the above-mentioned ways of mate selection, probationary marriages are also reported among the Kuki, who permit a young man and woman to live together at the girls home for some weeks, and then decide whether to get married or not. In case they decide to separate, the young man has to pay cash compensation to the girl's parents.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use space below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) Explain what is meant by preferential marriage. Use about three lines for your answer.

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- 2) Explain with examples how mate selection is done among tribals. Use about three lines for your answer.

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6.5 CHANGES IN MARRIAGE

Industrialisation and urbanisation have ushered in changes which have profoundly affected the institution of marriage all over the world. While different societies, and within each society different groups, have responded differentially to industrialisation and urbanisation, nonetheless certain common trends in the changes affecting marriage are discernible.

6.5.1 Changes in the Forms of Marriage

Societies with traditions of plural marriages are turning towards monogamy. Due to the general improvement in the status of woman and her gradual emancipation from the clutches of male dominance, even in those societies where polygamy is permissible, incidence of polygamous marriages, and plurality of wives, are on the decrease. In India, the Hindu Marriage Act has banned both polygynous and polyandrous marriages. Even in a Muslim country like Pakistan, legislation was introduced making it necessary for the kazi to solemnize plural marriages only if the first wife gave her written consent. The trend towards monogamy has also been encouraged by the new idea of romantic love as the basis for marriage propagated by the western societies. It is a marriage in which one specific individual is considered to be the ideal partner.

However, it would perhaps be wrong to assume that this trend towards monogamy is also towards straight monogamy. While conditions in modern society have made marriage unstable and the marriage bond is revokable, individuals are willing to risk another marriage in order to find happiness. Parents and friends too are sympathetic in this matter. Hence, societies are likely to move towards the condition of serial monogamy, rather than maintain straight monogamy.

6.5.2 Changes in Mate Selection

In traditional societies like India, where mate selection was entirely a prerogative of parents and elders, a dent has been made. Young men and women are increasingly being given some say in the matter of mate selection. From a position in which they had no say whatsoever concerning whom they were to get married to, a stage has now come in which the concerned individuals are consulted and their consent obtained. In urban middle class families, sons and daughters have even come to enjoy the right to veto marriage proposals initiated by others. In the more advanced and enlightened urban families, parents are now giving opportunities to their children to become acquainted with prospective mates. "Dating" a practice in which a boy and a girl meet each other to get to know each other and enjoy themselves with relative freedom is a phenomenon which can be seen in different colleges and universities of predominantly metropolitan cities in India. It is again an imitation of the Western Society and is the result of exposure of people to Western culture to a far greater extent than it was earlier.

In India, mate selection through newspaper advertisement has become quite a popular practice among urban middle classes and the latest development is the reported harnessing of the services of computers in bringing potentially compatible mates together.

6.5.3 Changes in Age of Marriage

In India where, traditionally, child marriages were prescribed, preferred and encouraged, various efforts were made by social reformers to bring this practice to an end; accordingly, the Child Marriage Restraint Act, popularly known as the Sarda Act, was passed in 1929. However, early marriage continues, in spite of the impact of modern industrialisation and urbanisation, especially among the rural people. In urban areas, too, there was a strong tendency to get a daughter married off as soon as possible.

But with increasing enrolment of girls in schools and colleges, and their desire to take up employment, along with the problems of 'settling down' in life for the vast majority of boys, the age at marriage is perforce being pushed up. Further, as part of its population policy, the Government has now prescribed the minimum age of marriage as 18 years for girls and 20 years for boys. In urban areas, however, marriages are now generally taking place beyond these prescribed minimum ages.

6.5.4 Changes in Marriage Rituals and Customs

Contemporary changes in India present us with a paradoxical situation. With greater intrusion of technology and science, it was expected that a secular-scientific outlook would emerge and, consequently, the non-essential rituals and customs have always pleaded for avoiding of wasteful expenditures on meaningless customs and rituals. But observation indicates that, contrary to the expectations of enlightened people, marriages in India are tending to become more traditional insofar as the ritual-custom complex is concerned. Today, there is a revival of many rituals and customs, which, soon after independence, appeared to have become weak. To an extent, this revival is a function of affluence. Many people in society have a lot of money to spend lavishly on weddings, and there is a tendency among the not-so affluent to imitate the affluent.

6.5.5 Changes in Marriage : Goals and Stability

It was seen earlier that procreation has been the most important function of marriage in traditional societies. In all communities, a large number of children, bestowed higher status upon parents and among Hindus sons were particularly desired. Thus, a large-sized family was one of the cherished goals of marriage, and the blessings showered upon the bridal couple included good wishes for several children.

But modern conditions of life have made a large family burdensome; in fact, even those with three or four children are being disfavoured.

Several developing Countries are seized of the problems that exploding populations can cause and are, therefore, committed to encouraging the small family norm. Restriction of family size is the declared official policy of many of these. India, in fact, was the first country to adopt an official family planning programme. In those Asian and African countries where there are democratic governments, through vigorous education efforts, citizens are being made to realise and accept the advantages of limited procreation.

China has also adopted a very strict population control programmes which involves certain disincentives and punishments for couples that do not restrict procreation.

All these efforts are gradually influencing the values of people in India, and other countries. It is being realised that it is better to have about two healthy and well-cared for children than a large number who cannot be adequately fed, clothed or looked after.

As procreation, and along with it parenting role, are tending to become less important, other functions like companionship and emotional support from the spouse and children are becoming the more important goals of marriage. In fact, the younger people today are entering matrimony for happiness and personal fulfilment.

The conditions causing marital instability are likely to worsen rather than improve in the future. Our outlook, values and ideals pertaining to marriage are also undergoing change. What then is the future of marriage? Predictions concerning social life are difficult and risky. But, there appears to be little chance that marriage, as a major event in individual and social life will ever be given up and abandoned. If evidence from western societies is any guide, high rates of divorce will not automatically deter people from getting married. Notwithstanding marital instability, the individual's quest for finding happiness in marriage will continue.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use space below for your answer.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) Comment briefly upon changes in the forms of marriage. Use about five lines for your answer.

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2) Describe how the goals and stability of marriage are changing. Use about five lines for your answer.

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6.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit various practices related to the institution of marriage were discussed. We have presented the institution and forms of marriage early in the unit. These indicate the wide differences in marriage practices and procedures. Our discussions on mate selections indicate that society and social rules are based upon different aspects of marriage. In many cases marriage happens within a very narrow choice. Finally we have indicated how marriage as an institution has been changing. This shows that marriage itself is a dynamic institution, always undergoing modification.

6.7 FURTHER READINGS

- 1) Gore, M.S., 1965. "The Traditional Indian Family" in M.F. Nimkoff (ed.), *Comparative Family Systems*, Houghton-Mifflin: Boston.
- 2) Kapadia, K.M., 1966. *Marriage and Family in India*, Oxford University Press: Mumbai.

6.8 KEY WORDS

- Endogamy** : When marriage is within a specific caste, class or tribal group.
- Exogamy** : When marriage occurs outside a certain group of relations.
- Monogamy** : When marriage involves one husband and one wife alone.
- Polygamy** : When marriage involves more than one mate at one time.
- Polyandry** : When more than one man is married to a woman.
- Polygyny** : When more than one woman is married to a man.

6.9 MODEL ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) In monogamy there is one husband and one wife. In polygamy there is more than one mate at one time. Polygamy has two sub-types: polyandry and polygyny.
- 2) Endogamy requires that a person marries within a clearly defined group. He or she is forbidden to marry outside it. Exogamy requires that a person marries outside a particular group. There is a certain group within which a person should not marry.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Preferential marriage refers to that type of marriage, which defines, whom we should marry. Such marriages are common in South Indian (Cross cousins) and among Muslims (Parallel cousins)
- 2) Mate selection among tribals is done in several ways. These include; (i) by purchase of bride, (ii) youth dormitories; (iii) selection by capture of bride; (iv) by athletic trial of bridegrooms.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The forms of marriage are undergoing change. Societies with a tradition of plural marriage are turning towards monogamy. In this way women's place in marriage has improved. However, remarriage for another partner is now acceptable. Thus, serial monogamy is becoming a generally accepted practice.
- 2) In earlier times marriage had procreation as one of the main objectives. Today the goal is a small family and the drive is to restrict family size. Couples are now entering marriage with the hope of personal and emotional fulfilment. This makes for very high expectations on the part of both, husband and wife.

UNIT 7 KINSHIP

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Significance of Kinship
- 7.3 Basic Concepts of Kinship
 - 7.3.1 The Principles of Descent
 - 7.3.2 Types of Descent
 - 7.3.3 Functions of Descent Groups
 - 7.3.4 Inheritance Rules
 - 7.3.5 Rules of Residence
 - 7.3.6 Patriarchy and Matriarchy
- 7.4 Descent Systems - Further Details
 - 7.4.1 Patrilineal Descent
 - 7.4.2 Matrilineal Descent
 - 7.4.3 Nayers of Kerala: An Illustration
 - 7.4.4 Other Matrilineal Communities
- 7.5 Kinship in India
- 7.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.7 Further Readings
- 7.8 Key words
- 7.9 Model Answers to Check Your Progress

7.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have read this unit you should be able to describe:

- the significance of kinship;
- the basic concepts of kinship;
- the principles of descent;
- the types of descent; and
- kinship system in India.

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will be giving you the basic aspects of kinship. We explain the significance of kinship in social life. We then define the basic concepts of kinship. These include the concepts of descent, inheritance, residence rules and so on. Next we take up descent systems, including the patrilineal and the matrilineal systems. Finally, we deal with kinship modes in India. This unit provides a broad idea about the concept of kinship.

7.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF KINSHIP

The kinship system refers to a set of persons recognised as relatives, either by virtue of a blood relationship technically called consanguinity, or by virtue of a marriage relationship, that is through what is called affinity.

Most of us tend to regard the kinship system into which we are born and in which we are reared as natural. It will seem natural and right to us that certain close relatives should be tabooed as marriage and sexual partners, and we feel quite certain that disastrous consequences would follow any infringement of the taboos. We may similarly think it natural that certain classes of persons be preferred as marriage partners, or we may on the contrary think it very unnatural that any persons be so designated.

We all have very strong ideas, too, about what is the correct and proper behaviour of different kin towards each other—deference, respect, familiarity, avoidance, kindliness, protectiveness, and so on, as the case may be. All such aspects of kinship relations tend to be taken for granted unless, or until, one is confronted with the kinship practices of other peoples. Initially, different practices may appear as disgusting or inhuman, exotic or fantastic, strange or primitive, etc. Earlier anthropologists spent a great deal of labour on trying to work out the various stages through which they believed kinship systems had progressed in the course of human history. However strange other peoples' kinship practices may at first appear to be, a closer look will usually show them to be functional. They are useful for the maintenance of the society as a whole, contributing to its continuity over time and containing the conflicts that might potentially disrupt it.

This is not to say that all practices are for the best for all members of the society and for all time. One certainly need not justify customs like sati, female infanticide, child marriage, amniocentesis or killing of the female foetus etc. One would here try to understand how these practices are (or were) consistent with the principles and values at work in the wider society.

7.3 BASIC CONCEPTS OF KINSHIP

We have already made the general point that kinship relations are the outcome of the cultural interpretation of relations given in nature, and discussed some of the different ways in which sociologists have looked at the kinship system. In doing so, we have indirectly introduced some of the basic terms and concepts in kinship studies, which we will now set out more systematically. You certainly do not need to memorise this rather overwhelming set of technical terms, but you should try to understand the basic principles and distinctions that these key terms seek to convey.

7.3.1 The Principles of Descent

Descent is the principle whereby a child is socially affiliated with the group of his or her parents. In some societies the child is regarded as a descendant equally of both the father and the mother, except that titles and surnames are usually passed down along the male line. Such a system is termed Bilateral or Cognatic. The individual belongs simultaneously to several descent groups - those of the two parents, the four grandparents, the eight great-grandparents, and so on. This link is limited only by memory or by some conventionally determined cut-off point at, say, four or five degrees removal. In small intermarrying communities, membership will probably overlap, and in case of dispute or feud, the individual might find his or her loyalties divided. There are some cognatic systems where the individual has the right by descent to membership of several cognatically recruited groups, but this right is actualised only if the person is able to reside in a particular group's territory. Modern nationality laws often make this type of requirement.

7.3.2 Types of Descent

In other societies, by contrast and your own is most probably one of them—descent is reckoned UNILINEALLY, that is, in one line only. The child is affiliated **either** with the group of the father, that is, PATRILINEAL DESCENT, or with the group of the mother, that is, MATRILINEAL DESCENT. Theories of the physiology of procreation

and conception often correlate with these different modes of reckoning descent. In the former, the father is often given the primary role in procreation while the mother is regarded as merely the carrier of the child; in systems of the latter type the father's role may not be acknowledged at all.

Additionally, in some societies one finds that the child is affiliated to the group of either parent, depending on choice, or to one parent for some purposes (for instance, inheritance of property) and to the other parent for other purposes (for instance, the inheritance of ritual or ceremonial roles). This is called **DOUBLE UNILINEAL DESCENT**.

The principle of unilineal descent provides the individual an unambiguous identification with a bounded social group that exists before he or she is born and that has continuity after he or she dies. Members of a descent group have a sense of shared identity, often referring to each other as 'brother' and 'sister' even when no genealogical relationship can be traced. Descent groups are also very often, (though not inevitably), characterised by exogamy. That is, marriage must be with persons outside this group. For instance, traditional Chinese society was divided among approximately a hundred 'surname' groups—you could perhaps call them **CLANS**—within which marriage was disallowed, and these groups further divided into **LINEAGES**, whose members claimed to be able to trace their descent, perhaps for several hundred years, from a founding ancestor, and then into further localised **SUBLINEAGES** and so on down to the individual co-resident families. Sometimes a whole village might be settled by members of a single lineage. The gotras of Indian caste society are also exogamous descent groups, segmented in rather the same way.

Activity 1

Interview or discuss with some members of your family and prepare a chart indicating five generations of your family on your fathers' side or mothers' side whichever is relevant to you. Write a note of one page on "The kinship structure of My Family". Discuss your note with other students and Academic Counsellor at your study centre.

7.3.3 Functions of Descent Groups

Apart from the function of exogamy, unilineal descent groups tend to be 'corporate' in several other senses. Their members may often come together for ritual and ceremonial functions, for instance, for collective worship of lineage gods, totems or ancestors. The descent group will have a built-in authority structure, with power normally exercised by senior males, and it may well own corporate property. An individual's economic rights and responsibilities will be defined by his or her position in the descent group. In many societies unilineal descent groups are also jural units, internally deciding their own disputes, and externally acting as a unified group in the conduct of feud, etc. For this reason, lineage structure is often coterminous with the political structure in societies lacking a centralised state structure.

Lineages cannot expand indefinitely in a single locality and often segment into smaller, more manageable and economically viable lineage segments. You can see the lines of segmentation of the ground, as it were. Consider the pattern of land ownership in an Indian village; or at the pattern of village or urban settlement; a particular quarter of the village or town may be inhabited by the descendants of a single founding ancestor. Often, the large **havelis** divide among brothers or step-brothers, and these quarters are further divided among their descendants. In case a line dies out, the property would be reconsolidated.

Given the range of social functions that descent groups may potentially perform, it is little wonder that concern with the principles of unilineal descent has dominated the work of many students of comparative kinship. However, even these scholars realise that unilineal descent is not the whole story. In ancient Rome, women after marriage severed all contact with their natal group. In certain slave societies, the slave has no 'family' of his or her own. In patrilineal systems, the mother's father, mother's sister, and especially the mother's brother, are important relationships which need further discussion. To take note of the importance of relationships, the scholars have identified another principle. This has been termed the principle of **COMPLEMENTARY FILIATION** which explains the significant ritual and social roles of the mother's brother(s) in the lives of their sister's children. It reminds us that, in most societies, an individual is a child of both parents, however descent is formally reckoned.

7.3.4 Inheritance Rules

Rules of inheritance tend to co-ordinate with the reckoning of descent in most societies, but not necessarily in a one-to-one manner. In fact, it is quite often the case that certain types of property pass from father to son, and other types from mother to daughter. In most parts of India, in the past, immovable property such as land and housing, was inherited only by sons. In the absence of sons, except under rare circumstances, by the nearest male relatives on the father's side. On the other hand, movable property in the form of cash and jewellery was given to the daughter at the time of her marriage, with a certain amount of jewellery also passing from the mother-in-law to the daughter-in-law.

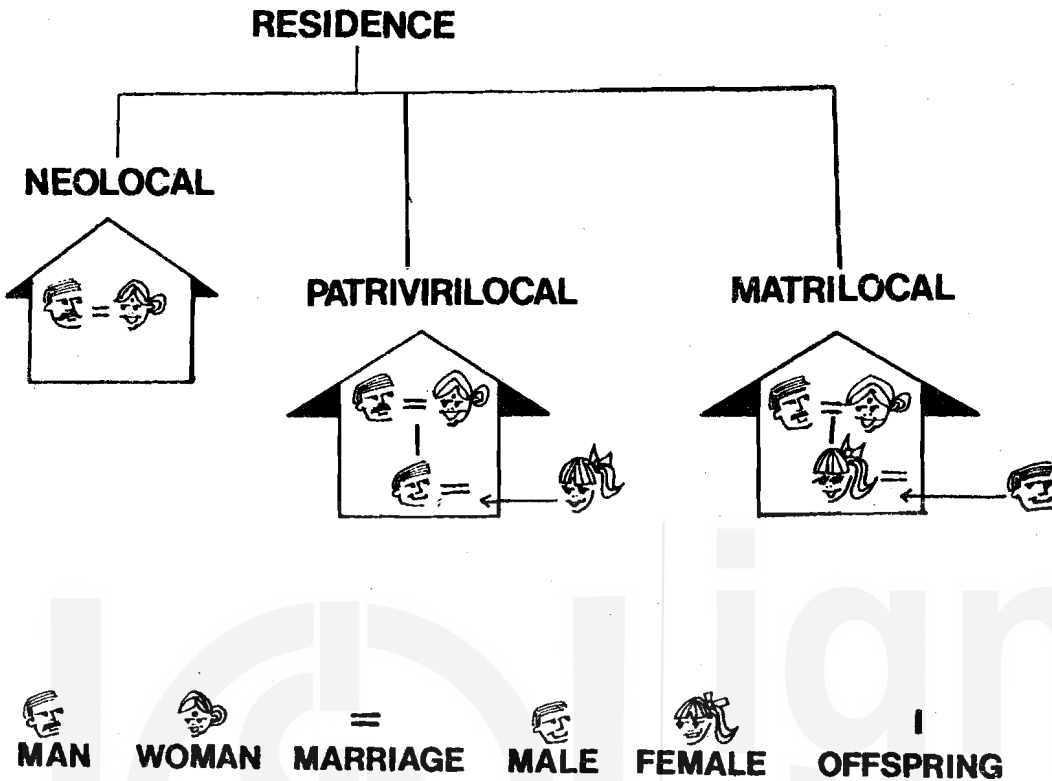
In addition to property of various kinds, rights and obligations, esoteric knowledge, crafts and skills, etc., might be passed on in accordance with kinship roles, succession to office to chieftainship, kingship, etc.-and to other social roles and statuses, is also very often determined by kinship criteria. In such cases, the individual's status is said to be 'ascribed', not 'achieved'. It is commonly asserted that ascriptive status of modern, industrial societies. There is a great deal of truth in this statement, but one should not underestimate the importance of kinship connections in modern societies too. Often one finds that in a family if father is a doctor or lawyer the son or daughter is also likely to choose the same occupation. Most of the Indian women who have been successful in the political domain are either daughters, sisters or wives of people who have been active in politics. One such example is the Nehru family of India.

7.3.5 Rules of Residence

Rules of residence, meaning residence after marriage, are an important variable in a kinship system, and substantially affect the quality of personal relations within the kin network. If husband and wife set up their own independent home after marriage, as is usually the case in modern western society, residence is said to be **NEOLocal**. Where the wife goes to live with the husband in his parents' home, residence is described as **VIRILocal**, **PATRILOCAL**, or **PATRIVIRILocal**, and where the husband moves to live with the wife, it is termed **MATRILOCAL** or Rules of residence may or may not 'harmonise' with the rules of descent. On the whole, patrilineal descent systems correlate with either neolocal or patrivirilocal residence patterns. However, matrilineal descent systems may be combined with all three types of residence. It is also combined with what is called **AVUNCULocal** residence, that is, residence with the mother's brother.

ILLUSTRATION : 1 different types of Residence

(i) Neolocal (ii) Patrivirilocal (iii) Matrilocal



Legend:

7.3.6 Patriarchy and Matriarchy

A society is said to have a patriarchal structure when a number of factors coincide, i.e. when descent is reckoned patrilineally, when inheritance of major property is from father to son, when residence is patrilocal, and when authority is concentrated in the hands of senior males. There is, however, no society on earth, nor any society actually known to have existed, whose features are the exact reverse of these. For even in matrilineal, matrilocal systems, which are fairly rare, major property is usually controlled by males. And authority is normally exercised by males, though women may well have a higher status in the family and greater powers of decision-making than in the patriarchal set up. Some anthropologists assert that in societies with very simple technology and minimal property, relations between the sexes are relatively egalitarian, whether descent is formally matrilineal, patrilineal or bilateral, but others insist that women, and children, have played subordinate roles in all human societies.

For this reason, the term 'matriarchy', though often found in the literature, is probably a misnomer, best avoided, and there is certainly no conclusive evidence to support the view that matriarchy was a universal early stage in the development of kinship systems.

Check Your Progress 1

- Note:** i) Use space below for your answers.
 ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) What is the principle of descent? Explain in one line.

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2) Explain the types of descent. Use about three lines for your answer.

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7.4 DESCENT SYSTEMS-FURTHER DETAILS

The patrilineal descent systems of India have many of the features noted in similar groups elsewhere. A boy at birth becomes a member of his descent group, and a coparcener (partner) in a joint estate. A girl, by contrast, is only a residual member of her natal group: at marriage she is incorporated into her husband's descent group and ultimately (i.e. after her death) offered worship by their male descendants. Residence, as we have already noted, is usually partilocal.

The descent group may participate in joint rituals such as the worship of certain deities and ancestor worship, and will observe mourning restrictions, in various degrees, following a death in the family. It may also own a certain amount of common property. Immovable property such as land and housing is inherited in the male line only (of course, we are speaking here of the traditional system, before the several changes sought to be brought about by post-independence legislation). Whereas daughters are given goods, cash and jewellery as 'dowry' at the time of marriage. The descent group has an in built authority structure based on generation and age. Senior members have the authority to settle disputes within the kin group, and to represent the group in its dealing with outsiders.

7.4.1 Patrilineal Descent

Taken together, the above mentioned features approach the 'patriarchal' model of society. This has patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence, inheritance from father to son, and authority in the hands of seniors as against juniors, and males as against females. A number of social practices testify to the fact that a woman's only legitimate roles are those of wife and mother. Spinsterhood and widowhood are inauspicious and unenviable conditions. A girl is regarded as merely a guest in her natal home and, initially at least, as a rather threatening outsider in her marital home. The poignancy of the transition between these two locales and these two statuses is captured in folklore and folksongs with which you are probably familiar.

The patrilineal systems of the south are not so markedly patriarchal as those of the north. Also a woman after marriage continues to have materially and psychologically important relations with members of her natal group. This is more so with her parents and her brothers, and the residual right to maintenance in their estate in adverse circumstances. And in many other partilineal systems, the mother's brothers have significant ritual and social roles in the lives of their sister's children, and an especially tender and affectionate relationship with them.

Further modifying the starkly 'patriarchal' picture a number of social anthropologists, speaking comparatively, have also drawn attention to the fairly substantial property that devolves on a daughter at her marriage. Others, however, insist that this property cannot be considered as a daughter's 'inheritance', comparable to that of the son, since the greater portion of it is neither owned nor controlled by the girl in her own right. It is really a form of 'bridegroom price', that is, an enticement to the groom's family as part of the settlement of the marriage contract. However, equal rights of inheritance by both son and daughter in one's father's or mother's self made property is recognised and some states have even introduced it in their legislation,

7.4.2 Matrilineal Descent

Matrilineal descent systems, of which there are several well-known examples in south-western and north-eastern India, have their own distinctive characteristics. Empirically you never find matrilineal systems that are an exact inverse of the patrilineal-patriarchal model which we have already described and which is fairly well approximated by the patrilineal descent systems of north and south (but especially north) India. The reason is quite simple: whatever the descent system, that is, matrilineal, patrilineal or indeed bilateral, authority is usually exercised by males, only in extremely simple societies one comes across a fair degree of mutual inter-dependence between males and females. Also, though rights in property might be determined by the principles of matrilineal descent (for instance, passing from mother to daughter or from mother's brother to sister's son rather than from father to son as in patrilineal societies), major property is usually controlled (if not actually owned) by males.

For obvious reasons, residence arrangements are problematic in matrilineal societies. A man may not have authority over his own children, who belong to his wife's descent group and who may also reside after maturity with their mother's brother. Conversely, in cases where the husband customarily resides with his wife and children, he may have difficulty managing the property in which he has an interest by virtue of descent, and in exercising authority over his sister's children. In other words, there seems to be some sort of contradiction in matrilineal kinship systems, brought out in the dilemma over residence, between a man's role as father and his role as mother's brother. His natural love for his own children might easily come into conflict with his special jural responsibilities towards his sister's children.

7.4.3 Nayers of Kerala: An Illustration

Among the matrilineal Nayers of Kerala, formerly, men resided in large and matrilineally recruited joint families, called **taravad**, along with their sisters, sister's children and sister's daughter's children. They visited their wives in other **taravads** at night (this is why the system has been popularly called the 'visiting husband' system). Their own children resided with their mother in their mother's **taravad**. In this system the bond between brother and sister was strongly emphasised, and the bond between husband and wife correspondingly de-emphasised, this is more so because Nayar women could legitimately have a number of visiting husbands (polyandry), provided they were of the correct status (i.e. higher status Nayers or Namboodiri Brahmans). Also, Nayar men could have a number of wives (polygyny). In fact, the marital bond was so minimised among the Nayers that anthropologists have debated endlessly whether Nayar society had the institution of marriage at all! Anthropologists have also cited that the Nayar system disproves the proposition that the elementary or nuclear family is a "universal" human institution. The details of these debates need not detain us here. Indeed, the unique institutions and customs described by the anthropologists no longer exist and have not existed for generations, but the Nayar case is a useful one for illustrating the types of tensions that seem to be coming into matrilineal systems. They had a rather unique way of coping with what anthropologists have called 'the matrilineal puzzle'. Effectively they ensured the unity of the matrilineal at the expense of the solidarity of the marital bond between husband and wife.

7.4.4 Other Matrilineal Communities

There are many other matrilineal communities in India whose kinship organisation is rather different to that of the Nayers. For instance, the Khasis of Assam are matrilineal in descent, inheritance and succession, and practise matrilocal residence. The youngest daughter is the heiress, and lives in her mother's house alone with her husband and her children. The older daughter however may move out of the matrilineal household on marriage and make new nuclear families; their husbands have greater independent

authority than does the husband of the youngest daughter still residing matrilocally. The Garo, also of Assam, have yet another arrangement. Marriage is matrilocal for the husband of the daughter who becomes the head of the household and its manager. A rule of preferential cross-cousin marriage ensures that a man is succeeded in this position by his sister's son in an ongoing alliance relationship between the two linked lineages.

Earlier anthropologists, working within an evolutionary framework, had maintained that the matrilineal descent systems are the surviving traces of an earlier matriarchal or 'mother-right' stage in the development of human kinship organisation, and that these would automatically give way to patriarchal and then bilateral models. There is no conclusive evidence that this has happened or is currently happening. At least in the Nayar case it appears that the decline of the Nayar **taravad** over the last century has given rise to a wide variety of residential patterns in the area, and it has become exactly like the patrilineal groups in their neighbourhood.

Sociologists and anthropologists continue to find matrilineal descent groups of special interest, not only because of the ramifications of the 'matrilineal puzzle', referred to above, but also because issues concerning the status of women or gender relations have come very much to the fore in recent years. It may be, as we have stated, that males have authority and exercise control over property in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies, but most scholars working on matrilineal societies, and the members of these societies themselves, feel that there is nonetheless a qualitative difference in the status of women in matrilineal, as against patrilineal, societies.

Activity 2

Think about emergency situation in your own family, such as, economic crises, death, birth etc. Try to recall the people from whom your sought help and how these people were linked with you. Write a report on "kinship in my Family/Community" and discuss it with other students at your study centre.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note:** i) Use space below for your answers.
 ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.
- 1) Write a brief note on the patriarchal model of society. Use about three lines for your answer.

 - 2) Explain matrilineal descent. Use about two lines for your answer.

7.5 KINSHIP IN INDIA

From your general knowledge, what would you say are the distinctive features of kinship in the north and south of India? Almost everyone, spontaneously, thinks of the different rules of marriage, and of the kinship practices that derive from these. We will now briefly enumerate here the sort of contrasts that Iravati Karve, the famous sociologist, had described.

In the Southern Zone, you usually find a preference for marriage with certain categories of close kin, in particular with one or the other or both of the cross-cousins (but never parallel cousins), or even with the elder sister's daughter. On the whole, the inter-marrying groups are of comparable status. Though the actual marriage relationship might give rise to a temporary inferiority of wife-givers in relations to wife-takers. The marriage will probably involve groups which are geographically quite proximate—even from the same village—and the bride will already be familiar with her in-laws. You don't really expect a young bride to be badly treated by her mother-in-laws if that woman is also her aunt or her maternal grandmother!

In north India, by contrast, marriages are never between persons who are already closely related. A rule of village exogamy also ensures that brides are given to and taken from other villages or towns, often at a considerable distance. The bride therefore comes to her husband's family as a 'stranger'. She will always be suspected of trying to alienate her husband's affections, and will usually be blamed for the break up of the joint family, should a partition subsequently take place. The distinction between 'daughters' and 'brides' is very sharply emphasised in this system (think of the practice of veiling), and the new bride's position is relatively vulnerable, unless and until she becomes the mother of a son. In this region it is also often the case that marriages unite groups whose social status is already unequal, the wife-givers being of inferior status to the wife-takers (hypergamy), while the marriage transaction commonly (though again not invariably) takes the form of a 'dowry' payment. However legally taking dowry or giving it, both have become illegal offences punishable by the state. But, in reality it continues to affect a large category of people in India. Even other religions, such as, Muslims, Christians and SC/STs are getting influenced by it. All in all, we have in this combination of features the social-structural locale of also such practices as levirate marriage, sati, female infanticide and, lately, 'bride-burning' or dowry deaths.

Box 7.1

In 1980 the government of India began to take notice of the issue of dowry as oppression against women and took legal action against it. In December 1983 the Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act was passed. Section 498-A was added to the Indian Penal Code. Under this Act cruelty to a wife was made a cognisable non-bailable offence, punishable up to three years imprisonment, and a fine. Section 113-A of the Evidence Act was amended so that court could draw an inference of abetment to suicide (which most dowry deaths are claimed to be) under section 174 of the Criminal Procedure Code. (IGNOU: 2000, WED Programme, WED-01, pp. 34)

Other differences between the northern and southern systems noted by Iravati Karve (and others) relate to the rules of descent, inheritance and marriage. In brief, the northern zone is universally patrilineal, though patrilineal systems are also found among different communities in the southern or dravidian zone, along with a variety of residence patterns. We should add here that there are a number of important matrilineal groups (for instance the Khasis and the Garos) in north-eastern India (eastern zone) as well.

Of course, the division of the kinship may develop into major culture areas zones can give only a very crude idea of the salient variations in kinship practices throughout the subcontinent. A more precise picture emerges when one considers the sub-regional varieties corresponding to the different regional languages and dialects. In analysing these regional kinship systems, scholars pay attention not only to kinship terminologies and to the way the people concerned speak about kinship relations and about the moral obligations that stem from them, but also to the data of ritual practices, gift exchanges folklore and other forms of cultural communication.

7.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have provided information about kinship. We have shown quite clearly that kinship is significant to society. Moreover we have clearly indicated that the basic kinship concepts like descent, inheritance and residence are important in all societies. We also showed how patrilineal and matrilineal system are aspects of descent systems. Finally kinship in India was examined in this unit. This unit therefore provides adequate information about various aspects of kinship.

7.7 FURTHER READINGS

- 1) Faber, Bernard (ed.), 1966. *Kinship and Family Organisation*, Johan Wiley and Sons: New York.
- 2) Fox, Robin 1967, *Kinship and Marriage*. Penguin Books : New York.

7.8 KEY WORDS

Consanguinity	: The principle of recognising kinship by virtue of blood relationships.
Affinity	: The principle of recognising relationship through marriages.
Descent	: The system of deriving relationships from an ancestor.
Bilateral or Cognatic	: The system of descent in which a child is recognised as a descendant equally of both the father and the mother.
Unilineal	: The system of descent in which relationship with the ancestor is recognised in one line only, i.e. either of father or of mother.
Double unilineal	: The system of descent in which the child is affiliated to the group of either parent.
Patrilineal	: Implies that descent is traced from the father's side.
Matrilineal	: Where descent is traced from the mother's side.
Patriarchal	: Where the father is the main authority in the family.
Complementary filiation	: The principle which explains the significant ritual and social role of mother's brother in a patrilineal society.

7.9 MODEL ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Descent is the principle by which a person traces his/her ancestors.
- 2) The following is the list of the types of descent:
 - i) unilineal descent including (a) patrilineal descent (b) matrilineal descent.
 - ii) double-unilineal descent
 - iii) bilateral or cognatic descent.

- 1) The patriarchal model of society combines (i) patrilineal descent; (ii) patrilocal residence; (iii) inheritance from father to son; (iv) authority in the hands of senior males.
- 2) In matrilineal descent, though, inheritance goes through the mother to daughter, major property is controlled by males and authority is also exercised by males.

REFERENCES

References, cited in Block II. (These and other works are given here for those students who wish to follow certain points in detail.)

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