



COURSE CODE: MASOD 103

COURSE NAME: SOCIOLOGY OF  
FAMILY AND KINSHIP

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND  
ONLINE EDUCATION  
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**SOCIOLOGY  
BLOCK II**



### **Vision**

**To grow to be a leading centre for human resource development through distance, open and universal learning system.**

### **Mission**

**To provide quality higher education at door step through barrierless, flexible and open learning mode in conformity with national priority and societal need.**

### **Objective**

- **To offer degree, diploma, certificate level programme of study through distance learning in various emerging subjects across the disciplines.**
- **To offer job oriented and vocational programmes in flexible terms in the line of the national and regional level demand of manpower.**
- **To offer various programmes under lifelong learning contributing to the local and regional level requirements and as per the need of the society at large.**
- **To undertake various research and academic activities for furtherance of distance education in the region.**
- **To contribute to conserve and promote cultural heritage, literature, traditional knowledge and environment conducting short programmes, workshops, seminars and research in interdisciplinary field.**



## **MSO-103: INTRODUCTION TO FAMILY AND KINSHIP**

### **ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

Dr Rabin Deka	Head and Associate Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Tezpur University
Prof. Chandan Kumar Sharma	Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Tezpur University
Prof. Kedilezo Kikhi	Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Tezpur University
Dr Amiya Kumar Das	Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Tezpur University
Ms Ankita Bhattacharyya	Assistant Professor, Centre for Open and Distance Learning, Tezpur University

### **CONTRIBUTORS**

<b>Module III</b>	Ms Deepshikha Carpenter	Guest Faculty, Department of Women's Studies, Gauhati University
	Ms Prithibi Gogoi	Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Tezpur University
	Ms Swarnali Basumatary	Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Gauhati University
	Ms Maitrayee Patar	Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Tezpur University
<b>Module IV</b>	Ms Parishmita Saikia	Independent Scholar

### **EDITOR**

Dr Ishita Dey	Assistant Professor, Centre for Development Practice, Ambedkar University Delhi
---------------	---

*Copyright © reserved with Centre for Distance and Online Education, Tezpur University. No part of this work may be reproduced in any form, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission in writing from CDOE.*

*Any other information about CDOE may be obtained from the Office of the CDOE, Tezpur University, Tezpur-784028, Assam.*

Published by the Director on behalf of the Centre for Distance and Online Education, Tezpur University, Assam.

# BLOCK II

## MODULE III: FAMILY AND KINSHIP IN INDIA

### UNIT 8: FAMILY AND KINSHIP STUDIES IN INDIA

### UNIT 9: REGIONAL VARIATIONS OF KINSHIP

### UNIT 10: FAMILY AND KINSHIP STUDIES IN NORTHEAST INDIA

### UNIT 11: FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD, CHANGING NATURE OF FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIP IN INDIA

## MODULE IV: CHANGING DISCOURSE OF FAMILY AND KINSHIP

### UNIT 12: CHANGING DISCOURSE OF FAMILY AND KINSHIP

### UNIT 13: TRANSFORMATIONS OF KINSHIP: QUESTIONING PATRIARCHY

### UNIT 14: REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND RECONFIGURED KINSHIP, GAY PERSPECTIVES

## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>MODULE III: FAMILY AND KINSHIP IN INDIA</b>	
<b>UNIT 8: FAMILY AND KINSHIP STUDIES IN INDIA</b>	<b>3-17</b>
<b>8.1 Introduction</b> <b>8.2 Objectives</b> <b>8.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Family and Kinship</b> <b>8.4 Historical Understanding of Family and Kinship Studies in India</b> <b>8.4.1 Approaches to the study of Kinship System</b> <b>8.4.2 Family and Kinship Practises among different regions in India</b> <b>8.4.3 Indian Family and Kinship Crises</b> <b>8.5 Contemporary Trend in Kinship and Family Studies</b> <b>8.5.1 Reinforcement of the Joint Family in India</b> <b>8.5.2 Role of Descent and Property rights in Kinship Studies</b> <b>8.6 Summing Up</b> <b>8.7 Questions</b> <b>8.8 Recommended Readings and References</b>	
<b>UNIT 9: REGIONAL VARIATIONS OF KINSHIP</b>	<b>18-32</b>
<b>9.1 Introduction</b> <b>9.2 Objectives</b> <b>9.3 Kinship in India</b> <b>9.4 The Works of Scholars on Kinship in India</b> <b>9.5 Regional Variations</b> <b>9.5.1 The Northern Region</b> <b>9.5.2 The Southern Region</b> <b>9.5.3 The Northeastern Region</b>	

<b>9.6 Summing up</b> <b>9.7 Questions</b> <b>9.8 Recommended Readings and References</b>	
<b>UNIT 10: FAMILY AND KINSHIP STUDIES IN NORTHEAST INDIA</b>	<b>33-49</b>
<b>10.1 Introduction</b> <b>10.2 Objectives</b> <b>10.3 Matrilineal System in Northeast India</b> <b>10.3.1 Garo Matrilineal Community of Meghalaya</b> <b>10.4 Patrilineal System in Northeast India</b> <b>10.4.1 Patrilineal System Among Pagro-Mising Community of North-East India</b> <b>10.5 Double-Descent System in Northeast India</b> <b>10.6 Summing Up</b> <b>10.7 Questions</b> <b>10.8 Recommended Readings and References</b>	
<b>UNIT 11: FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD, CHANGING NATURE OF FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIP IN INDIA</b>	<b>50-62</b>
<b>11.1 Introduction</b> <b>11.2 Objectives</b> <b>11.3 Family</b> <b>11.4 Functionalist Perspective on Family</b> <b>11.5 Marxist Perspective on Family</b> <b>11.6 Feminist Perspectives on Family</b> <b>11.7 Household</b> <b>11.8 Family and Household: Relationships and Distinctions</b> <b>11.9 Changing Nature of Family in India</b> <b>11.10 Summing Up</b> <b>11.11 Questions</b> <b>11.12 Recommended Readings and References</b>	

<b>MODULE IV: CHANGING DISCOURSE OF FAMILY AND KINSHIP</b>	
<b>UNIT 12: CHANGING DISCOURSE OF FAMILY AND KINSHIP</b>	<b>64-76</b>
12.1 Introduction 12.2 Objectives 12.3 The Family System 12.4 The Household Size and Composition 12.5 Transformations of the Kinship System and the Reasons Behind It 12.6 Summing Up 12.7 Questions 12.8 Recommended Readings and References	
<b>UNIT 13: TRANSFORMATIONS OF KINSHIP: QUESTIONING PATRIARCHY</b>	<b>77-91</b>
13.1 Introduction 13.2 Objective 13.3 The Old and the New 13.4 Kinship and Gender 13.5 The Marriage System 13.6 The Reproduction Process and Gender 13.7 Gender and Politics 13.8 Summing Up 13.9 Questions 13.10 Recommended Readings and References	
<b>UNIT 14: REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND RECONFIGURED KINSHIP, GAY PERSPECTIVES</b>	
<b>92-105</b>	
14.1 Introduction 14.2 Objectives 14.3 Notion of Family	



<b>14.4 The Sexual Minorities</b>	
<b>14.5 Law against Sexual Minorities</b>	
<b>14.6 Assisted Reproductive Techniques</b>	
<b>14.7 Configuration of the Kinship System</b>	
<b>14.8 Summing Up</b>	
<b>14.9 Recommended Readings and References</b>	

\*\*\*\*\*

### **BLOCK INTRODUCTION**

This Block comprises of Modules **III** and **IV** of MSO 102: Introduction to Family and Kinship. **Module III** explores the concepts of Family and Kinship in the context of India. The module is divided into four units. **Unit 8** discusses Family and Kinship Studies in India while **Unit 9** discusses the Regional Variations of Kinship. **Unit 10** focuses on Family and Kinship in the context of Northeast India. **Unit 11** is about Family and Household. This Unit explores the changing nature of family and relationship in India.

**Module IV** has three units, each dealing with the Changing Discourse of Family and Kinship. **Unit 12** introduces learners to the changing discourse of family and kinship. **Unit 13** deals with the Transformations in Kinship, focusing particularly on how Patriarchy is questioned in the recent times. **Unit 14** is about Reproductive Technologies and Gay Perspectives which have reconfigured the concept of kinship in contemporary times.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **MODULE III: FAMILY AND KINSHIP IN INDIA**

---

## **UNIT 8: FAMILY AND KINSHIP STUDIES IN INDIA**

---

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Objectives

8.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Family and Kinship

8.4 Historical Understanding of Family and Kinship Studies in India

8.4.1 Approaches to the study of Kinship System

8.4.2 Family and Kinship Practises among different regions in India

8.4.3 Indian Family and Kinship Crises

8.5 Contemporary Trend in Kinship and Family Studies

8.5.1 Reinforcement of the Joint Family in India

8.5.2 Role of Descent and Property rights in Kinship Studies

8.6 Summing Up

8.7 Questions

8.8 Recommended Readings and References

---

### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

You have earlier read about family and kinship in Unit 2, 3 and 5. In this unit, you will read about the understanding and concerns of family and kinship studies. India is an assimilation of diverse cultures, religions and ethnicity that brings a distinctive position to study various family and their kinship relations. Family as a unit is composed of members that are related either by blood relationship (consanguineous) or through marriage (affinal). This enables to introduce the kinship system, an integrated relationship either through the line of descent or unions. The dynamic culture-specific location spread across north, south, east and west of India also speak volume about varied family and kinship relations.

---

## 8.2 OBJECTIVES

---

After reading this Unit, you shall be able to:

- Describe the development of family and kinship studies
- Explain the practices of family and kinship system
- Provide the contemporary issues related to family and kinship

---

## 8.3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FAMILY AND KINSHIP

---

Functionalist Perspectives of Talcott Parsons (1955) viewed the family as a universal institution. He proposed two functions of the family: socialisation of children as a crucial element and stabilisation of adult personalities of the population. The tasks performed by a wider kin group steadily will be taken over by formal institutions like the industrial society. However, a shared conjugally bonded nuclear family maintaining genealogical and siblingship links will remain in the end.

**Conflict Perspective:** Friedrich Engels (1964) argued that man's supreme control over sexuality, reproduction and enforcement of monogamous family is based on the instinct of heir and inheritance. This influence led to the emergence of state and private property wherein family worked together for capitalism. It is interesting to observe that Marxist feminists considered family as a location for exploitation between men and women in the domestic mode of production (Delphy, 1984). For Leela Dube (1997), mother's identity played a significant role in forming child's identity in the family since parents' played a vital role on placing the child in the caste hierarchy. It is procreation that makes entitlement to power, rights, and entitlement in the family in India. William Hamilton's work (1964, 1971) in evolutionary biology shows how through the direct or indirect channel of reproduction, a discriminatory response towards relatives' benefit creating relation pressure on kin recognition mechanism or mutually beneficial behaviour.

**Cultural Approach:** David Schneider (1984) emphasised a distinction between the notion of a social relationship that is given by birth and a social relationship that is formed and maintained by a process of interaction. According to Schneider, the social relationship should be determined from the symbols in which the relationships are embedded eliciting individual cultural meanings. Kinship as a field is rather a cultural than a biological framework.

These theoretical perspectives draw light on the biological, cultural and economic phenomena on how family and kinship as institutions function in society. In the next section, we will probe into the genesis of family and kinship studies through different approaches and field studies.

**Stop and Read:**

According to Michael Young and Peter Willmott, in *the Symmetrical Family*, there are four stages of family life. Stage I involves a family consisting of the husband, the wife and unmarried children working in textile or agriculture. It denotes a preindustrial age. Stage II relates to the industrial age and family cease to be a unit of production as individual members are wage earners. The family extended its network to include relatives beyond the nuclear family. Stage III involves a family which is home-centred and leisure-based. Occasional odd jobs are taken when necessary. There is a separation of the immediate members from the extended families. Stage IV shows family life to be basically work driven and the leisure activities hardly involved females. The wife role is to look after the children and home.



---

## **8.4 HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING OF FAMILY AND KINSHIP STUDIES IN INDIA**

---

The debate on the beginning of family studies dates back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For nearly half a century, the Hindu joint family system was engaged as a medium of kinship and marriage through the British colonial system. Historians, as well as sociologists, had used textual (literary, sacerdotal and legal) sources to comment on social institutions (Uberoi, 2000). However, from 1950's onwards, incorporation of field studies through Sociology and Social Anthropology influenced an active part from book view to field view (Goode, 1963) The empirical studies were also divided into oriental (east) or occidental (west) types. The scope was actually to look into the forms and structure of family beyond property holding or shraddha (periodic propitiation of the dead ancestors) performing unit. It also expanded in other fields such as the family in production, reproduction, socialisation, care of the elderly and domestic worship (Patel, 2005).

### **8.4.1. Approaches to the Study of Kinship System**

Let us delineate from the above discussion the main approaches to the study of kinship in India -

1. **Indological approach (Text-Based)** - The proponents of this approach can be traced to Anthropologists and Sociologists work like PH Prabhu (1954), G.S. Ghurye (1946, 1955), K M Kapadia (1947), Iravati Karve (1940, 1958) Based on the sacred liturgical texts, this approach explains the Hindu kinship system is grounded on Sanskrit texts . It provides a rich historical perspective on the changing kinship system based on these textual sources. The Indological approach established that the Hindu Joint Family to be an ideal family (Uberoi 2000).
2. **Anthropological/ sociological approach (Field-Based)** -This approach is viewed through the line of descent as well as alliance.

Descent Approach has been studied by Gough (1956), Madan (1965), and Brown (1924) where filiations through matriliney patriliney, bilinear, cognatic, parallel or cross are initiated membership to the group. It is the cooperation and support of family members by blood. Alliance refers to the positive and negative rules governing the marriage bonds. Dumont (1950, 1957) studies in Dravidian kinship through repetitive marriage in course of a generation brought the category of parallel and cross-cousin marriage rules and regulations. It drew kinship groups through cooperation, conflict, inheritance of property, clan, caste and sub-caste, marriage rules (bride givers & takers) and exchange of gifts. The relative statuses of the parties as bride givers and bride takers are maintained. In general, the north of India favours extension of family members, whereas the south enjoys intensification of relatives favouring marriage among the cousins (Dumont, 1986). One the significant studies in this area is Leela Dube's doctoral dissertation (1951-1953) where she studied kinship among Gond tribes in Central India.

#### **8.4.2. Family and Kinship Practices Among Different Regions of India**

When we study the different regions of India, some of the features which are commonly practised are marriage outside the village, a one-directional flow of gifts, unequal relationship between wife-givers and wife-takers, limited contact with natal and affinal kins and common kanyadaan (gift of the bride). Among the tribal groups of India, a common practice and culturally agreed upon practice is the formation of nuclear family groups by setting separate hearth for sons when they marry or have one or more children. This practice can be seen among the Munda group of tribes. A practice of clan exogamy and caste endogamy is a common practice. A given caste has several clans, and a given clan has several lineages. Based on the clan, eligibility for marriage within a given caste is determined (Karve, 1953).

There are four field-based examples representing north, south, east and west where you will understand a detailed family and kinship structure in India.

T N Madan's (1965) study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir shows that the primary determinants of interpersonal relations are kinship and affinity. These ties develop most in their domestic organisation. Functionally the most important group in the pandit society is the domestic group called *gara* (household) or *chulah* (hearth group). It is usually embedded in a wider grouping of a domestic group called the *kotumb* (family). The *kotumb* is usually a large extended family and may include kin who are genealogically separated by several degrees of collaterality. The backbone or the structural core of the *kotumb* (family) is the *kol* (patrilineage). The *kotumb* is recognised as a local group that includes all the blood ties and their spouse's residence in the village. A pandit distinguishes between three types of relatives –a. Agnates (blood ties) are subsumed under the *kol*, the *kotumb* and the *chulah*,

b. the *howar* of a man and the *variw* (conjugal family) of a woman are their personal affines,

c. All the non-agnatic cognates are referred to as *ashnav* (mother's natal family) which constitute a kinship area of secondary importance.

J Puthenkalam's *Marriage and the Family in Kerala* (1977) highlights the *Marumakkathayam tarawad* (descent through sister's children) as a joint family consisting generally of several members. They trace their descent from a common female ancestor. They live under the control and guidance of the senior male (*Karnavan*) who for a time being is the head and representative. The entire is the owner of *tarawad* property where the female line continues it. The sons have the right of maintenance and hope of succeeding to the *tarawad* *karunavanship*.

In the eastern region, a study by J Mipun (1980) on the Mishings of Assam is reflected as one of the major tribes of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Among the Mishings, there is a patriarchal joint family with common social activities for all, but husband and wife like to live together separately from the main family. The Mishings trace their clan from the name of their forefathers or from the name of the deity. Each subgroup of the Mishings has separate clans. Matrimonial relationship within the same subgroup is preferred. For example, both Doley and Pegu clan belongs to the Pagro sub-group. Marriage relations among the same clan cannot be performed. A Pegu cannot marry a Pegu. Matrimonial relations are not allowed even within the clans which are separated from the main clan. Cross-cousin Marriage and Levirate are practised.

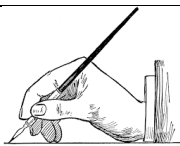
L. Lobo's work *The Thakors of North Gujarat: A Caste in the Village and the Region* (1992) is about the Dhoria Thakors in North Gujarat. They occupy a household or lineage segment. They practise the joint family system. The type of joint family can be either filial or fraternal. The distributed household of a joint family lives adjacent to each other, nevertheless sharing a common courtyard, entry-exit gate, and place of worship, common well, rites of passage and a frequent exchange of inter-household ritual gifts. Agnates are heir to the properties within the family unit. They have only one patrilineage group among them. They all trace descendants through a common male ancestor (*Kula or Vamsha*).

It is noted that kinship is certainly a major basis for social organisation and the studies show the similar characteristics in these patrilineal and matrilineal institutions. There is a practice of commonality in each activity among these various communities.

### 8.4.3 Indian Family and Kinship Crisis

The era in Indian sociology marked a change from textual to empirical understanding corresponds with the influence of urbanisation and modernization in families of Gujarat and Maharashtra (Patel, 2005). Bombay also has provided sufficient evidence of the influence of modernisation and industrialisation in the studies. These regions received maximum attention in various studies neglecting south and other parts of India. There was an inherent bias to study the Indian family in the form of Hindu family as upper caste north India (Shah, 1973) whereas it was not a true representation of non-Hindus south India communities (Kapadia 1958, Dube 1969). Two major contemporary influences made an impact not only on the field view of the family but also on how family studies in India were to unfurl over the following decades. The Indian census data on the household size revealed that the Indian household decreased in size compared to the textual images of the family. Also, there was an evolutionary perspective on the social institution where monogamy and nuclear family were the final destinations. This led to shedding the image of the ideal Indian family to an existing one in contemporary times. The challenge is to bring more empirical studies on the family structures and kinship practices of non-Hindus of the South and Northeast India, lower caste, non-patrilineal communities and others kinship patterns in different regions and communities (Uberoi, 1993).

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



#### ACTIVITY:

1. Look around your region and find out how many studies have been done empirically on family and kinship?

2. Take a small village with a population less than hundred people and examine the family and kinship relations. Find out which theoretical interpretation works the best according to you?

In the next section, you will come across the contemporary scope of family and kinship studies with the element to look at the urban-rural struggle and changing family dynamics relating to property rights.

---

## **8.5 CONTEMPORARY TREND IN KINSHIP AND FAMILY STUDIES**

---

We identify a shift in urban areas mainly metropolitans where both male and female members of the family go for gainful employment outside the home. However, with limited child care facility, the presence of kin members makes a difference to look after home and children. The demands for working couples make them rely on professional caregiving services. Aged parents make their own income sources. Even within a city married children and parents reside separately. A new and a positive trend that is observed in family life is that women are prepared to support their parents in old age, and it is not impossible to find a widowed father or mother or parents staying with a married daughter to help her to manage the household.

To say that families in urban areas are completely nuclear is still ambiguous due to mutual dependence from joint families residing in rural areas. This is highlighted in the next subsection.

### **8.5.1 Reinforcement of the Joint Family in India**

The belief that migration to cities by members of the joint family for education, employment or medical facilities leads to its disintegration is proved to be a myth by the studies of K. M. Kapadia (1972). He states that families which have migrated to urban areas still preserve their bonds and kinship orientations. In actuality, this brings the relatives




closer at the time of crises. Milton Singer (1968) points out that the joint family continues to be the rule among industrial entrepreneurs, despite whatever changes are brought in living conditions. Changes have taken place in residential, educational and occupational spheres with increase social mobility and lesser ritual observation. Nevertheless, these alterations have not transformed the joint family into isolated nuclear families. Kolenda (1987) observes that industrialization aids as an economic structure to renew family enterprises because relatives can help each other to gain better social and economic position. However, the structure of the family changes over a time period in terms of size, composition, role and status of persons as well as societal norms and sanctions. With the course of time, the establishment of nuclear household still maintains ritual, economic and sentimental links with relatives who compose a joint family.

### **8.5.2 Role of Descent and Property rights in Kinship Studies**

The line of Descent plays a prominent role in the rights of men and women relating to inheritance, ownership, transmission and dismissal of property. The controversy regarding spouse's right to property acquired in the court of marriage and accruing after the death of one spouse; economic roles and occupational activities; the freedom to initiate divorce, the possible ground of divorce and the allocation of children are some of the arguments to understand the significance of the descent system. The perception and process in the descent principles decipher into social, symbolic, reproductive and material rights and entitlements in a person's life both in matriliney and patriliney (Agarwal 1994, Uberoi 1997). Tambiah (1989) mentions about the regions of South and Southeast Asia where unilineal descent is practised, it is necessary to underplay the role of parent—that of the father in matriliney and mother in patriliney. In the patrilineal system, the mother seemed to be devalued and eulogised, controlled as well as compensated. A mother is needed as a nurturer and a repository. There is a hierarchy of age, seniority, and

class rather than that of gender in the kinship system. It is interesting to note that the study *Brahman Kinship in a Tamil Village* by American Anthropologist of E Kathleen Gough (1956) brought the aspect that men isolate women from natal kinsmen and thus maintain the unity of men of the patrilineal group. It brings an asymmetrical relationship between men and women. Wife becomes assimilated with the husband and salvation is attained through devotion to him. That affects the marital relationship and general position of women. It also shows no clarity on property rights for women.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	<p>1. How does contemporary trend change the family and kinship relations in India?</p>
<hr/>	
<hr/>	
<hr/>	
<hr/>	
<hr/>	
<hr/>	

---

### 8.6 SUMMING UP

In Unit 8, we have observed the historical shift of family and kinship studies from textual to field level intervention. It looks into the theories and empirical reality from both East and West to establish the nature of interpersonal relations in the family. Family Studies have tended to highlight the harmonious and functional aspects of the

family. The family as an institution unfolds reality from the ideal. It provides a window to the whole arena that has remained unexplored for so long. We also notice that there is no one pan Indian structure of an analysis and unit for family and kinship studies as each day can be an exploration of novelty. The unit lastly focuses on contemporary issues of family and kinship changing norms rather than on other works on the disintegration of it.

---

### 8.7 QUESTIONS

---

1. Do the relationship of consanguineous or affinal nature maintain the same kind of status and bonding? Give the reasons in support of your answer with the help of a chart.
2. Observe and reflect on how family maintains harmonious relations in today's time and write a note on it providing your own views.

---

### 8.8 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

---

- Agarwal, B. (1994). *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Brown, R. (1924). *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, 15-31.
- Delphy, C. (1984). *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression*. University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst.
- Dube, L. (1969). *Matriliny and Islam: Religion and Society in the Laccadives*. National Publishing House
- Dube, L. (1997). *Women and Kinship: Comparative Perspectives on Gender in South and South-East Asia*. UNU Press, Tokyo.
- Dumont, L. (1957). *Hierarchy and Marriage Alliance in South Indian Kinship*. Occasional Paper 12, Royal Anthropological Institute, Ditchling Press Limited, London.

- Dumont, L. (1986). *South India Sub-caste: Social Organization and Religion of Pramalai Kallar*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Dumont, L. (1950). Kinship and Alliance among the Pramalai Kallar. *Eastern Anthropologist* 1, 1-3.
- Engels, F. (1964) *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. International Publishers, New York.
- Ghurye, G.S. (1946). Some Kinship Usages in Indo-Aryan Literature. *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay*, New Series ,1(1).
- Ghurye, G.S. (1955). Nomenclature of Kin. *Sociological Bulletin* ,4(1) 45-84.
- Goode W. J. (1963) *World Revolution and Family Pattern*. The Free Press of Glencoe, London.
- Gough, E. K. (1956) Brahman Kinship in a Tamil Village. *American Anthropologist* 58(5), 826-53.
- Hamilton, W. (1964). The genetical evolution of social behaviour. *Journal of Theoretical Biology*. 7 (1): 1–16.
- Hamilton, W. (1971). Geometry for the selfish herd. *Journal of Theoretical Biology*. 31 (2), 295–311
- IGNOU, (2004) ESO-12 Society in India, Block 2 – Family Marriage and Kinship
- Kapadia, K. M (1972). *Marriage and Family in India*. Oxford University Press in North India, University of California Press, London
- Kapadia, K. M. (1958, 1955). *Marriage and Family in India*. Oxford University Press, Bombay.
- Kapadia, K.M, (1947) *Hindu Kinship: An Important Chapter in Hindu Social History*. Popular Book Depot.
- Karve, I. (1940) Kinship Terminology and Kinship Usages in Rigveda and Atharveda. *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*.

- Karve, I. (1953) Study of Kinship Organisation in Northern India. *Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute*: Poona.
- Karve, I. (1958) What is Caste? Caste of Extended Kin. *The Economic Weekly* 10: 125-138.
- Kolenda, P. (1987) *Family Structure in Village Lonikand*. Contribution to Indian Sociology.
- Lobo, L. (1992). *Household and Family Among Thakors in a North Gujarat Village*.
- Madan, T.N. (1965). *Family and Kinship: A Study of the Pandits of Rural Kashmir*. Asia Publishing House, New Delhi.
- Mipun, J. (1980). Clan and Kinship Organisation Among the Mishings. In Dubey, S.M., Bordoloi, P.K., Borthakur, B.N., editors, *Family Marriage and Social Change on the Indian Fringe*. Cosmo Publication, New Delhi.
- Parsons, T. and Bales, R. F. (1955). *Family, Socialization, and Interaction Process*. The Free Press.
- Patel, T. (2005). The Family in India: Structure and Practice, *Themes in Indian Sociology* 6. Sage Publication, India
- Puthenkalam, Fr J. (1977) *Marriage and the Family in Kerala*. University of Calgary
- Schneider, D. (1984). *A critique of the study of Kinship*. University of Michigan Press
- Shah, A. M. (1988). The Phase of Dispersal in the Indian Family Process. *Sociological Bulletin*, 37 (1): 38-48
- Shah, A.M. (1964). Basic Terms and Concepts in the Study of the Family in India. *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 1(3): Indian Sociological Society 1-26.
- Singer, M. (1968). The Indian Joint Family in Modern Industry. In Singer, M. and Cohn, B., editors, *Structure and Change in Indian Society*. Aldine Publishing Co., Chicago.

- Tambiah, S.J. (1968) Bride wealth and Dowry revisited: The Position of Women in Sub Saharan Africa and North India, *Current Anthropology* 30 (4).
- Uberoi, P. Ed. (1993). *Family Marriage and Kinship in India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- Uberoi, P. (1997) *Family Kinship and Marriage in India* (Sociology and Social Anthropology). Oxford University Press
- Uberoi, P. (2000) *The Family in India: Beyond and Nuclear versus Joint Debate*. Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi
- Uberoi, P. (2001). The Family in India. In Das, V., editor, *Oxford Handbook of Indian Sociology*, pages 275-307. Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- Young, M. & Willmoth P. (1973). *Symmetrical Family*. Pantheon Books, New York.
- 

\*\*\*\*\*



---

## **UNIT 9: REGIONAL VARIATIONS OF KINSHIP**

---

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Objectives
- 9.3 Kinship in India
- 9.4 The Works of Scholars on Kinship in India
- 9.5 Regional Variations
  - 9.5.1 The Northern Region
  - 9.5.2 The Southern Region
  - 9.5.3 The Northeastern Region
- 9.6 Summing up
- 9.7 Questions
- 9.8 Recommended Readings and References

---

### **9.1 INTRODUCTION**

---

The term 'kinship' in simple words means the relation between 'kin' (persons related by blood, marriage or putative). The central basis of kinship system is group formation. The group formations are based on two types of bonds arising from descent (lineage) and marriage. The study of kinship is the study of such social bonds which is the most fundamental of any social group formations in human society.

Robin Fox (1967) states that the study of kinship is the study of what he (individual) does and why he (individual) does it, and the consequences of the adoption of one alternative rather than another. He further adds that the study of kinship is the study of what man does with the basic facts of life- such as mating, gestation, parenthood, socialization, siblingship, etc.

---

## 9.2 OBJECTIVES

---

In this unit, we would discuss and learn about the complexities to pen down the regional variation of kinship systems in India. By the end of this Unit, you are expected to:

- Describe the views of the scholars who have worked on kinship systems in the Indian subcontinent;
- Explain the variation within and between regions in regard to kinship systems;
- Compare the kinship system of various groups across the country.

---

## 9.3 KINSHIP IN INDIA

---

The kinship system is a complex network of individuals having functionally interrelated familial roles. The institution of kinship has been widely researched and documented in other countries but in India, it is still not well documented. The kinship system of India cannot be clubbed under a single banner as Indian kinship system. There cannot be a single kinship terminology owing to religious diversity, geographical location, linguistic groups across socially stratified groups. There are various communities in India and scholarship has shown how despite sharing linguistic or ethnic ties kinship organisations can be varied. The cultural specificity of kinship organization demands a close reading as extraneous factors such as globalization, migration has also brought about a change in kinship organization.

---

## 9.4 THE WORKS OF SCHOLARS

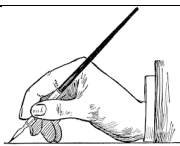
---

In order to look into the variations of kinship systems across India, we have to look at some of the previous works done by few scholars in this area. The first and the foremost work that would be discussed is Iravati Karve, who is credited with changing the discourse on kinship study in India. The work of Iravati Karve's *Kinship organization in India* (1965) was a pioneer in the field of kinship studies in India. She

identified three major types of kinship organization namely northern, southern, central and eastern on the basis of the three major language families (the Indo-Aryan or Sanskritic, the Dravidian and the Austro-Asiatic). In her discussion she found some resemblance between kinship organisations in Central India and kinship organisations in Northern India.

Louis Dumont in his paper ‘North India in Relation to South India’ made an attempt to showcase that despite the dissimilarities between southern and northern kinship, there are features of similarities that can be drawn from the north and the south region of the country. In the ritualized act of gift giving at marriages, funerals and other such lifecycle events in a way create an asymmetric relation between the ‘wife-givers’ and the ‘wife-takers’ where a hierarchy is established between the two classes. The ‘wife-takers’ are always at a higher position than the ‘wife-givers’. Along with that, Dumont points to the rules of marriages which are either in South or North remain generally the same. Dumont’s work had a significant impact in the development of kinship studies in South Asia.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Who wrote the book *Kinship organization in India*?

-----

2. What are the three major types of kinship organisation identified by Irawati Karve?

-----  
-----  
-----

---

## **9.5 REGIONAL VARIATIONS**

---

There are a number of criteria on the basis of which a comparison can be drawn among the regions of India. In this section for the understanding of the readers, the institution of marriage, descent, inheritance and residence would be taken as the said markers to discuss the kinship systems of India. In the following sub-sections, case studies would be discussed to show the variation of kinship system across regions.

### **9.5.1 The Northern region**

This region comprises the part of India which lies between the Himalayas to the north and the Vindhya ranges to the south. The vast majority of people in this region speak languages derived from Sanskrit (Karve cited in Uberoi, 1993). In this region, caste plays an important role where a wife giver and a wife taker belong to the same caste group. The caste endogamy is strictly followed in any marriage alliances. Any instance of not following this rule results in the excommunication of the married couple.

#### **The Rules of Marriage:**

The rules of marriage are fundamental to any social organization as they lay down the restrictions and taboos which are intrinsically knitted within any given society. According to Karve (1968), the social structure of a community, its group formation, succession, mating arrangements, etc. in the northern zone are based on the following principles -

- i. A person must not marry in his patri-family which can also be called as patri-clan in some cases
- ii. A person must also avoid marriage
  - (a) with the children of his mother's siblings and cousins
  - and

- (b) with the children of his father's sisters and the children of his father's female cousins

These above rules are getting more elaborated or substituted with more rules in different ways in different communities. In many cases, cross-cousin marriage alliances are avoided while in some community it is welcomed.

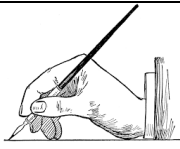
**Case study:**

Jat is an agricultural and a warrior caste residing in South Punjab, Delhi and Haryana. They are considered to be influential because of their influence in electoral politics. They constitute the majority vote bank in the state of Haryana. This community is divided into exogamous-*gotras* and the marriage rule among them is that a man must not marry into:

- i. his father's i.e. his own *gotra*
- ii. his mother's *gotra* and
- iii. his *dadi's* i.e. his father's mother's *gotra*
- iv. While in few orthodox families, a man has to avoid his *nani's* i.e. his mother's *gotra* (Karve cited in Uberoi 1993)

This 'four *gotra*' or 'three *gotra*' rule is seen to be followed by most of the castes that practises *gotra* exogamy. This rule is similar with the *Dimasas* of Northeast India though in place of *gotras* there are clans. In a tribal group, it is mandatory to maintain clan exogamy and various taboos and prohibitions are applied to avoid such alliances within same clans.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What according to Irawati Karve, are the principles on which the social structure of a community in the northern zone is based?

---

---

---

---

---

### **Inheritance of property:**

Almost all caste-based societies are patriarchal in nature so the property (both immovable and movable) movement is always along the male line. In absence of any male heir, the property is transferred to the closest male kin member. The female heir does not receive any right over the property.

### **Punjabi Kinship System:**

According to Paul Hershman (1981), the 'relatives' of Punjabi are categorized primarily as an undifferentiated mass of individuals surrounding the Ego. The relationship within the mass depends on the proximity of social ties of the ego with them such as 'close' or 'distant'. In general, the social ties are categorically having an ego-centric dimension to it apart from the traditional anthropological dichotomies such as cognatic/affinal or agnatic/non-agnatic. The criteria on which relatives are either included or excluded from ego's kindred are described in his book *Punjabi kinship and marriage* (1981) along with their assigned set of rights and duties in their respective social roles.



### ***Sakke* and *Sak* in the Punjabi kinship system:**

The term of reference *sak* (noun) denotes any relative whether real or classificatory while the term *sakka* (adjective) is only used to describe a 'real' relative as opposed to classificatory one. In other words, the term noun *sak* is used to describe any type of kinship relation while the adjective term *sakka* is used to describe a 'real' opposed to a classificatory kinsman. In classificatory term of address, all men of the same generation of the same lineage are referred as *bhra* (brothers) but only the genealogical brother is Ego's *sakka bhra* (Hershman 1981 cited in Uberoi 1993). For example, ego's sister husband (ZH)<sup>1</sup> would be ego's *sakka bhanoia* (real brother in law) while the husband of his female cousin is included in the common parlance of *bhanoi*, but the referred person is not the *sakka bhanoi* of the ego.

*Sakke* plays an important role in rites de passage and so forms a crucial element in Punjabi kinship system. The act of gift giving in various life cycle rituals is mandatory to maintain the affiliation to the *sakke*. A significant portion of Punjabi kinship behaviour revolves around *sakke*.

### **9.5.2 The Southern Region**

The following states, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra are referred to as Southern zone. In Karve's (1965) category of 'The Southern zone', she included the areas of southern and central India where the languages of the Dravidian family were spoken. Many scholars have written about Dravidian kinship system referring to a group of people belong to the same linguistic group which significantly overlook the variation within this linguistic group. Trautmann (1982) in his book titled *Dravidian Kinship* addressed the problem of such nomenclature. To elucidate the kinship system of the southernmost part of the country, a case study of Nayar is presented here in the following section.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kinship notation for sister is Z while for husband is H so kinship notation for ego's sister's husband would be ZH.

### **Case Study I:**

The Nayers of central Kerala practise matriliney. It was anthropologist Kathleen Gough (1959) who wrote extensively on them highlighting the characteristic feature of this community which defies the universal statement of marriage and household. She critiqued Leach (1955) for presuming that fatherhood is absent among the Nayers and the legitimacy of the children do lie on marriage. Kathleen Gough showed that the Nayar caste was divided into a number of ranked subdivisions characterized by different political functions. Chief among these were:

- a. the royal lineage,
- b. the lineages of chiefs of district
- c. the lineage of Nayar village headman and
- d. several sub-castes of commoner Nayers.

The Nayar household unit is not constituted by the universal and basic building block of the human organization, i.e. elementary family of husband, wife and children rather it constitutes members of the same lineage. The descent of the members residing in the same household is traced through women. The marriage among the Nayers can be simultaneously polygynous (the practice of having more than one female as wife or mate) and polyandrous (the practice of having more than one husbands at the same time) and the social role of the father is reduced to a level where they barely acknowledge it.

The concept of 'visiting husband' system is prevalent among the Nayers where the husbands do not reside with their wives rather they visit them at night. The tradition of placing his weapons at the doorstep is followed which marks the presence of the visiting husband in the household and also allows the other visiting husband to know his presence. It indeed puts the husband role to the mere progenitor of children as he has no claim over them. A legitimize or ritualized fee which bears the expense

of childbirth has to be paid by any of the husbands in order to legitimize the social position of the child in the lineage of the woman.

According to Gough, the case of Nayar redefines the definition of marriage that was provided by the *Notes and Queries*<sup>2</sup> definition of marriage which states that marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized legitimate offspring of both parents (Gough cited in Uberoi 1993). A rite of passage ceremony which replicates the ceremony of marriage known as *tali* rites is initiated for every Nayar girl. This ceremonial rite endows the girl with the sexual right to choose a partner, but such choice is limited to partners belonging to her sub-caste group.

### **9.5.3 The Northeastern Region**

This region comprises of the eight states (Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Manipur and Sikkim) situated in the Northeastern part of the country. In this region of the Indian subcontinent, a wide variation of kinship systems can be observed as this region is home to a number of different communities having its own distinct cultural trait. The state of Meghalaya houses matrilineal societies while in the state of Assam, a community with double descent resides.

#### **Case Study I:**

Dimasa is a tribal group residing in various parts of Assam and in Dimapur (Nagaland). They are recognized as Scheduled Tribes as per the Constitution of India. This tribal group is one of the few communities in the world wherein the social structure is characterized by Double Descent. In Double Descent, the society recognizes both the patrilineage (the line of descent drawn from the paternal side of the ego) and the matrilineage (the line of descent is drawn from the maternal side of the ego) simultaneously. A Dimasa individual always has double clan

---

<sup>2</sup> The *Notes and Queries of Anthropology* edited for the Council of Anthropological Institute was a bible for colonial administrators who had to undertake fieldwork in the areas under colonial administrations at the orders of British Empire.

allegiance, so equal importance is emphasized to both patrilineal and matrilineal kins (Danda, 1996). But affiliation of the ego to paternal grandfather and maternal grandmother does not apply at equal level and it is rather determined by the sex of the ego (Bathari, 2011). For instance, a male ego during his lifetime could be affiliated to both clans of paternal grandfather and maternal grandmother but he could only transmit his father patri-clan to his offspring and not his matri-clan. Similarly, females too face the same preferential affiliation during their lifetime but in their case, they could only transmit their matri-clan to their offspring. Moreover, a Dimasa woman is never a permanent member of her father's patri-clan unlike her opposite counterpart as after marriage a woman needs to take the patri-clan of the husband. Though the tribal group claims to have equal status for both man and woman, there is an uneven status between them which gets reflected in the rules of inheritance and various other rituals where women are not allowed to participate.

The family structure among the Dimasas is monogamous and nuclear as it is believed that no two women belonging to different matri-clans should stay under the same roof. This restriction is not strictly followed these days.

#### **Rules of Inheritance of Property (Both movable and immovable):**

The inheritance of immovable materials, such as land, may be the domain of the patrilineage, while the matrilineage controls the inheritance of moveable objects such as livestock, utensils, clothes, jewellery, etc.

#### **Rules of Marriages:**

The rules of marriage among the Dimasas are complicated and complex as the both affiliation of patri-clan and matri-clan at the same time makes it difficult task for marriage alliances as there are various restriction and

prohibitions to it. There are few principle marriage rules among the Dimasas and they are as follows-

- i. An individual cannot marry into one's own patri-clans and matri-clans
- ii. Marriages outside the tribe are looked down but there are cases of such union
  - a. A Dimasa man can marry a non-Dimasa woman provide she had to undergo certain cleanliness rituals. Then the non-Dimasa woman is assigned a matriclan which her descendants would inherit from her
  - b. A Dimasa woman is not allowed to marry non-Dimasa man
- iii. Cross cousin marriages are allowed provided they do not violate the rules of exogamy
- iv. Widow re-marriage is allowed but
  - a. an elder brother cannot marry the widow of his younger brother
  - b. the younger brother can marry the widow of his elder brother

### **Case Study II:**

Khasis are also recognized as Scheduled Tribes by the Constitution of India. They reside in the state of Meghalaya and are given special status where their customary laws are protected. The Khasi society is one of the few communities in the world which follow matrilineal descent. Thus, in Khasi customs, the line of inheritance and descent is passed on from the mother to the daughter.

### **The Rules of Inheritance:**

The Khasis have different sets of rules assigned for the ancestral or self-acquired property. The ancestral property is transmitted through the female line. The youngest daughter of the household takes over the ancestral house. The sons of the household have no right over the ancestral property of his parents.

There are rules for the self-acquired property as well and how that can be inherited or transferred. In case of a woman, the woman usually transfers her property either to her daughter or son, if she dies before handing over the will, the property is immediately transferred to the youngest daughter. If a woman dies unmarried, her property goes either to her mother or sister. The inheritance rule of self-acquired property for a woman is simple but a complex set of rules are spread-out for a man. If a man dies without assigning an heir to his property, there are specific rules depending upon the nature of the property and the time period during which it was acquired. The complex set of rules are stated below-

- a. The property earned before he gets married is called the ‘earning of the clan’ and this would go to his mother and sister.
- b. While the property earned after he gets married is called the ‘earning of the children’ and this would go to his wife and children.
- c. If a man brings his self-acquired property and set up his own business and acquires property, the property would be regarded as self-acquired possessions. After his death, the possessions would go to his mother and sister.

---

### **9.6 SUMMING UP**

In this Unit, an attempt has been made to throw some light on the regional variations of kinship systems in India. The above-said categories do not

define watertight compartmental categories rather it presents a few plausible ways of interpreting the variety of kinship systems in India through its varied topography and culture. The data on Kinship data is rich in India which gives a researcher a number of different options to view this intrinsic relation of human social life. The presence of different forms of kinship system strengthens future prospects of comparative theory construction in regard to kinship studies and adding to the literature on the kinship of the whole of South Asia. As there is exists variation within a community and between communities so a generalized conception in regard to kinship cannot be made overtly.

Though Iravati Karve is criticized for her generalization and factual errors of different regions, her works laid down the foundation stone of kinship studies in the Indian context. Her work can be taken as one of thread from where one can start investigating and analysing kinship in India further.

**Glossary:**

1. *Gestation-* Gestation, in mammals, is the time between conception and birth, during which the embryo or foetus is developing in the uterus.
2. *Siblingship-* Sibling, typically, a brother or a sister. Many societies choose not to differentiate children who have both parents in common from those who share only one parent; all are known simply as siblings. In those societies that do differentiate children on this basis, the former is known as full siblings, and the latter are known as half-siblings. While siblingship means the relationship between or among siblings.
3. *Gotra-* In Hindu society, gotra is equivalent to a clan
4. *Clan-* It is a kin group found in many traditional societies used as an organizational device. Membership in a clan is

traditionally defined in terms of descent from a common ancestor.

5. Descent- It is one of the common methods to classify human societies. The system of acknowledged social parentage varies from society to society, whereby a person may claim kinship ties with another. The four varieties of descent are bilateral, matrilineal, patrilineal and double descent.
6. Cognatic- A mode of descent traced from an ancestor/ancestress either from male lineage or female lineage
7. Affinal- The family relationship established through marriage
8. Agnatic-The male lineage or patrilineal
9. non-agnatic- non-male lineage
10. Matri clan- The clan pertaining to membership of female lineage.
11. Patri clan- The clan pertaining to membership of male lineage.

---

## 9.7 QUESTIONS

---

1. Write a short note on the regional kinship variance in India
2. What are common threads of kinship system which can be drawn from the northern and southern region of India?
3. Discuss few family types and kinship practices in northeastern part of India
4. Why is Karve's work still hold as a classic in kinship study of India?



---

## 9.8 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

---

Bathari, U. (2014). *Memory, History & Polity: A study of Dimasa Identity in Colonial Past & Post-Colonial Present*. Doctoral's thesis, Department of History, Gauhati University, Assam.

Bhandari, J.S. (Ed.). (1996) *Family and Kinship in Northeast-East India*. Vedam Books, Delhi.

Danda, D. (1978). *Among the Dimasa of Assam: An Ethnographic Study*. Sterling, New Delhi.

Fox, R. (1984). *Kinship and Marriage: An Anthropological Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Uberoi, P. (Ed.). (1993). *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

\*\*\*\*\*

---

## **UNIT 10: FAMILY AND KINSHIP IN THE NORTHEAST OF INDIA**

---

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Objectives

10.3 Matrilineal System in Northeast India

10.3.1 Garo Matrilineal Community of Meghalaya

10.4 Patrilineal System in Northeast India

10.4.1 Patrilineal System Among Pagro-Mising Community of  
North-East India

10.5 Double-Descent System in Northeast India

10.6 Summing Up

10.7 Questions

10.8 Recommended Readings and References

---

### **10.1 INTRODUCTION**

---

In the Northeast of India, there are many tribes and each tribe has a different family and kinship organisation. The Northeast of India is characterized by a distinct socio-historical background, ethnic composition and cultural heritage. The tribal societies are specially recognized for its kinship system. There are three major types of descent group and they are patrilineal, matrilineal and double descent.

Three important rules define kinship: the rules of descent, succession and inheritance. The term “descent” was first given a precise anthropological definition by W. H. R. Rivers (1924) about 80 years ago. He argued that this word should be used to denote recruitment to a descent group automatically by virtue of birth alone.

**Rules of descent** control the birth right membership of a social group; such membership may also be obtained by adoption. Descent through father is called patrilineal, and descent through mother is called matrilineal. In both cases, descent is unilineal since only one parent is considered for affiliation. In cases, where the descent is traced through both parents, it is called bilateral. There is also a type of descent called ambilateral in which patrilineal and matrilineal principles operate at the societal level but descent may be traced either through the mother or father but not both.

**Rules of succession** control the transmission of office or rank, it could be either patrilineal or matrilineal. In the matrilineal system, the title passes from a man to some other kinsman through women. In a patrilineal system, titles and position are passed through the male line.

**Rules of inheritance** are those which control the transmission of property from one generation to another. It may be patrilineal or matrilineal. The rules that control distribution between brothers (and/or sisters) are variable. In some communities, equal distribution is made, but in others rules of primogeniture and ultimogeniture is applied. In primogeniture it is the eldest son or daughter inherits the property and in ultimogeniture, it is the youngest son or daughter inherits the property.

---

## 10.2 OBJECTIVES

---

After reading this Unit, you shall be able to:

- Describe the unique kinship system of the North East of India;
- Explain about the Garo matrilineal system;
- Explain about the Mishing patrilineal system and the Dimasa double descent system;
- Analyse the different types of kinship and family system that exists in the North East of India.

---

### 10.3 MATRILINEAL SYSTEM IN NORTHEAST INDIA

---

According to G.P. Murdock's World Ethnographic Survey, there are 565 matrilineal societies, and in India, we have three known matrilineal societies, i.e. the *Khasis* and *Garos* of Meghalaya in the North-East of India and the *Nayars* of Kerala in the extreme South West of India. In our discussion, we will study the Garo and the Khasi matrilineal system of Northeast India. In this lesson, we will study the nature of this system that makes these people so unique.

In the state of **Meghalaya** of the Northeast of India, the tribes of Garo, Khasi and the Jaintias are matrilineal. A matrilineal society is also called matriline, it refers to a kinship system in which the descent is traced through the mother's side instead of the father's side.

Schneider and Gough state that in a matrilineal system, the transfer of group membership, wealth and political ties are directed towards matrilineal kin. It must be understood that matrilineal system does not mean the rule of women. A system in which a woman rules is called a matriarchal system.

#### 10.3.1 Garo Matrilineal Community of Meghalaya

Garos are matrilineal tribes. And descent, succession and inheritance are in the female line from mother to daughter. Which means when a child is born, s/he is affiliated to the mother's lineage and membership to the lineage is permanent and remains even after death.

Therefore, the characteristics of the Garo Matrilineal system are:

- (1) descent is traced through the female line.
- (2) Clan identity is inherited through the mother, and
- (3) Ancestral property is generally passed down from the mother to daughters, sons usually inherit nothing.

Let us look into the various aspect of the Garo matrilineal tribe:

**1) Social groups of the Garos:** The *machong* and the *maharis*: According to D.N. Majumdar (1980), the most important social group among the Garo society is the clan which is known as the *machong*. *Machong* is an exogamous matrilineal descent group, composed of smaller groups called the *maharis*. The *machong* acts as the unit that determines ownership of property and rules governing exogamy. The *mahari* is a close-knit group, among whom the actual blood relations can be traced. The *maharis* share joint responsibility, for example in case of disputes, one would expect support from one's own *mahari*. The two principal clan groups of the Garos are the Sangma and the Marak clans.

**2) Inheritance:** The Inheritance of property among the Garo community is in the female line, i.e. from the mother to the daughter. According to customs, all family property, whether movable or immovable, is inherited by the women. The women as a wife and a mother is the real owner of the family property which remains with her and her *machong* and is passed on from mother to daughter.

The largest portion of the property is given to the most favored daughter and smaller shares are distributed among other daughters. And the selected daughter for the inheritance of the property is called the *nokna* and her husband is called the *nokrom*.

**3) Succession:** In terms of succession to chieftainship or *nokmaship*, (village headman/chief), the office passes from one man to another through women. Hence, a man becomes a *nokma* by virtue of his marriage to the inheriting daughter of the previous *nokma*. Despite inheritance of property or lineage, women do not wield power at the home front nor at the public front. Thus,

it is clear that Garo community is merely matrilineal and not matriarchal.

**4) Marriage and Residence:** Garos practice exogamy. This means you cannot marry within the same clan group called the *machong*. After marriage the husband moves into the house of his wife. As such, the rule of residence among the Garos is matrilocal.

In the Garo community, matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is the most preferred type of alliance. Thus, according to the Garo custom the chosen heiress called the *nokna* has to marry her father's sister's son. However, in the absence of a suitable nephew of her father any man brought by heiress from any other clan except from her own *machong* becomes the *nokrom*.

In case of a non -heiress, she can marry a man of any other clan except her own *machong*.

In the Garo community, marriage within the same *machong* (clan) is considered a taboo, because marrying within the same *machong* is like marrying one's own relative. Among the Garos, a marriage forms a permanent bond between the *mahari* of the female and the *mahari* of the male. This bond is known as *akim*. The *akim* becomes responsible for property ownership and property management.

**5) Death:** Among the Garos, if an unmarried heiress dies, another girl is chosen in her place – either an unmarried sister or a related girl, of the same lineage, who can become an adopted heiress. A married sister cannot be made an heiress unless she is married to a man from the correct lineage who agrees to become an heir.

In a Garo household, where a *nokna* is already selected, at the death of the male head (*nokna*'s father) of the family, *nokrom* (*nokna*'s husband) takes over the management of the family. And if the dead man or *nokna*'s father is survived by his widowed wife, then she lives with her daughter and son-in-law for the rest of her life.

If a woman dies before her husband, it becomes the responsibility of the dead wife's *mahari* to recommend another wife. If the wife has an unmarried younger sister, she is the most suitable bride, but an elder sister is unsuitable. In the absence of an actual sister, one is adopted.

When the husband dies, it becomes the responsibility of the dead man's *mahari* to arrange for a replacement groom for the widow. Therefore, a unique system of marriage is found among the Garos in which along with the widow, the unmarried daughter is also married to the replacement groom. The younger wife is referred to as *jikgite*, and in the absence of a suitable young girl in the family, the *jikgite* could also be adopted

A ceremonial gift called *magual* is made at funerals of married men. The gift comes from the deceased man's wife's household. It is presented to the deceased man's mother's house. The most appropriate item is a brass gong. The gift symbolizes their willingness to maintain their side of the *akim* relationship. Unless the *magual* is presented, the relatives of the man do not feel obliged to send another man as a replacement groom for the dead person.

The Khasis like the Garos have the matrilineal family system. The matriliney of the Garos differ from that of the Khasis and Jaintias. Nakane (1967) had shown that the social structure of the Garos and the Khasis differ greatly.

Similarity is found only in the basic succession rules of mother-daughter, and mother's brother-sister's son. In fact, the property is owned by the woman, but the controlling power and authority over it are in the hands of the man. One of the most important aspect to know is that Khasi society is not a matriarchal society.

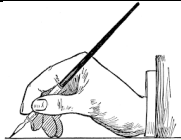
One important difference between the Khasi and the Garo community is, unlike the Garos, where the property is handed down to any one of

the most favoured daughters, in the Khasi community the property is handed down only to the youngest daughter, the *Khadduh*. The *Khadduh* is the custodian and preserver of her clan, family and lineage.

Therefore, the Garos follow the 5 rules of social custom –

- (1) lineage traced through females - hence matriliney - from mother to daughter
- (2) residence after marriage is matrilocal - hence a man after marriage moves to his wife's mother's house;
- (3) inheritance of property is through women - hence from mother to daughter. However, a woman is merely the custodian of ancestral property and cannot dispose it off without the permission of her male matrilineal kins (such as uncles, brothers).
- (4) avuncular status - maternal uncle assumes a high status in the family and clan, many a time, much more than the father (who is from a different clan);
- (5) succession to power - *nokmaship* (village headman/ chief) passes from a man to another man through women. Hence, a man becomes a *nokma* by virtue of his marriage to the inheriting daughter of the previous *nokma*. Therefore, Garo community is merely matrilineal and not matriarchal.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	1. What is matriliney?
<hr/>	
<hr/>	
<hr/>	
<hr/>	



2. Name the three known matrilineal communities in India

---

---

---

3. Write three characteristics of Garo Matrilineal system.

---

---

---

---

#### **10.4 PATRILINEAL SYSTEM IN NORTHEAST INDIA**

---

In a Patrilineal Descent system, an individual's kin group, or clan membership, is traced along the male line from father to son. It generally involves the inheritance of property, rights, names or titles by persons related through male-kin.

##### **10.4.1 Patrilineal System Among Pagro-Mising Community of Northeast India**

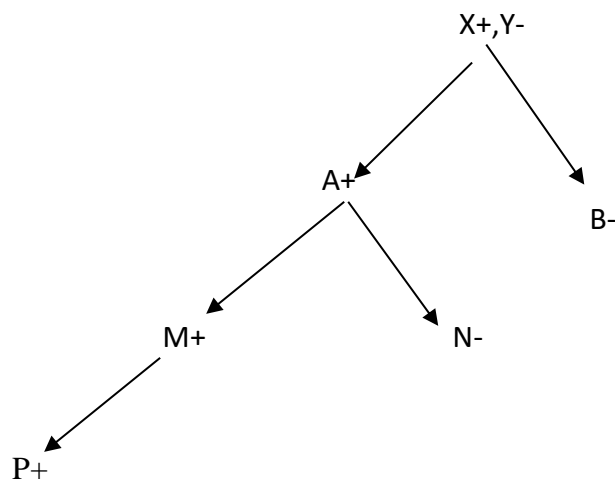
Majority communities in Northeast India are patrilineal. The Pagro-Mising community of Assam are patrilineal. The Pagro-Misings belong to the Barogam group, and their kinship organization was studied in detail by J. S. Bhandari in 1992.

Among the Misings, there is a clear insistence on biological paternity. It means tracing of the family lineage in the male line. In a Mising community the right to property, title and position are reserved for the male descendants.

The Mising community is also patriarchal in nature. Which means male members are in complete power and authority. The family and clan among the Misings are identified in the male line only.

Let me explain with an example. Let us say X, is a Mising man who marries Y, a Mising woman. She would come to the male household to live and adopt the surname of her husband. When they have a son A and daughter B, the son A would continue the lineage while the daughter B would go to some other household in marriage. She would give birth to the descendants of her husband and not her paternal descendants. The son A would continue the lineage from Minor to Major to Maximal extension.

Let me explain with the help of following diagram-



(In the diagram, (+) means male descendant while (–) refers to female descendant)

Here, X's family extends through A, his son and not through B, his daughter. B would get married and produce somebody else's progeny. You can see here that the family extends in a linear fashion through M and P, the male members. This linearity gives them the clan identity.

- 1) **Social group:** In terms of the **geographical location**, when you visit the locations dominated by Misings in upper Assam, you will find that they are grouped into two groups based on

geographical location and affiliation: Dahgam and Boragam. The Pagro Misings belong to the Boragam group.

In terms of **social grouping**, the Mising community is divided into two social groups of dominant clans, the Doley and Pegu, and their allied clans. Among the Mising, the clan is the largest category of social group with a common ancestor. Clans among the Misings usually live together in an area. Each clan has a chief called *gam*.

- 2) **Inheritance-** Inheritance follows the rule of descent. A patrilineal descent follows inheritance on male line. In Mising community of Northeast, the property left by parents would be divided among the sons equally. But, daughters would have no right over property. They would get married and move to their husband's household. Daughters would only inherit the mother's clothes and jewellery.
- 3) **Marriage:** The most important function of the clan is regulation of marriage. The Misings strictly maintain clan exogamy; therefore, a Doley cannot marry a Doley, or a Pegu a Pegu. After marriage the bride would go to live with the bridegroom. Therefore, the Misings follow the patrilocal rule of residence.

There are three different types of marriages-

- (i) **DARO MIDANG-** this form of marriage is arranged and settled by concerned parents of brides and

bridegrooms. It is an expensive wedding and a lengthy process and thus not everyone can afford.

(ii) **DUNGLA LA NAM**-this is a marriage by elopement with the consent of the bride.

(iii) **KUMNA SOLA LA NAM**-this is also done after consent from parents; however, performances on the wedding is not as spectacular.

*(Source: THE MISING TRIBE OF NORTH EAST INDIA- A GLIMPSE: NANDITA KAKOTI -Vol 3,Issue- 9.Sep-2017)*

The Misings discourage inter-caste marriage. However, it is not absent altogether.

True to the notion of a patrilineal system, the father or in his absence, the eldest son acts as the guardian of the marriage of male or female member. In the absence of both father and elder brother, paternal uncle or his sons would act as guardian. Once the girl is married, she belongs to the husband's family and the children would take the surname of the father and not that of the mother.

This gives the impression of diversity in North-eastern society in terms of practices, rituals, customs and traditions.

**Bride wealth is an important aspect in a Mising marriage:** It has a ritual significance among the patrilineal Mising tribe, it makes the ancestors of the groom accept the woman as an affine. A woman is not considered fully integrated into her husband's patri-clan unless at least a token bride-price has been paid for her at the time of marriage.

- 4) Ancestors - Ramnu and Ramku:** One of the unique characteristics of the Mising community is the role and importance given to the ancestors in a Mising community. The Misings call their ancestors as the *ramnu* and *ramku* ancestor. *Ramnu* and *ramku* ancestors play a very important role in a Mising community. The ancestors are the guiding principle of lineage among Pagro-Mising society. A *ramnu* is a man's deceased father's father. A *ramku* is a man's deceased father's father's father.

Let me show this through a table-

Generation 1	Ramku
Generation 2	Ramnu
Generation 3	
Generation 4	Ego

Ramnu and Ramku ancestors are considered as the guardians of the household of their descendants. It is believed that any disregard to these paternal ancestors would bring misfortune to the descendants. Therefore, they are invoked or summoned before any ceremony or festival. Moreover, the descendants perform Ramnu Urom Festival and Ramku Urom Festival to propitiate and regain the favours of the ramku and ramnu ancestors.

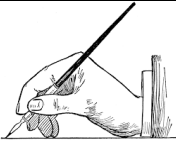
Thus, patrilineally, we can categorize them into three distinct lineages. They are shown below with the help of following table-

Minor Lineage	Those who have a common father's father, that means, common ramnu ancestor
Major Lineage	Those who have a common father's father's father, that means, ramku ancestor

Maximal Lineage	Those who have a common father's father's father's father, that means beyond ramnu ancestor
-----------------	---

It can be seen that the Major Lineage performs Ramku Urom Festival, while Minor Lineage performs Ramnu Urom festival. Moreover, two or more Maximal Lineages may join to offer *Bor Seva*. It is the most elaborate affair of ancestry worship.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	<p>1. What is patriliney?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>2. Name the different types of marriages found among the Misings in Assam.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>3. What are 'Ramku' and 'Ramnu'?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
--	---

### 10.5 DOUBLE DESCENT SYSTEM IN NORTH EAST INDIA

A double descent system is a system in which both patrilineal and matrilineal descent is recognised. In other words, in a double descent

system, descent is traced in both the father's line as well mother's line for different attributes such as movable property in one line and immovable property in another. According to G.P. Murdock "double descent is essentially a combination of matrilineal and patrilineal descent, the two modes of affiliation being followed concurrently".

The Dimasa tribe of Assam, who live in the North Cachar Hills of Assam follow the double descent system. Danda (1996: 228) says, "In the whole of North East India, the Dimasa of North Cachar Hills stands out distinctly in this respect and presents a case of double descent". An ethnographic study on this tribe was made by Dipali Danda in 1978, where this system was first discussed.

**Descent:** In a Dimasa household a man establishes descent from father's father and mother's mother. Because of the double descent system, double clan system has evolved in the Dimasa community. A Dimasa individual has a kinship bond with both sets of clans. In this society there are two co-existent and intersecting sibs of kin groups, one matrilineal and another patrilineal. Patriclans are called *sengfong* and matriclans *jaddi* or *jilu*. Among the Dimasas, there is almost equal number of patri and matri clans. Both the clans are exogamous in nature.

Among the Dimasas, the Ego is affiliated with both his paternal and maternal ancestors with one speciality, the importance and intensity of affiliations are not uniform for both the genders.

Danda (1978, 1996) stated that among the Dimasas, there are **two types** of clan affiliations called the:-

- i) primary clan affiliation and
- ii) secondary clan affiliations

These two types of clan affiliation are based on two aspects and they are:-

- i) sex of the person and
- ii) his or her relationship with the ancestor.

Primary affiliation means descent continues lineally through generations, i.e. from father's father to son's son or from mother's mother to daughter's daughter.

Secondary affiliations, on the other hand, changes in every alternate generation. In a secondary affiliation a man traces his descent from his mother's mother and his son also from his own mother's mother. Similarly, for a woman, her secondary affiliation is derived from her father's father and it changes after her marriage. Her daughter would have the secondary affiliation from her own father's father and not from her mother's father. Therefore, it changes in every generation.

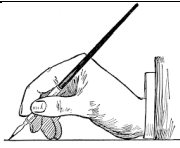
**Marriage:** Double descent system also controls the marriage system in the Dimasa society. Both patri and matri clans of the Dimasa community is exogamous. The Dimasa marriage rules include the following:

1. It prohibits marriage between members of the same patriclan and matriclan
2. It prohibits marriage between consanguines (relatives by blood)
3. Marriage with cross-cousins both patrilateral and matrilateral are allowed, as this does not violate the rules of exogamy
4. Sororate and levirate are permitted. However, they are not much preferred in the society.

In the Dimasa community, because of the double clan bond system, equal emphasis and importance is given to both the patri-kin and the matri-kin.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. What is double descent system?

-----  
-----  
-----

2. Name a community of Assam that follows the double descent system.

-----

3. What are *sengfong* and *jaddi* or *jilu*?

-----  
-----  
-----

---

### 10.6 SUMMING UP

In this unit, we have learnt the kinship system in Northeast India, focusing on matriliney, patriliney as well as double descent system. In the context of matrilineal system, we have discussed the Garos and the Khasis of Meghalaya whereas, in the context of patrilineal system, we have discussed the Pagro-Mising community. To understand the concept of double descent, we have taken up the example of the Dimasas. This Unit only covers a small portion of the kinship system in Northeast India. You are expected to go through the recommended readings to have a better understanding of the kinship system in Northeast India.

---

## 10.7 QUESTIONS

---

1. Define Matrilineal system.
2. What is the difference between matrilineal system and matriarchal system?
3. How many types of descent groups are found in the North East of India?
4. What is the difference between matrilineal and patrilineal system?
5. What is a double descent system?
6. Why is the kinship system in North East of India unique? Elaborate with suitable examples.

---

## 10.8 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

---

Bhandari, J. S. (1992). *Kinship, Affinity and Domestic Group: A Study among the Mishings of the Brahmaputra Valley*. Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi.

Danda, D. G. (1978). *Among the Dimasa of Assam: An Ethnographic Study*. Sterling Publishers, New Delhi.

(1996). Kinship and descent among the Dimasa. In: J. S. Bhandari (ed.), *Kinship and Family in North-East India*, pp. 225-246. Cosmo Publications, New Delhi.

Nakane, C. (1967). *Khasi and Garo: A Comparative Study in Matrilineal System*. Mouton and Co., Paris.

Schneider, D. M and Gough, K. (1961). *Matrilineal Kinship*. University of California Press, Berkeley & LA.

Quinbala Marak: *A Note on Kinship Studies in North-East India*

\*\*\*\*\*

---

## **UNIT 11: FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD, CHANGING NATURE OF FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIP IN INDIA**

---

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Objectives
- 11.3 Family
- 11.4 Functionalist Perspective on Family
- 11.5 Marxist Perspective on Family
- 11.6 Feminist Perspectives on Family
- 11.7 Household
- 11.8 Family and Household: Relationships and Distinctions
- 11.9 Changing Nature of Family in India
- 11.10 Summing Up
- 11.11 Questions
- 11.12 Recommended Readings and References

---

### **11.1 INTRODUCTION**

---

As you may have already learnt in the previous units, the basic material definition of family is that it is the elementary economic unit of human society. This is the most functional definition that has been used to define family by sociologists and economists alike. The multifaceted functions performed by the institution of family as a basic unit in the society makes it an important institution in a society. There are several important functions performed by the family which include the reproduction of new members and their socialization and giving of both physical care and emotional support to the elderly as well as the young. Family, in fact, is an institution which resolves or eases a large number of social problems.

There are several definitions of the term 'family' given by various sociologists and anthropologists. Murdock (1949), after studying over 250 multicultural societies defines family as a "social group characterized by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction". It includes adults of both sexes, of whom at least two should maintain a socially approved sexual relationship and one or more children - own or adopted. The 'household' is said to be the 'living arrangement' of such a family unit.

In this unit, we shall learn about the relationships and distinctions between family and household and try to get an idea about the changing nature of family in India.

---

## **11.2 OBJECTIVES**

---

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- Define the family and household;
- Analyse the relationships and distinctions between family and household;
- Explain the changing nature of family in India.

---

## **11.3 FAMILY**

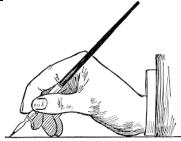
---

George Peter Murdock (1949) defined the family as "a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction." He added that the family "includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children". Haralambos and Herald (1997) define family as a platform for socialization, economic activity, and sexual activities between two persons of opposite sex who will indulge in sexual activity at least for the sake of pleasure and will also have children as well as descendants. Most of the definitions consider family as a universal social institution which consists of persons linked directly to each other through

kinship ties where the adult members take the responsibility of caring for the young ones (Marsh et al., 1996).

The sociologists have classified family into two main types—nuclear and extended. A nuclear family consists of two adults and their children. It is often referred to as the “immediate family”. Extended family, on the other hand, is often considered to be an old system of family which is marked by close connections between/among two or three generations of relations, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, wives of brothers, etc. (Bilton et. al., 1996; Giddens, 1993). This typology of the family is basically on the basis of the size of the family. Another categorization gives us two more types—the family of orientation and the family of procreation. A person’s family of orientation is the family to which s/he is born. On the other hand, when a person creates her/his own family as an adult by marrying and procreating, that family is referred to as her/his family of procreation. In sociology, family systems may also be categorized based on the residence of the couple after marriage. For example, if a married couple moves to live with the parents of the bride or of her house with close proximity to her kin, such family is recognized as a matrilocal family, while the inverse of this model is identified as the patrilocal family (Giddens 1993).

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	1. Write one definition of family.
<hr/>	
<hr/>	
2. What are the two main types of family?	
<hr/>	
<hr/>	

---

#### **11.4 FUNCTIONALIST PERSPECTIVE ON FAMILY**

---

According to the functionalists, the family is the basic functional unit of society. Murdock (1985) argued that every society consists of a universal nuclear family structure. Murdock studied around two hundred and fifty human societies and found that in most known societies, nuclear family can be found as a distinct group which is strongly functional in some form or other. It is a universal human social grouping which may compound into more complex groupings at a later stage. Murdock was a functionalist. According to him, the family serves four key functions:

1.      Sexual: It allows the individual to express his/her sexuality in a way that is accepted by society, by stabilizing the sexual relationships for adults and controlling the sexual habit of the members.
2.      Reproduction: Apart from bringing in new members to the society, the family works as a suitable way of raising children, providing them social legitimacy.
3.      Socialization: Family provides the space for the primary socialization of children thus teaching them the socially accepted behaviour and societal norms and values.
4.      Economic: It serves as a unit that meets the basic human requirements of food, clothes and shelter of the family members with parents as providers and children as dependents.

According to Murdock, without the above key functions of family, society will cease to function and will eventually disappear. This view of Murdock and other functionalists has been criticised for its idealistic nature.

---

### **11.5 MARXIST PERSPECTIVE ON FAMILY**

---

Unlike the sociologists, the Marxists are of the opinion that the economic function of the family is more significant than cultural or social value. They view the family as an exploitation of women. However, the Marxist sociologists emphasize on capitalism and family only in terms of their interrelationship and not on how women as members of the same society suffer from this arrangement. *The Origin of Family, Private Property and the State*, a book by Fredrick Engels states that the original relationship between men and family has always been that of private property. The need to transfer property to a male blood kin contributes to the sustaining of the family as an economic unit which further works to contribute to the development of private property (Engels, 1884). Engels thus views the family as a reproduction of the capitalist system.

---

### **11.6 FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE ON FAMILY**

---

That gender is a socially constructed identity has been accepted by almost all social scientists. The social construction of gender means that gender roles are internalized through social training rather than fixed by biology. Family acts as space where individuals are trained to behave in a way that is appropriate to their assigned gender. The feminists argue that two key functions of the nuclear family have traditionally oppressed women: a) different socialization for boys and girls, i.e., while the girls are taught to be more feminine and docile in the family, the boys are encouraged to believe that they are superior and need to be manly and muscular. b) socialising women in a way that the role of 'housewife' became the only ideal and an acceptable role for an ideal feminine woman. The feminists thus see the institution of family to be functioning as a fertile space for individuals to develop patriarchal attitudes, thus giving rise to a society that is utterly patriarchal in its values and operations. The feminist perspective on the family can be understood through the following three strands of feminist thought:

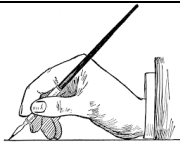
1.     **Marxist feminist perspective:** The Marxist feminists draw upon the Marxist concept of family to argue how exploitation of women stays as a key characteristic of the institution of family. Here, we shall see how the idealistic view of nuclear family by the functionalists like Murdock is criticised. Criticising the 'ideal' nuclear family, the Marxist feminists call it an ideological instrument wherein everyone aspires for an ideal family of two parents, with the father as the breadwinner and the mother as the caregiver of the children. For them, stressing on the role of mothers and creating an elusive social aspiration for women to have children and take the responsibility to rear them is an important characteristic of capitalist society. It also exploits the women in terms of work done at home where the unpaid work done by them at home is seen as a labour of love. This ideology is further supported by the state. The state often formulates policies that emphasise and encourage the role of women as mothers. It idealises the image of women as mothers and contributes towards creating stereotypes about women and family, thus taking a part in limiting the potential of women as human resources.

2.     **Radical feminist perspective:** Radical feminists see society as patriarchal. For them, a society which has unequal relations of power between women and men and which leads to a systematic disadvantage and oppression which are experienced by the womenfolk, is essentially a patriarchal society. The radical feminists see family as an instrument of continuing male power.

3.     **Liberal feminist perspective:** Liberal feminists are comparatively less critical of the family than Marxist or Radical Feminists. They suggest that improving family life for women requires modest policy reforms rather than revolutionary change.



## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS



1. Engels views family as the \_\_\_\_\_ of the capitalist system.

2. The feminists see the institution of family to be functioning as a \_\_\_\_\_ space for individuals to develop \_\_\_\_\_.

---

### 11.7 HOUSEHOLD

The layman definition of household is a group of people who live together and who often are also a family. In other words, all the people who live together in a family or a group who live together in a house constitutes a household. It basically refers to a person or a group of persons dwelling together in a single residence. A household is a residential space in which the members organize and carry out various activities important for sustaining life, such as economic production, consumption, inheritance and child rearing.

A household is constituted by one or more person(s) who share a residential space. Therefore, not all households contain families. Family households usually comprise of two or more individuals who are related to one another either by birth or conjugality and even by adoption. Along with this, there may also exist unrelated people who may be living in the same household.

---

### 11.8 FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD: RELATIONSHIP AND DISTINCTIONS

Although often used synonymously by the laymen, family and household are not the same. In simple terms, a family may refer to a group of people affiliated to one another by 'consanguinity, affinity or co-residence'. A household, on the other hand, may refer to a

person or a group of persons dwelling together in a single residence. A household is a residential space in which the members organize and carry out various activities important for sustaining life, such as economic production, consumption, inheritance, child rearing and shelter. In a normative traditional society, family and household often display similar characteristics. They are also basic units of analysis in studying demography. However, a family may or may not constitute a household. Similarly, a household may or may not contain a family. While explaining how family and household can differ sociologically, A.M. Shah in his work *Basic Terms and Concepts in the Study of Family in India*, argues that the 'elementary family' is not the same as a 'simple household' and that a household composed of a complete elementary family is only one of the several types of 'simple household'. Government and policy discussions often tend to treat the terms 'household' and 'family' as synonymous, but in reality, it is not necessary that there be always a direct relationship between households and families.

According to Tulsi Patel, "the family is a unique institution in that it is at one and the same time both a private and a visibly public institution. It oscillates between the most intimate to the most public in its various contexts." The word 'family' has been used in several different senses by different scholars- a) as the household- a body of persons who live in one house or under one head, including parents, children, servants etc, b) as a group consisting of parents and their children who may or may not reside together in the same house, c) all those who are nearly related by blood and affinity, d) those descended or claiming descent from a common ancestor, a house, kindred, lineage. The above four definitions are clearly related to each other, but they should be clearly distinguished from each other. According to Tulsi Patel, the terms 'domestic group' and 'household' thus got introduced as they provided an understanding of the family that was

not discrete and helped in viewing it more as a process than as a static institution.

A group that comprises of a man along with his wife and the children born to or adopted by both is usually considered as an elementary family. Many thinkers of Indian family tend to assume that even in an elementary family, the members always live together as a same household group, just as in case of a joint or extended family. However, it is much more complex than the assumption since one can also find households composed of both complete elementary family as well as households composed of incomplete elementary family.

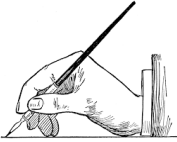
When two or more elementary families are joined together, they usually form a joint family. If based on the principle of patrilineal descent, it is called patrilineal joint family, and if based on the principle of matrilineal descent, it is called the matrilineal joint family. In other words, a patrilineal extended family is formed by an extension of father-son relationship and a matrilineal extended family is formed by an extension of mother-daughter relationship.

However, changes can be seen to have appeared in the Indian Family. These changes are both functional and structural in nature. Sociologists like A.M. Shah have pointed out that what is emerging out of these changes is not the elementary family but a new form of the joint family.

Kapadia (1956) argues that the traditional joint family consisted of the patriarch, his brothers and their grandsons whereas the modern joint family is constituted by the patriarch, his sons and grandsons. He argues that the said change could be mainly due to the changes that are taking place in terms of industrialization and subsequent urbanization. According to Orenstein, however, figures from census

show a slight increase in the average size of the household rather than a decrease. He thus maintains that westernization and industrialization have not been effective in bringing about the so-called disintegration of joint families. This view of Orenstein is further analysed by Shah who extends the argument to state that studies on family and household in India needs to be freed from existing perspectives and need to be looked at afresh. We shall discuss this in detail in the next section.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

	<p>1. What do you mean by a household?</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>
	<p>2. State one difference between family and household.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p>

---

### 11.9 CHANGING NATURE OF FAMILY IN INDIA

---

The traditional definition of family would be that it is a basic social unit consisting of parents and their children, considered as a group, whether dwelling together or not. However, the traditional definition of family needs to be revisited, since family as a social unit has undergone structural changes in recent times. The traditional notion of the family no longer holds itself true for all sections of the society. The changes in social values seem to have brought in an overall social change. Women are seen to be increasingly participating in the

production process. Their active participation as human resources in the production of economic goods and services have contributed to significant changes in the institution of the family. There have been changes in the patterns of marriage, with a visible shift from the traditional norms of arranged marriage. The changes in social phenomena are no more limited to the West but rather are becoming visible in the developing societies too.

Kath Weston's work *Families We Choose* may be read to get an idea about contemporary changes in notions about families and households with respect to gender and kinship. This classic text, originally published in 1991, draws upon fieldwork and interviews to explore the ways gay men and lesbians are constructing their own notions of kinship by drawing on the symbolism of love, friendship, and biology.

Apart from the effects of globalization, the excessive individualization of society in the postmodern times has hugely impacted the Indian society too, bringing in changes in the notions of family. These changes can be seen to have become more prominent in urban spaces like cities and metro cities. Changes in gender roles, emergence and acceptance of more complex gender in these spaces have given rise to newer versions of family. In this regard, different sociologists and social scientists have put forward different opinions on the nature of change in the concept of family and household in India. The perspective of sociologist A. M. Shah is important here. Shah argues that the average size of the household in the early decades of the 19th century was more or less same as it is now and argues that the belief about the wide prevalence of large and joint households in pre-British India is false. According to Shah, postulating a single line of change for the entire Indian society would not be fruitful. He argues that there is a need to distinguish the normal developmental process from change. According to him, bringing M.N. Srinivas's ideas on

Sanskritization and Westernization into the study of the household could prove profitable. The process of Sanskritization of lower castes and Adivasi tribes has been going on since long past in the country in a massive scale, and this may have contributed to an overall greater emphasis on the principle of residential unity of patri kins and their wives.

Westernization of higher castes have undeniably resulted in the opposite, but Shah argues that the influence of Sanskritization might have actually led to an overall tendency of greater emphasis on the said principle. Shah agrees partially with Orenstein's analysis that there was a slight increase in the average size of the household due to demographic factors but maintains that the problem of the impact of industrialization and urbanization on the household has to be looked at from a fresh perspective. Migration of rural people from the village to town does not necessarily mean migration from a social environment of large and joint households to that of small and simple households. In other words, according to Shah, the whole question of the relationship between migration and households in India is complicated and can be understood better only if one gets rid of established assumptions. Shah, therefore, argues that one needs to inquire about the changes by using newer and more fresh sociological tools and perspectives rather than simply assuming that there has been an inevitable change from large and complex joint households to small and simple ones.

---

#### **11.10 SUMMING UP**

---

The concepts of family and household are thus interrelated, though not the same. The changing patterns of family and household have their impacts on the overall growth of society. Indian society, in particular, is undergoing changes due to these changing patterns.

---

### 11.11 QUESTIONS

---

1. Critically examine the functionalist perspective on the family.  
What are the four key functions of family described by Murdock?
2. What are the various perspectives on the family? Describe briefly
3. What is a household? Discuss its similarity or differences with family.
4. What is the nature of change, if any, in the notions of family and household in India? Examine with reference to A.M. Shah's study of family and household.

---

### 11.12 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

---

Patel, T. (Ed). (2005). *The Family in India: Structure and Practice*. Sage, New Delhi.

Shah, A.M. (1998). *Family in India: Critical Essays*. Orient Longman, New Delhi.

Weston, K. (1991). *Families We Choose*. Columbia University Press, New York

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4358128.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A6fd5c67a0d2eb677b15417\\_c54da738a6](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/4358128.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A6fd5c67a0d2eb677b15417_c54da738a6)

<http://www.markedbyteachers.com/as-and-a-level/sociology/summary-of-sociologists-studies-of-the-family-in-india.html>

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/Publications/mtintro.pdf>

\*\*\*\*\*

## **MODULE IV: CHANGING DISCOURSE OF FAMILY AND KINSHIP**



---

## **UNIT 12: CHANGING DISCOURSE OF FAMILY AND KINSHIP**

---

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Objectives
- 12.3 The Family System
- 12.4 The Household Size and Composition
- 12.5 Transformations of the Kinship System and the Reasons Behind It
- 12.6 Summing Up
- 12.7 Questions
- 12.8 Recommended Readings and References

---

### **12.1 INTRODUCTION**

---

In the previous units, we have discussed various aspects of the kinship system like family, social network, social customs, and marriage system among others. In this module, we will discuss the emerging changes in this very spectrum. In the following units, we will discuss the transformations in the family composition, question patriarchal norms and age-old systems as well as recognize the alternative family systems and the reproduction techniques that have developed over time.

This unit will focus on the family system, the Indian family structure and household size. The family composition and inter-relationship among members of the family will also be discussed. Lastly, we will also discuss the gradual transformation in the kinship system and the reasons behind it.

Kinship system is one of the most important aspects for an individual as it defines the social actions and interactions in the society one belongs to. It is a web of social relationships and networks that govern the people associated by descent and/or marriage through customary systems and

statuses According to the anthropologist Robin Fox, "the study of kinship is the study of what man does with these basic facts of life – mating, gestation, parenthood, socialization, siblingship etc." It is these raw processes that humans give a social meaning. The basic concepts, thus, include the family system, descent, marriage and alliances to name a few which will be discussed broadly in the following sections.

---

## **12.2 OBJECTIVES**

---

The objective of this unit is to discuss the household dimensions of a family and the gradual change in the discourse of family and kinship. By the end of this Unit, you are expected to:

- Explain the family system, especially, the dimensions of the household in the Northeast Indian states;
- Discuss the change in the discourse of family and kinship;
- Explain the reasons behind such transformation in the kinship system.

---

## **12.3 THE FAMILY SYSTEM**

---

The family is considered to be the basic unit in a society that is essential for social, economic, political and socialization processes. It is composed of consanguineal ties, i.e. kins related through blood and affinal ties, i.e. kinship based on marriage. On the basis of the degree of proximity in their relationship, the kinsmen can also be designated into primary, secondary and tertiary kins. According to Dubey, there are eight such primary kins – husband-wife, father-son, mother-daughter, mother-son, younger-elder brothers, younger-elder sisters and sister-brother.

Now, kinship not only describes the different networks that form the society but also, expresses how new kinship relations can be formed. In

the case of marriage, it provides the preferable marriage systems and social categories to choose a bride/groom from, the relationship between the bride-takers and the bride-givers along with defining the marriage customs and norms. For instance, in the case of the Jaunsar Bawar society of the mountainous sub-division of Dehradun district in the north-western Uttar Pradesh, fraternal polyandry is practised. That is, here, a woman has to marry with the eldest brother and after the marriage ceremony, all the brothers become the husbands of the woman. Again, in the case of the Dravidian kinship, cross-cousin marriage is prescribed among certain castes and is a preferred form of marriage in other regions. But, marriage between maternal parallel-cousin is not permitted.

Moreover, the kinship terminology differentiates various types of kins. Morgan has classified the kinship terminology into the descriptive and classificatory system. In the classificatory system, various kins are attributed by an equivalent term; like the uncle in the American Kinship terminology. Descriptive system, on the other hand, is used to describe the exact relation of a person to the ego. In Assamese society, there are different terms such as “Mami”, “Khuri”, “Jethai”, “Mahi” and “Pehi” for the relation of an aunt to the ego.

In the majority of the societies around the world, there is the prevalence of a patriarch, a male, who is considered as the head of the family and the members of the family functions under his authority and control.

#### **Activity**

Why is the patriarchal system dominantly prevalent in the modern world? And, did matriarchal families existed in the past?

Write an essay on your perception on the evolution and nature of patriarchal system in India.

The chief exponent of the Patriarchal Theory, **Sir Henry Maine**, maintained that society in primitive times was “in fact, and in the view of the men that composed it... an aggregation of families,” and not a collection of individuals. The eldest ascendant was supreme in his household and his domination extended “to life and death, and is as unqualified over his children and their houses as over his slaves.”

His theory has been criticised as being just a speculation into the beginnings of the early society, particularly the family. McLennan and other scholars have denied this claim of the patriarchal family being the earliest and original unit, many claiming the Matriarchal system as the earliest unit of society.

Marxists, on the other hand, adopt a structural perspective on family opining that men after acquiring wealth and property, in order to ensure their transfer to his rightful offspring, replaced free sexual relations. Thus, through monogamy, families became patriarchal and it ensured male domination.

Under the patriarchal system, final authority rests on the male head of the family. In a traditional Indian family, this basic unit is most essentially a patrilineal, patrilocal, extended group where customary moral and social values demand the wives in the household to place their devotion towards their husband and welfare of their children. However, although it is a dominant phenomenon, it is not universal. There also exists matrilineal societies in India like in the case of the Nayers in Central Kerala and Khasis in the north-eastern state of Meghalaya.

These varied societies have a diverse gender-related division of labour and contribution of the sexes to the material resources. This divergence leads to a change in the married couples' choice of residence, the line of descent as well as inheritance.

Among the Khasis, the nucleus of matriliney is based on the lineage identified to a common ancestress, inheritance recognized to the female head of the family and authority of the maternal uncle. The line of descent links the mother to the daughter. Women are central to the family in Khasi ideology as well as in the process of reproduction as it is believed that it is the women folk who carry the brunt of parenthood. The Khasis believe that women have control over the children as they nurture them with their own blood and flesh rather than the man who only provide what is called as ‘pus’. Thus, the husband/ father remains an outsider. This matrilineal system creates intense role conflict among the menfolk. With the change in time and circumstances, however, there have been significant changes in this social system. We will discuss extensively this system and on-going changes in our next unit.

Even, in the case of the Matrilineal joint family known as Tarwad, the relationship of men with women are seen as that of a brother, son, daughter’s son and sister’s son. Discussing the kinship system among the Nayars of the Malabar Coast, E. Kathleen Gough states in her essay, “The Nayars and the Definition of Marriage” that Nayar marriages were polygynous and Nayar household was avunculocal even before the British period. In such a society where the women folk were not maintained as “wives” by the men, the fatherhood of a child was uncertain. The men who accepted the paternal duties of paying all the expenses for the delivery of a child was presumed to be the father of the child. Like the Khasis, we will also learn about the nature of Nayar household as well as changes to the system due to deviations in various dynamics in the society in the next section.

So, through the cases mentioned above, it is clear that though the patriarchal form of marriage is dominantly present in India, there also exist kinship systems where the elementary family of father, mother and child is not institutionalized as a legal, productive, distributive, residential, socializing or consumption unit.

---

## 12.4 THE HOUSEHOLD SIZE AND COMPOSITION

---

Although the terms ‘Family’ and ‘Household’ are used interchangeably, there is a difference between the concepts. ‘Family’ is a group membership system based on affinal or consanguineal ties whereas ‘Household’, on the other hand, is a socio-economic co-residential unit.

According to a report, “Changing Household Size in India: An Inter-State Comparison, Shillong, Meghalaya”, since 1991, the mean household size is declining. Also, there is a gradual increase in the number of households which is much faster than the rate at which the country’s population is increasing. It also reports that the range of variation in the number of households is remarkably high in the plains. On the other hand, if you take the case of the hills and mountainous areas, the household increase is rather small compared to population growth.

The outstanding growth in households in relation to the growth in population can be taken into account as, since the year 2011, this trend is seen to have declined. However, in the case of Manipur again, there is a rise in the household numbers in comparison to other states in the North-eastern region. But that can be explained by the fact that Manipur supports most of the proportion of its population in the valley region. Again, in the case of South India, fewer households showed a tendency towards a larger size.

Any change in the number of households or their size is essential to be remarked as family and households are important factors of the socio-economic institutions. These changes reflect the effects of social, economic or demographic processes. Though not spatially uniform in regional variation, the report indicates towards an increase in the number of households in India. The report suggests that this increase in household size is indicative of a rise in nuclear families in relation to multigenerational families which till recent times were far more widespread in India. Also, demographers are of the opinion that this

change is leading to a deepening of the demographic transition process in India.

Household composition is as important as the household size that has gone through changes in the current scenario. This is so because the demographic parameters have a strong association with household dynamics, especially household composition. Changes in household size are clear reflections on changes in living arrangements as well as in household composition. The problem acquires nuances of meanings in a country like India which has shown indications towards a tendency to move into a low fertility regime in the years to come. However, aggregate demographic statistics generally mask substantial changes in the size and number of households. As in most indicators of demographic, economic and social changes, household changes are neither uniform in their social content nor in their spatial content.

No association could be established between the proportion of the Scheduled Caste and proportion of single member as well as six-member households. The Scheduled Tribes, however, showed a positive association with larger households particularly in the year 2011. The proportion of Hindus and Muslims in the population showed a positive association with larger households, though the coefficient of correlation is not strong enough to draw any firm conclusion.

As discussed earlier, various factors lead to such changes in the dynamics. The nuclear family exists as a result of the emergence of the market economy as well as the migration of youth to urban centres. These developments tend to break organic functioning of the joint, integrated family where each member is dependent on the other and together are engaged in agricultural activities. Urban socio-economic forces also have an impact on the rural setting.

Moreover, the impact of industrialisation, urbanisation, Western education and employment opportunities along with legislation have

weakened the traditional authority where the rule of custom is being replaced by the rule of law. There have also been changes in the status of the women as with the access to education, women are able to earn their livelihood. Moreover, the notion of the family structure is changing with increasing recognition to sexual minorities who basically comprise of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. Also, the core of the changing nature of the family structure is the problem of child-bearing and the parent-child relationship. With the development of assisted reproductive technologies, the nature of the traditional reproduction process and the customs related to it are also facing changes. We will discuss more on the topic in our last unit.

---

## **12.5 TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE KINSHIP SYSTEM AND THE REASONS BEHIND IT**

---

Certain dominant trends in the Indian family in the last few decades include an increase in the formation of nuclear and neolocal families, transfer of certain educational, recreational and protective functions to other institutions rather than family and societal system and liberalisation of perception and practice towards sex to name a few. American anthropologist George Murdock states, "When any social system which has attained equilibrium begins to change, such change regularly begins with modification of the rule of residence. Alteration in residence rules is followed by development or change in form of descent consistent with residence rules. Finally, adaptive changes in kinship terminology follow (Murdock, 1949:221-222)." So, according to this Main Sequence theory, if there is an increase in the proportion of women in the labour force, it will ultimately lead towards the trend of neolocal residence. Again, this, in turn, will lead to an increased emphasis upon individuality that results in weakening of familial ties as obligations towards the extended family diminishes. This, in the long run, may lead to changes in kin terminology



as well as identity. For instance, choosing surnames on the basis of preference and not on the basis of descent/ lineage.

Studies indicate that there is an increasing tendency towards neo-local residence, that is a type of post-marital residence in which a newly married couple resides separately from both the husband's natal household and the wife's natal household, from that of the traditional setting. However, the perception of joint family and opinion on its current and future trend differs among scholars. Ram Ahuja, in *Society in India*, argues that “jointness of family in India is not disappearing...” He believes that nuclear families are still “functionally dependent on some primary kin”.

There has also been Interactional Changes which Ram Ahuja points out in three levels: husband-wife relations, parental-filial relations; and relations between daughter-in-law and parents-in-law.

In case of husband-wife relations, Ahuja is of the opinion that even in a male-dominated household, women are able to exercise “ideological source of power”.

Studies on the husband-wife relations in Indian society by Gore (1968) and Murray Straus (1969) designate changes in conjugal bonds like in case of power allocation in decision-making where the wife plays an instrumental role in the contemporary family. It may be due to women attaining higher education and assuming economic roles, thus, emancipating themselves.

In the case of parent-child relations, changes are evident in terms of the right to discuss on family matters as children are actively included in decision-making, in terms of freedom as certain legislation enables children to demand their rights as well as oppose the authority.

Above mentioned paragraphs are able to indicate towards the weakening of familial norms. For instance, the youth often defies dominant norms

due to various factors which have been pointed out by Ram Ahuja as “... influence of western culture, values picked up from commercial means of entertainment, increased leisure, greater affluence, and power of parents”.

#### **Activity**

The above paragraph discusses the perspective of Ram Ahuja in his book *Society in India*.

What is your take on the emerging trend of youth culture in India? Try to find the transition in kinship relations, especially among youths in Western cultures.

In earlier settings, the patriarch controlled the younger generation and looked after the daily affairs. Norms on proper behaviour and action were accepted unopposed. Exposure to the Western culture has declined parental authority as the idea of equality and individualism has been introduced that, in turn, leads to a difference in attitudes towards traditional customs and beliefs. For instance, there is the prevalence of an extreme protest regarding demands for the law of equitable distribution of wealth, both self-acquired and ancestral, among the children, irrespective of their gender. Exasperated by traditional restrictions that Khasi matriliney imposes, the Khasi men urge for the passing of the Meghalaya Succession to Self-Acquired Property Act, 1984. This Act may free Khasi men from customs and norms they consider outmoded, but it will wane the Khasi women's position as the wife have no claim over her spouses' self-acquired property.

Again, as stated earlier, Sexual minorities are constructing their own notions of kinship by drawing on the symbolism of love, friendship and biology. Conventional views of the family have depicted gays and lesbians as exiles from the realm of kinship. But, in recent decades, sexual minorities have increasingly portrayed themselves as people who

seek not only to maintain ties with blood or adoptive relatives but also to establish families of their own.

But, are such changes enough to breakdown the family and the kinship system? Plural-Feminist-Marxists believe that family will not break up but adapt itself to changes.

---

## **12.6 SUMMING UP**

Family plays a decisive role in moulding the personality of a child and at the same time playing a significant part in the cultural and social arena. However, we have seen in the above sections that the traditional notion of family – in terms of household size and composition – has been changing due to many developments in the modern times. Despite these changes, however, there is a difference in change between the rural and urban household as rural families are still more or less integrated and function organically, engaged in the agricultural occupation. Although like urban households, it is going through qualitative changes like the gradual decline of the dominance of familism, the family and the kinship system do exist, albeit certain structural changes.

Through the paper “Changing Household Size in India: An Inter-State Comparison, Shillong, Meghalaya” as discussed above, we have examined the inter-state variation in this feature of change that is unfolding in India in recent years. The study reveals that the demographic parameters, in contrast to non-demographic parameters, have a stronger association with extremes of household size—whether it be compact or expanded.

Certain factors responsible for such changes in the social equilibrium can be the introduction of modern means of communication and Western educational and financial institutions, development of social reform movements as well as modern legislations like the Constitutional provisions of equality and freedom along with the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955, Widow Remarriage Act of 1856 and the Child Marriage

Restraint Act to name a few. Let us take the case of the Khasi Kinship System. The advent of the British led to many adverse impacts on the Indian society. For example, the development of the cash economy, Western education and improved communication system along with importance to educational qualification rather than caste identity. Reforms in education and administration led to a greater sense of individualism. Education and increase in employment also helped the Khasi men to acquire wealth and thus, demand for the bride to be brought to his house after marriage rather than practising the traditional matrilineal custom. We will discuss more on these changes in the next unit.

Studies on structural changes in family indicate a trend towards a transitional family system and the weakening of family norms along with increasing equality of individual, equal status for women and aggregating growth of opportunities for the development of the individual. Some scholars, however, argue that irrespective of such changes, the structure of the family remains intact.

Whatever be the argument, the main point is that, across time, varied aspects have led to a transformation of this basic biological and social unit. Changes in terms of the family can be seen in the drift towards transitional family, changes in the intra-family relationship, transference of certain functions to other external institutions, equality of individuals, increasing individualism, weakening of family norms and strengthening of women's status. The extension of these developments on socially and spatially varied conditions has triggered vigorous ideological debates. Whether the same changes had actually changed women's status and also, different questions regarding the nature of the impact of homosexuality in transforming kinship system will be discussed in the next two units.

---

## 12.7 QUESTIONS

---

1. What is the difference between the concepts of 'family' and 'household'?
2. Describe the transformation in the traditional concept of family.
3. Elucidate the reasons behind the changes in the idea of family and kinship in the modern times?
4. What is the meaning of patriarchy? Critically analyse the theories behind the origin of Patriarchy?

---

## 12.8 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

---

- Ahuja, R. (2015). *Society in India*. Rawat Publications, New Delhi.
- Cantlie, A. (1984). *The Assamese*. Curzon Press Limited, London and Dublin.
- Karve, I. (1965). *Kinship Organization in India*. Asia Publishing House, Bombay.
- Nayak, D. K. and Behera, R.N. (2014). *Changing Household Size in India: An Inter-State Comparison*, Shillong, Meghalaya. Vol.36-No.1
- Nongbri, T. (1988). Gender and the Khasi Family Structure: Some implications of the Meghalaya Succession to Self – Acquired Property Act, 1984. *Indian Sociological Society*.
- Saxena, P. (2011). *Life of a Eunuch* (pp. 42 – 53). Shanta Publishing House, Navi Mumbai, India.
- Uberoi, P. (1993). *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Weston, K. (1991). *Families we choose: lesbians, gays, kinship*. Columbia University Press, New York.

\*\*\*\*\*

---

## **UNIT 13: TRANSFORMATIONS OF KINSHIP: QUESTIONING PATRIARCHY**

---

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Objective
- 13.3 The Old and the New
- 13.4 Kinship and Gender
- 13.5 The Marriage System
- 13.6 The Reproduction Process and Gender
- 13.7 Gender and Politics
- 13.8 Summing Up
- 13.9 Questions
- 13.10 Recommended Readings and References

---

### **13.1 INTRODUCTION**

---

Kinship and gender are key issues dealt with extensively in this Unit. Kinship is a web of social network and relationships that are essential in all forms of human societies. It performs several functions—social, economic, political, ritual and religious. It is the basis of the social structure and thus, transformation in it leads to a change in the structural definition and vice versa. The same is also true in the case of gender relations. For instance, there is a difference in the kinship system as well as in the terminology in the patrilineal societies and in the matrilineal societies. Gender relations are constructed differently in different cultures and kinship, that subsumes marriage and family structure, provides the framework for the cross-cultural study of gender relations. Also, the kinship system has a tendency of allotting resources, obligations and responsibilities of members of the particular group. Thus,

there is a difference between the roles of the son and the daughter-in-law as evident in many communities. But, any change in the family structure or kinship system inevitably leads to changes in the system of gender that is at work in most societies. A change in the family dynamics amongst the Khasis in recent times has weakened the hold of the maternal uncle whereas the position of the heiress Khadduh has changed from being titular to actual head of the household and ancestral property.

In the previous unit, we discussed the transforming trend in family and kinship system. In this section, we discuss the transformation in kinship in the context of gender relations. Questions relating to the early gender arrangements, the current situation and the constant structures that have defied the force of time will be discussed with reference to varied societies.

---

### **13.2 OBJECTIVES**

---

This Unit aims to evaluate the transformation in the kinship system, especially focusing on the question of kinship and gender.

It is expected that after going through this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the relationship between kinship and gender relations;
- Discuss how such changes impact the institution of patriarchy;
- Discuss the further development in the discourse of Kinship and Gender.

---

### **13.3 THE OLD AND THE NEW**

---

Walby states, “the domestic division of labour is a major form of differentiation of men and women.” She is of the opinion that this differentiation has a substantial influence on other aspects of social relationships as well.

### Activity

Have you heard of the "1939 Marital Chart" prepared by George W. Crane?

What do you think about the subject discussed in the chart? Do these differences exist today between the men and the women?

The structures mentioned by Walby are not just true for the Western society but are also evident in the case of the different Indian communities. For instance, we can see the traditional family among the Pardhans who priests or musicians and live in joint families are mainly is common among them. The father is the family head and also, the owner of the property. The Pardhan families are patrilineal and after marriage, the son continues to live in his parent's family with his wife and children. After the death of the father, the sons divide the property equally among them. However, according to Dr R Singh, the women in Pardhan families are not allowed to inherit the property rights. The last comment on the women's property rights has been discussed by Sylvia Walby when she differentiated between Public and Private Patriarchy. But, it is not just a case of the patriarchal, patrilineal society but is also true for the societies exercising the matrilineal system like the Khasis of the North-eastern region of India. The intricate relationship between kinship system and gender relations is discussed below.

---

### 13.4 KINSHIP AND GENDER

---

The Kinship system defines the prescribed gender roles. In *The Assamese*, Audrey Cantlie observes that within the Assamese society, the sole purpose of a woman is marriage whereas a man can opt for celibacy. In a marriage, the wife has to serve her husband and provide him progenies. And "... fertility and barrenness being attributed to women



and not to men.” Among the Hindus, the metaphor of 'seed and the earth' testifies to the subordination of women. Where the man is seen as the provider and the woman as a mere passive recipient who nurtures the seed. A barren woman or a widow is often considered inauspicious.

Moreover, although remarriage is allowed, a contemptuous term—*Batalu*—is used for a woman who marries a second time. That is, second marriage lacks the sanctity of the first one to the extent that only uncooked food is accepted from the hand of such a woman.

### **Activity**

Interview at least fifty subjects of your family/ friend on the question of Kinship and Gender.

Note down each person's age, sex, educational qualifications and religion before you ask her/ him the following questions on the topic 'Questioning Patriarchy':

Do you find any differences in the duties of a woman in her natal home and in her conjugal home? If, yes, what are the reasons behind this?

Does this role and function differ in accordance to class difference, regional variation or other such factors? If yes, mention certain instances on such differences.

What changes are witnessed in such roles played traditionally by women in modern times?

Relate the answers to what has been discussed in the unit and based on your findings, write a short essay on 'Transformation in Kinship: questioning patriarchy.'

In relation to property inheritance, the passing of the Hindu succession law may give daughters equal share in their father's property. However,

it is not effective enough in drastically changing the patriarchal ideology that continues to govern over the property relations.

Disruptions in the old traditional order of the society with the explosive emergence of the modern era are also evident in the two distinct matrilineal societies of India, one in the Northeast of India, i.e. the Khasis and the other in the Southwest, i.e. the Nairs. In both the societies, the basic principle is the clan authority is theoretically in the hands of the mother, matrilocal marriage system, with the practice of 'Visiting Husband' among the Nairs, matrilineal descent as well as clan endogamy.

Among the Khasis, the nucleus of matriliney is based on the lineage identified to a common ancestress, inheritance recognized to the female head of the family and authority of the maternal uncle. The husbands do not exercise control over their wives or children as the maternal uncle does, causing tension in the relation. Another conflict is between the wife and her sister-in-law on the right over the husband. However, such traditions and tensions are on the verge of alteration due to the process of modernization and all that goes with it like education, industrialization, urbanization, literacy, communication, transportation, etc. Modernization has played a key role in changing the ways of thinking and acting, such as the gradual introducing of the patrilineal principles in the Khasi society. The process of education, the advent of Christianity to this excluded, hilly area and the impact of the West through different media have brought in a new middle class who plays a vital role in the process of cultural revivalism that has weakened the matrilineal system.

Although the changes have been able to provide jural authority to the Khasi women along with the traditional authority over the domestic affairs with the decline of the avuncular authority of the maternal uncle, the forces of modernization have not necessarily promoted gender

equality as the Khasi women still lack effective representation in the administration and political affairs.

The Khasis believe that women have control over the children as they nurture them with their own blood and flesh rather than the man who only provide what is called as 'pus'. However, that respective position seems to be shaken as an increasing number of Khasis are taking to their father's surname, mainly if the father is an affluent figure. Moreover, an extreme protest is witnessed demanding law of equitable distribution of wealth, both self-acquired and ancestral, among the children, irrespective of their gender. Exasperated by traditional restrictions that Khasi matriliney imposes, the Khasi men urges for the passing of the Meghalaya Succession to Self-Acquired Property Act, 1984. This Act may free Khasi men from customs and norms they consider outmoded, but it will wane the Khasi women's position as the wife has no claim over her spouses' self-acquired property. This may reduce the economic security of the women folk in case of neglect by their husbands during nuptial lives or after separation or divorce. It will also render women vulnerable, under the dominance of the men.

Similar is the case of the Nayers of Kerala who enjoyed a position of comfortable dominance in the past, experienced a crisis in their matrilineal system during the second half of 19th century; ultimately, leading to its disintegration. The advent of the British in India led to the development of the cash economy, Western education and improved communication system along with importance to educational qualification rather than caste identity. Reforms in education and administration led to a greater sense of individualism. Such a change in the system of production affected the kinship structure too. The Nayar matrilineal joint family system could not adapt to the increasing alterations in the economy, politics as well as society. Nayar men were able to attain means of livelihood away from the ancestral joint family and thus, could establish independent, patrilineal families. Many

educated Nayar men also agitated to the legalization of the Nayar *sambandham* so that offspring of Nambudiri Brahmin men and Nayar women could inherit their father's property.

However, transformation in kinship has not solely fuelled the male superiority in different societies as seems to be evident in the above paragraphs. Legislation has also transformed the traditional kinship system keeping in mind the welfare of the second sex.

The Hindu Succession Act, 1956 along with The Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 and Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 are certain instances that have re-defined gender roles. Similarly, *registration of marriages* has been made compulsory to prevent various evils like *marriage* frauds, bigamy, child *marriages* and desertions of women by their husbands. Likewise, The Government of India passed the Triple Talaq Bill in 2017 to ensure security and welfare of Muslim women. Thus, through legislation, there has been a transformation in the gender relations, family structure as well as the kinship system in many societies

---

### **13.5 THE MARRIAGE SYSTEM**

---

The institution of marriage is another aspect of the gender – kinship dynamics. Although monogamy is the most common type of marriage, other types of marriage exist and are practised by various tribes and communities of India. For instance, Polygyny is common among the Gond, the Lushai and the Naga tribes whereas polyandry though lesser in practice, is prevalent among the Toda of Nilgiri Hills. Polygamy is basically a result of sex disparity or property consideration.

Again, there are two types of preferential marriages, that is, levirate and sororate marriages, which is practised to promote inter-familial cordiality and obligations. For the fulfilment of these objectives, a widow might be obliged to marry her elder or younger brother-in-law against her objection. Such wife inheritance may be able to keep the property intact

and provide a guardian for the fatherless child, but in most cases, it overshadows the opinion of the widow involved in it. This indicates the influence of patriarchy on the position of women in the society which needs to be questioned.

Further, as seen earlier, we can safely state that many rituals or religious functions are on the decline. For instance, in the earlier generations of the Assamese society, the first approach or proposal for a marriage came from the bridegroom's family. Also, 'ga-dan' or 'the gift of the body' was a price paid for the body of the bride. However, in the recent times, due to the common belief about the scarcity of suitable bride-grooms, the first approach is often made by the bride's family and even, the custom of giving 'ga-dan' has become obsolete. 'Sodhani-Bhar' or 'the gift of the asking' have also become outdated. Audrey Cantlie, the author of the book *The Assamese*, believes that this change is due to greater occupational opportunities for the highly educated sections after India's independence. This creates economic differences within the caste, thus, creating a class who are able to demand dowry in return for a highly desirable bridegroom. So, although there is relative equality in kinship terminology between the two parties, there exists the tendency of the superiority of wife-receivers to wife-givers.

Again, until recently, civil marriages conducted by magistrates were not considered as marriages among kith and kin. However, the passing of the Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act, 2005 in India has obligated the married couples to be registered.

---

### **13.6 THE REPRODUCTION PROCESS AND GENDER**

---

Childbearing though a biological process, it is also associated with social constructs and shaped by cultural perceptions and practices. Various beliefs, customs, diet prescription and other restrictions are observed to ensure the wellbeing of the child, the mother and also, the family.

One of the Chinese customs is feeding cold food to the child-bearing mother as pregnancy is considered to be a “hot” condition and, thus, cold food is required to balance the Yin and Yang. Another belief among the Chinese is to be quiet during labour as they believe that crying out aloud will attract evil spirits to the baby.

As discussed earlier, the Khasis believe the father’s contribution to be nothing more than pus whereas the mother rears the child with her own blood, and thus, the Khasis stress the mother’s role in the reproduction process. The mother-child bond is seen as stronger than that between the father and his child. The mother’s burden during pregnancy gives her custody over her child who comes to belong to her descent group.

Again, among the Khasi, Toda, Ho, Oraon tribes, the father practises “Couvade”, i.e. they too lead a life of invalid with their pregnant wives. For instance, not going out and refraining from active life, eating a similar diet as their wives and also, observing the various taboos that have been prescribed to their wives. One of the taboos related to pregnancy can be said to be the prohibition to lend or give any material (metal or cloth) to anyone during pregnancy as it is believed that it will lead to changing of the sex of the child, a practice among the Monpas in Arunachal Pradesh.

There is a difference in the perception towards the reproduction process and the role of the father and the mother in the Hindu tradition. The ‘Seed and Earth’ metaphor affirms the subordination of women as the womb is seen as a mere carrier that will help in the continuation of the man’s line of descent.

Veena Das discusses in her essay “Masks and Faces: An Essay on Punjabi Kinship”, that sexuality is often demoted to the “backstage” in the case of many societies. Again, the act of coitus is only justified on the grounds of procreation. Sexuality is not recognized overtly in social relations; although its reflection is distinct in cultural norms along with

kinship morality. For instance, while in the Punjabi society kinship morality requires clampdown of the sexual relationship between the married couples, on the other hand, there exists a theory of procreation where the female is seen as a field and the male as the seed. The quality of the progeny depends on the qualities of the genitor and the genetics. A flaw in the field or the seed will impact on the product, that is, the offspring.

In case of barrenness, the childless woman is often accused of being sterile by the conjugal family. And, there has been an increasing rate of infertility since the last decade. A study suggests that “in 2010, an estimated 48.5 million couples worldwide were unable to have a child after five years. 1.9% of women aged 20–44 years who wanted to have children were unable to have their first live birth (primary infertility), and 10.5% of women with a previous live birth were unable to have an additional live birth (secondary infertility). The researchers found that the levels of infertility were similar in 1990 and 2010, with only a slight overall decrease in primary infertility (0.1%, but with a more pronounced drop in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia) and a modest overall increase in secondary infertility (0.4%).”

Numerous aspects are responsible for this growth rate like environmental factors or genetic issues, etc. which may affect the women or the men or, both together. Certain clinical studies have hypothesized that this decline in fertility rate may be due to the prevalence of infection that blocks the fallopian tube in women whereas other studies blame the declining quality of sperm which may be due to increased alcohol consumption, stress, nature of occupation, etc. Again, others believe the increasing age at childbearing as the reason behind infertility.

As stated earlier, childlessness has serious implications to the women who are easily labelled as infertile and often experience exclusion from various social events like weddings, birthdays, christenings and other auspicious occasions. This social stigma attached to the childless women

generates a sense of failure for not achieving the personal, religious as well as social expectations that more or less leads to straining of relationships between childless couples.

This situation often leads to a second marriage. This is explained by Veena Das in her “Masks and Faces”, that wife is seen as replaceable, that any woman can satisfy the demands of sexuality.

To avoid any personal or social implications, childless couples have turned to different assisted reproductive techniques that include intrauterine insemination, self-insemination, ovulation induction, In-Vitro Fertilization, intracytoplasmic sperm injection, sperm donation, egg donation, embryo donation, or gestational surrogacy. These will be further discussed in the next unit.

---

### 13.7 GENDER AND POLITICS

---

In the Khasi society, men jealously guard their political position, attributing a woman to be “a hen that crows”—a freak of nature if she tries to voice her opinion. They see politics as an arena for the fit and mature persons. A woman is implied to be an immature child as they use the simile *Ka kynthai ka khyinnah* (the woman, the child) and thus, barred from attending the traditional *Durbar*. Thus, although the Khasi women have a significant role in the domestic arena, their participation is almost null in the political arena. They have to fulfil various familial and kinship obligations, but it is the men who are seen as the protector and the provider; *U rangbah khadar bor* (men has twelve strength).

Limited and no participation of women in politics is not just a characteristic of the Khasi society but is evident across many communities through the gender differences in voting behaviour, active participation and admission into various political offices/posts. Political participation of women is essential to reduce poverty, secure resources and ensure the well-being and development of this vulnerable section of



the society. There have been numerous measures adopted and legislation passed to create space for indigenous women in male-dominated decision-making bodies. It is to support and encourage them to perform better with regards to women's rights. In particular, many institutions have tried to make women aware of some of the negative aspects of the customary practices that violate their rights through community educational activities, seminars, mobilization, meetings and dialogues.

The above-mentioned steps are taken to empower women and strengthen their capacities through participation so that they can develop to their optimum potential. However, this empowerment and liberation of the oppressed are only possible if there arise effective changes to the structural constraints on the women's capacities. These socio-economic, political and ideological constraints built over time negates the positive outcomes to be gained through empowerment.

States requires to strengthen the legal framework for the recognition of the rights of women under CEDAW. Also, it should fortify the enforcement of related policies addressing violence against women through information and education campaigns and capacity-building of relevant government agencies and institutions, i.e. judicial bodies, law enforcement agencies, women and service-related institutions.

Further, it is required to establish specialized bodies at the national and/or sub-national levels (where relevant) to specifically address the conditions of women with appropriate policies and programmes to be designed with the full and effective participation of the women. National census and data-collection on socio-economic and wellbeing indicators should include data disaggregation in relation to indigenous peoples and in relation to indigenous women.

Education has made women aware of their rights and they have started questioning the traditional roles and positions of women. They are also beginning to challenge male control of local politics and decision

making. Moreover, with the passage of time, the attitudes of the people have undergone some changes and nowadays marriage outside the community is seen to be taking place. Such changes indicate towards a better future for women in the political arena.

---

### **13.8 SUMMING UP**

---

Throughout this Unit, we tried to discuss the relationship between gender and kinship. We examined the marriage system and the customs related to the reproduction process. Gender relations and political roles have also been dealt upon. The exceedingly changing trends in different societies have also been discussed. The advent of Christianity, Westernized lifestyle and the introduction of reforms and laws are certain factors that impacted on the patriarchal and conjugal values like the creation of nuclear families and to the breaking up of the secondary and tertiary Khasi family structures, i.e. Ka Kur and Ka Kpoh (joint family).

Ultimately, it affected the kin solidarity of a coherent community. The conversion has also diluted the role of Khadduh which is the keystone of Khasi religion and the declining of the Tarawad system and the authority of the Karnavan who was once an absolute ruler of the Nayar matrilineal system. Thus, a transformation in this core system was able to shake the Khasis and also, led to the destruction of the Nayar matrilineal system. As mentioned earlier, it is significant how changes in the familial structure or kinship system impacts upon the gender relations in any society.

Along with legislation, it is also realized that liberalization of attitudes and breaking away from orthodox belief systems and practices enhance the status of women in the society as well as in the personal sphere. The nature of inheritance and marital relations seem to have changed. A boon of modernisation is education which provides possibilities for more women participating in the political arena and working towards the

improvement of their condition and facilitating to share their ideas through the platform provided by modern mechanisms and institutions.

It is required that we understand that these changes are complex, ongoing process and the reasons behind them are varied and so, should not be generalized to a specific few. In addition, one must comprehend that in spite of the transformation in the kinship system, it still holds significance in the contemporary period. We must understand that kinship system defines our existence in the society and also determines our actions and believes. It is important that we understand the impact of transformation of kinship system which is so intricately intertwined with the social structure and to gender relations, most specifically. We will discuss about the relationship between kinship system and the sexual minorities in the next unit.

---

### **13.9 QUESTIONS**

---

1. Explain the six structures of the patriarchal society developed by Sylvia Walby in her book *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Is it relevant in the present Indian society?
2. Describe the interrelationship between Kinship and Gender as demonstrated within different societies.
3. Critically analyse the extent to which the Khasi and Nayar kinship systems challenge the institution of Patriarchy?
4. Elucidate the factors that can ensure active participation of women in the political arena.

---

### 13.10 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

---

Ahuja, R. (2015). *Society in India*. Rawat Publications

Beauvoir, Simone de. (1949). The Girl. In *The Second Sex*. Pp. 395 - 440. New York: Vintage Books. 2011

Cantlie, A. (1984). *The Assamese*. Curzon Press Limited: London and Dublin

Chanana, K. (2003). Female Sexuality and Education of Hindu Girls in India. In Rege, S., editor, *Sociology of Gender* pages 287 – 317. Sage Publication, New Delhi

Foucault, M. (1978). We “Other Victorians.” In *The History of Sexuality*. Pp. 1 - 13 New York: Pantheon Books. (<https://suplaney.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/foucault-the-history-of-sexuality-volume-1.pdf>)

Karve, I. (1965). *Kinship Organization in India*. Asia Publishing House: Bombay

Nongbri, T. (1988). Gender and the Khasi Family Structure: Some implications of the Meghalaya Succession to Self – Acquired Property Act, 1984. *Indian Sociological Society*.

Uberoi, P. (1993). *Family, Kinship and Marriage in India*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi.

Walby, S. (1989). Theorising Patriarchy. *Sage Journals*. 23 (2): 213–234 doi: [10.1177/0038038589023002004](https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038589023002004)

\*\*\*\*\*

---

## **UNIT 14: REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND RECONFIGURED KINSHIP, GAY PERSPECTIVES**

---

### **UNIT STRUCTURE**

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Objectives
- 14.3 Notion of Family
- 14.4 The Sexual Minorities
- 14.5 Law against Sexual Minorities
- 14.6 Assisted Reproductive Techniques
- 14.7 Configuration of the Kinship System
- 14.8 Summing Up
- 14.9 Recommended Readings and References

---

### **14.1 INTRODUCTION**

Kinship forms a significant part of the lives of human beings in different societies as it determines the mode of behaviour of individuals in a relationship as well as the accompanying functions to the relationship. The kinship system is also important as it integrates members of the family, tribe or community through a sense of identity and determines the relation of the members to each other. But, what about the individuals who have faced social exclusion due to their sexuality. How does the kinship system impact them and vice versa?

The family is the basic social unit where a child first goes through the socialization process. And, although with time, the child faces newer agents of socialization, the family continues to shape the child's personality, attitude and belief system. So, what is the impact of the

family on the socially excluded sexual minorities? They are born into a family too; do they have the same upbringing?

Again, we have discussed the increasing rate of infertility and the presumed reasons behind it in the previous unit. Additionally, many individuals belonging to the LGBTQ community also are opting for assisted reproductive techniques to form families. What impact do such decisions have on the traditional notion of family and the kinship bonds? Are such decisions a relaxed process in the Indian society? Can such growing trends as well as changes in the laws relating to the sexual minorities lead to significant change to the kinship system? What is the relation between the promotions of medical tourism and assisted reproductive technologies in India to the changing discourse on family and kinship? We will discuss such questions in the following sections.

---

## **14.2 OBJECTIVES**

---

Unit 3 aims at analysing the “other sex”. Also, we evaluate the increasingly cognizant laws for the LGBTQ community as well as the gradual development of artificial reproductive technologies and, whether these emerging trends have an influence on the evident transformation in the kinship system.

It is expected that after going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the condition of sexual minorities in India;
- Discuss the change in the traditional notion of family;
- Analyse the relationship between the development of artificial reproductive technologies and change in the outmoded kinship system.

---

## **14.3 NOTION OF FAMILY**

---

The family structure is believed to be a core element of the kinship organization. A family is a basic social grouping consisting of members

who are united by the kinship bonds. And different features have defined the family structure across time and space. For instance, a Hindu joint family is often characterised on the basis of co-residence, commensality and common property. There is also a difference in the kinship system with respect to the different regions. However, irrespective of such differences, the family is the universal and fundamental unit. It is an intricate aspect to understand the kinship system.

The family is a major agent of socialization that provides the child with values, behavioural norms, and beliefs with respect to his/her region, social status and other variables. However, in most cases, it lacks in the process of normalization and routinization; that is, the process of acceptance of one's sexual identity. And integration of the respective sexual identity in the day-to-day life. Steven Seidman in his book *The Social Construction of Sexuality* investigating sexual practices and identities in the context of the contemporary American society, discusses how this process of normalization and routinization is culturally, institutionally as well as interpersonally lacking. This point takes us to the next section, that is, the case of the sexual minorities.

---

#### **14.4 THE SEXUAL MINORITIES**

---

Sexual minorities are a group whose sexual identity, orientation or practices differ from the presumed majority of the population, which are male or female heterosexuals. Usually, sexual minorities comprise of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals. In a dominant hetero-normative society, the male-female dichotomy has distorted the personal life of individuals of the LGBTQ community; obfuscating the fact of these individuals being a human being too. Kath Weston, writer of the renowned book *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* draws upon fieldwork and interviews conducted in the San Francisco Bay area to explore an ideological shift of the notion of "family" in the 1980s in the US. According to her study, before the 1980s, gay men and lesbians

were exiled from family; socially, culturally, politically and symbolically.

Some studies show that homosexual individuals are still unable to disclose their sexual identity in fear of being ostracised, discriminated or excluded from their family. Although they may discover their difference from the majority population during their adolescent years, there is a tendency to suppress their emotions in the apprehension of losing familial love and support. Marriage is a prominent part of the conservative family values which is seen as a necessity for maintaining social cohesion and also promoting child welfare. Thus, the gays and lesbians often find themselves entrapped in a marital tie against their will. Such marriages mostly end in a marital disharmony, divorce or continuation with a poor condition of life.

Suresh Bada Math and Shekhar P. Seshadri in their work "The invisible ones: Sexual minorities" provides a detailed study on the life condition of sexual minorities. They discuss how the individuals are disinherited from their family, denied legal rights over the family property. Illiteracy is prominent among the sexual minority communities as they are not allowed inside the premise of the educational institutions. Many also dropout due to the harassment they face. Neither are they permitted in hotels, cinema halls or other public spaces. Nor are they selected for government jobs and if they happen to hold office, on the revelation of their sexual orientation they are suspended from the job. Even renting a house becomes difficult, changing residence frequently. This leads to disabilities like that of attaining social pension, voters' identity card, Aadhar card and passport or ration card with no proof of residence. Till recently, the third gender had been missed out of the census, rendering them as invisible citizens. Out of options, they are forced into begging or prostitution where they further face physical or mental abuse.

The disparity in the healthcare of transgender is evident in the lack of facilities like separate ward, toilets, queue etc. Studies show that people



prefer not to disclose their non-traditional sexual lifestyle so as to avoid discrimination. For most people, sex reassignment therapy is unavailable or costly or inaccessible in established public or private hospitals and so, they have to turn to illegal and sometimes fatal methods. There is a high prevalence of patients from the LGBTQ community suffering from sexually transmitted diseases or HIV, mostly due to being involved unprotected intercourse as a commercial sex worker for their livelihood. Higher levels of discrimination also lead to greater psychiatric morbidity risk among lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals.

Such discriminations are fuelled by the negative character of gays, lesbians or trans people portrayed in media. Suffering from unwanted distinction, lack of self-esteem, social acceptance and identity, these individuals contemplate suicide. A study in Denmark shows the increased suicide risk among men in same-sex partnerships.

In the contemporary times, the European societal practices reflect a growing awareness regarding the rights of gays and lesbians, re-defining the concept of marriage that had been an exclusively heterosexual procreative unit. The legal institution of same-sex marriage exists in four European countries (the Netherlands 2001, Belgium 2003, Spain 2004, and Norway 2008). We find an increasing number of countries recognizing same-sex relationships. The other aspect is parenting right. There is a growing trend of childbearing in a non-heterosexual household as gays and lesbians, long seen as exiles from kinship ties, are choosing to create their own families. And certain laws deal on these issues which we will discuss in the next section.

---

#### **14.5 LAW AGAINST SEXUAL MINORITIES IN INDIA**

---

Laws against transgender across time in India include The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871, Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act, 1986 and State-Level Beggary Acts: The Criminal Tribes Act, 1871: Certain tribes and

communities comprising of acrobats, singers, dancers among others were perceived to be criminals from birth, criminality being passed from generation to generation. An amendment to the Act, 'An Act for the Registration of Criminal Tribes and Eunuchs' brought the transgender community under surveillance and were subjected to penalties and restrictions.

Immoral Trafficking Prevention Act, 1986: The law criminalizes brothel keeping, trafficking, pimping and soliciting to prevent trafficking of women and children into prostitution; however, through it, Hijras were seen as criminal subjects and thus, were arrested, wrongfully confined and subjected to humiliating treatment and have their earnings taken away.

State-Level Beggary Acts: In existence in 20 states and two Union Territories, this act criminalizes begging, seeking alms by singing or dancing, punishable with imprisonment.

However, a major breakthrough came on September 6, 2018 when the Supreme Court of India gave the historic verdict on Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code decriminalising consensual adult gay sex. Decriminalisation of homosexuality is indeed a major victory for the LGBTQ community in India.

In the case of surrogacy too, there seems to be a shortcoming for same-sex couples. In the year 2001, India had legalized commercial surrogacy which is a major reason behind the spurt of growth of medical tourism in India. The cheap broker price and low cost for medical service had added to the growth. However, due to certain past cases that have exploited the poor surrogate mothers, the government have planned to pass The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016 banning foreigners, single parents and gay couples from hiring a womb. Such steps curtail the options available for the same-sex couple to attain parenthood.

---

## **14.6 ASSISTED REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGY**

---

Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) have developed at an extraordinary rate in recent years. This, combined with the changing landscape of legal, technical and social possibilities, enables individuals of LGBTQ community to consider their options for parenthood as new opportunities emerge for them to create families. One of the reasons behind desiring parenthood is the belief that such a step will ensure the familial and social integration they lacked previously in their lives. Along with the LGBTQ community, heterosexual couples who are not able to conceive are seen to opt for ARTs for having a child.

As discussed in the earlier section, gay couples, seeking the establishment of their own family and maintenance of kinship ties, opt for surrogacy despite the excessive cost that is charged by fertility clinics. It is problematic to ascertain the data on gestational surrogacy cases, specifically the number of gay male couples using surrogacy to achieve parenthood, with no systematic method to record these statistics, especially in case of people who travel to foreign locations to access the varied sources. Another reason that can be the tendency amongst many couples to recourse to other/informal assisted reproductive methods that include intrauterine insemination, ovulation induction, In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF), intracytoplasmic sperm injection, sperm donation, egg donation, embryo donation, among others.

In many cases, surrogacy is preferred rather than adoption as surrogacy provides gay couples with the possibility of being full-time fathers whereas in case of adoption only one of them is formally recognized as a father. Also, surrogacy allows for the transmission of biogenetic traits that create a sense of paternity over the child. Again, shared parenting is not much favoured as it means the arrangement of a woman, which requires conscious planning and navigation of options, who will be the legal mother of the child she gives birth to. In such a case, the law recognizes only the biological parents and the one not recognized by law

remains anxious about losing the child. Also, in case of separation of the couple issues like custody over the child, cost of child-rearing etc. causes weakening of the parent-child relationship. So, the functioning of multiple parenting is difficult.

Haimes (1990) is of the opinion that the standard model of Donor Insemination have been accepted widely, both by clinics and (infertile) heterosexual couples as “it supports the ideological and structural underpinnings of the traditional family”. However, access to the clinic – based donor insemination by lesbian women is perceived as a challenge to the traditional family model. In reaction to such rigid perception, lesbians opt for acquiring knowledge for alternative sources who can donate sperms for self-insemination (SI). Many underground SI group, developing since the 1970s in Britain, form network of women - who help each other, share information as well as match donors with recipient – outside the dominant clinic system.

However, this process had certain drawbacks. The lesbian women in such a scenario are at a health risk as they lose the double advantage provided by professional clinics, that is, the providence of screening procedures for good sperm count and mediation of request to the donor before donation. The scarcity of donor hinders lesbians impregnating through self-insemination to set terms like demanding for HIV tests.

Moreover, although the informal donor accepts to provide sperms, there is the possibility of at least minimal involvement in the child’s life. Post-conception, the continued relationship may cause certain complications.

---

## **14.7 RECONFIGURATION OF THE KINSHIP SYSTEM**

---

Gay and lesbian studies in the 1980s revealed various ontologies to kinship. In the following section, we will discuss the construction of a new concept of kinship and understand the landscape for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered parenting.

As discussed in the previous section, most of the sexual minorities had faced hostility from family, friends, and from the society as a whole as transitioning from one gender to another disrupts the culturally held assumption of the static duality of gender and disrupts gender norms propagated through different media. This leads to confusion, discomfort and resistance by family and friends against people who attempt at renegotiating roles and duties within the kinship relations. Sexual minorities thus remain bereft of a concrete status or space in the social network. Any renegotiation of kinship ties requires members of LGBTQ community to relinquish the power to define themselves within the larger kinship network and to wait for their kin to accept them (or not) in the context of their new gender identity. Traditionally recognized webs of association like that of mother-father, or husband-wife have a higher status, whereas sexual minorities often face rejection. One of the platforms of relatively balanced power equilibrium exists in online forums which are open to gays, lesbians and trans people and ensures equal participation. Gays and lesbians lack this legal recognition in the family structure that curbs the rights and protection attached to it; and exposes them to excessive physical, mental and emotional abuse and discrimination.

Kath Weston argues that a chosen family (gay family) should not be seen as a negative alternative to “standard family but to see it as a ‘positive constitution of the family’”. She mapped the contrast between straight and gay first into 'family/no family', and then into biological family/families we choose and she stated “family is and should be treated as a historical notion, rather than static model and thus "family we choose".

We discussed how gay couples desire to establish a family through the process of surrogacy. Developments in reproductive technology have enabled potential parents to create families. Those technologies that

involve the third party for the conception of a child, like in the case of surrogacy, defies cultural norms and existing understanding on biogenetic relationships.

### **Activity**

You must have read on the mother-child relationship in Punjabi, Khasi and Nayar kinship system.

Try to write on the following questions:

- 1) What similarities and difference can you make out of these three kinship system?
- 2) What changes do you notice in case of surrogacy and other artificial reproductive techniques?

Such situations of women renting their womb voluntarily and relinquishing her child to make a living questions the natural maternal instinct that had been seen as a personal trait of a mother. For instance, in Punjabi kinship, the mother-child relationship is believed to be the strongest as the mother carries the child in her womb with her own blood. However, such beliefs and values continue to be transformed as boundaries between social and biological kinship becomes blurred.

Now, surrogacy is seen as breaking the traditionally held beliefs on family, motherhood as well as the whole reproductive process. Children born to gay men using surrogacy may have a genetic mother, a gestational mother, a genetic father and a social father, but no mother in the family home to rear the child, as had been the assumed role of the mother. Further, among the arguments against gay couples accessing artificial reproductive techniques, the prominent one remains that it separates procreation from sexual intercourse. The conflict between the

needs of the child and the parents is cited in studies, involving a third party for attaining parenthood, that would mean complexity between the child's urge to know his/her genetic origins and the needs of the couple to conceal their condition. Whereas in case of adoption, concerns are largely derived from the experience of adoptive families where studies suggest that problems of child adjustment are more due to circumstances associated with adoption rather than the absence of a biological link.

One can see that in the current state of our kinship system, as well as the beliefs and rules that sustain it, parental pairings on the basis of same-sex couples remain fragile and limited. There is development in the parenting rights, parenthood and child development as well. Studies indicate how gay fathers have made deviations from the traditional fatherhood role by 'de-gendering parenting' and have challenged some of the assumptions about primary caregivers and the conception of motherhood and fatherhood.

However, there are often questions about the child's nature and development being impacted due to the parent's sexual orientation. There is a widespread assumption that children of a non-heterosexual or transsexual parent or same-sex parents can become especially vulnerable to social prejudice directed primarily at the parent(s). However, evidence has shown that the major impact of parenting on child development comes from the quality of parenting rather than the sexual orientation of the parents. Few studies have slammed arguments against families formed through reproductive donation as research suggests that there are no differences in behavioural or emotional problems in children conceived by sperm or egg donation.

---

## **14.8 SUMMING UP**

The question as to whether homosexuality transforms kinship system has triggered vigorous ideological debates. In the preceding sections, we

discussed the changing notion of family. It is clear by now that a family is more than a social institution; it is also an ideological construct which changes over time and is subject to various processes.

Across time, varied aspects have led to a transformation of this basic biological and social unit. Changes in terms of the family can be seen in the drift towards the transitional family, changes in the intra-family relationship, transference of certain functions to other, external institutions, equality of individuals, increasing individualism, weakening of family norms and strengthening of women's status.

However, in the core of the changing nature of the family structure, is the problem of child-bearing and the parent-child relationship. In regards to this, we explored the condition as well as changes in the texture of the life of the sexual minorities in the current period and the implications of this change for gay identity, community and politics as well as on the age-old kinship structure. The intent here is not only to understand the transformation in the kinship system but also understanding the gay perspective and the violation of rudimentary human rights that this LGBTQ community has faced over a long period of time.

Studies show how sexual minorities, especially trans people, undergo surgeries without proper assessment, psychiatrist opinion, hormonal therapy and real-life experience or even adequate aseptic precautions. In such cases of health care disparities, there is an urgent need to make health care affordable, accessible and cheaper for this vulnerable group.

There is a requirement for government intervention for the provision of equal opportunities and protection of the basic rights for this community like any other law-abiding citizen. This also includes marriage and parenting rights to gay couples. Weston, in her book *The Families We Choose*, argues that "chosen families" are not different from the families sexual minorities grow up in. Through interviews, she discusses these relationships of gays, lesbians and trans people with their "straight"



families. Also, she analyses the changes in gay communities that have helped to shape contemporary discourse about the gay families.

Homosexual individuals are constructing their own notions of kinship by drawing on the symbolism of love, friendship and biology. Conventional views of the family have depicted gays and lesbians as exiles from the realm of kinship. But, as seen in above sections, in recent decades, sexual minorities have increasingly portrayed themselves as people who seek not only to maintain ties with blood or adoptive relatives but also to establish families of their own. By the use of assisted reproductive technologies, they have been able to construct a different model of family, reconstruct the kinship system. The future holds the secret as to what extent these new developments will have on the dominant notions of the family and kinship system.

## **Glossary**

1. **Fertility:** the ability to conceive children or young.
2. **Homosexuality:** sexually attracted to people of one's own sex or characterized by sexual attraction between people of the same sex.
3. **Sexual Minorities:** A sexual minority is a group whose sexual identity, orientation or practices differ from the majority of the surrounding society.
4. **Sexual Orientation:** a person's sexual identity in relation to the gender to which they are attracted; the fact of being heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual.
5. **In-Vitro fertilization:** a medical procedure whereby an egg is fertilized by sperm in a test tube or elsewhere outside the body.

---

## 14.9 QUESTIONS

---

1. Define Sexual Minorities. Elucidate the social, economic and political disadvantages that they face in the society, especially in the Indian society.
2. Discuss the emerging market of assisted reproductive technologies and its impact on the traditional notion of kinship system.
3. Describe the various factors that are changing the concept of family and kinship in modern times.

---

## 14.10 RECOMMENDED READINGS AND REFERENCES

---

- Math, S.B. and Seshadri, S.P. (2013). The invisible ones: Sexual minorities. *Indian Journal of Medical Research*. 137(1): 4 - 6
- Michelraj, M. (2015). Historical Evolution of Transgender Community in India. *Asian Review of Social Sciences*, 4(1): 17-19, The Research Publication.
- Saxena, P. (2011). *Life of a Eunuch* (pp. 42 – 53). Shanta Publishing House, Navi Mumbai.
- Seidman S, Meeks C, Traschen F. (1999). Beyond the Closet? The Changing Social Meaning of Homosexuality in the United States. *Sexualities*. 2(1):9–34.
- Weston, K. (1991). *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*. Columbia University Press, New York.
- Whisman, V. (1996). *Queer by Choice: Lesbians, Gay Men, and the Politics of Identity*. Routledge, New York.

\*\*\*\*\*



**The Centre for Distance and Online Education was established in 2011 with the aim of disseminating knowledge and imparting quality education through open and distance learning mode. The Centre offers various post-graduate, undergraduate, diploma and certificate programmes in emerging areas of science and technology, social sciences, management and humanities with flexible system to cater to the needs of the learners who otherwise cannot avail the regular mode of education. The basic focus of the centre is to prepare human resources of the region and the country by making them skilled and employable.**

**CENTRE FOR DISTANCE AND ONLINE EDUCATION  
TEZPUR UNIVERSITY  
(A Central University)  
Tezpur, Assam - 784028  
INDIA**

**Visit us at: [www.tezu.ernet.in/tu\\_codl](http://www.tezu.ernet.in/tu_codl)**