

individuals and most people accept them as right though some may violate them.

## TYPES OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

### KINSHIP

In simple societies a person's position in the society, his rights and duties, his claim to property etc. depend on his/her genealogical relationships to other members. The primary social groups in such societies are all linked by **kinship** and in most of the cases their membership is fixed by descent. In common usage, people having 'Common blood relation' and having a common ancestor are the kins. Rivers defined 'kinship is the social recognition of biological ties'. The ties of kinship offer people claims to land for cultivation, to other kinds of property, to mutual assistance in the pursuit of common interests, to authority over others ; and obligations which complement these claims, on those in authority to regard the welfare of those subjects to them, obedience and co-operation from the part of the people establish conformity to **kin** relationship. Depending on the principles and organisational capacities to implement such principles societies may vary in their strength of kinship bonds. In some societies, with passage of time kin identities are loosened or lost as the distance from common ancestor becomes obvious. In some other societies appropriate devices are sought so that kinship ties and kinship arrangements are maintained with care.

The elements that lead to kinship cohesion and even mere existence of such social institutions are :

- Certain classificatory terms designating important relationships based on kinship ties are acknowledged and practiced among people of some kin group.
- A common link is accepted with an ancestor even if that link is not visibly clear or direct. The 'kindred' or the body of persons who are genealogically linked to the man who might have been the source of this relationship. This identity is nurtured by belief among the members flowing through generations.
- Kinship implies two possibilities of relationship—link by blood and link by marriage. All the people who are related by 'blood' in any way to an individual are his cognates and those who are related to him by marriage are his affines.
- Kinship offers the system of continuing property-holding based on the principles of descent traceable in one line only either through the males or through females which is commonly known as unilateral descent. The group

which ensures share in property holding for its members based on the principle, is known as corporate groups. If the descent is traced through males only, it is called patrilineal or agnatic and if it is traced through females it is called matrilineal. Societies may have varied options for the members to continue a kinship line. Thus, it may be double descent where the relationships determined by both males & females.

Kinship ensures cohesion, a unique social identity and sense of security for a definite group of people living in a simple accommodative society. There are several examples of kin groups based on descent though that had different principles of living in group. Among the Iban of Borneo the system of 'bilek' was observed. They live in 'long-houses' in which the rooms are connected with one another built on a platform by the side of a river. 'Bilek' means one of these rooms, as well as a group living in it. The residents of 'bilek' enjoy property ownership as a part of the group. They owned the rice-fields that were first cleared by members of that generation one of the children born in bilek must live there all its life, thus responsible to maintain the continuity by descent. Marriage within the bilek is a compulsion, thus filiation is strictly followed. Many other groups are there which follow other patterns of descent based homogeneity. On the other hand lineage is maintained carefully and at the other constant division is a reality. It is said that a man is the potential founder of a lineage. The smallest lineage that can exist consists of one man with his children. The father enjoys authority over the children and dictates their property inheritance, marriage, choice of occupation etc. After the death of the father the unit may be broken into divisions and loosely follows the principles of lineage. In some societies the whole population can theoretically be placed on a genealogical tree. In such societies new lineages may join, the lineage descent is traced back to the founder recognised as the optical ancestor. Both new and original lineage groups are finally fitted into the scheme, and give an appropriate place in the genealogy, by some sort of adoption.

When one thinks of a lineage as a corporate group, a body of people with a common patrimony and a common ritual focus in the shrine of the ancestors, one is in fact thinking of the adult male members. Women and children are believed to be within the system not as individual actors, rather as entities under the umbrella of particular male members. Even in matrilineal societies the role of the female members is relatively limited and after more than one generations it becomes difficult to continue on one genealogical tree. This indicates, kinship is essentially a group bond for the sustenance of social relationships in most convenient manner.

## MARRIAGE

Marriage is a social institution which sanctifies man-woman-children relationship as the primary unit of societal structure. Marriage has been defined as 'a relationship between man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognised as legitimate offspring of both parents'. Marriage creates new social relationships and establishes reciprocal rights between the spouses, between each and the kin of the other. It establishes what will be the rights and status of the children when they are born. Every society ensures specific procedures for creating such relationships and regulates them.

Monogamy is the most common form of such procedure that confirms loyalty between a partner to the other. Some societies still recognise polygamy, that is, marriage between more partners in either of the sides—that may be one man with more

one woman or one woman with more than one man. If one man marries more than one women, that is known as polygyny. If one woman marries to a number of men is polyandry.

There are several ways of acquiring mates depending on the socio-economic realities of different societies. The rights acquired and enjoyed by each partner also varies from society to society. In most of the societies the husband acquires two types of rights—rights in Uxorem and rights in genetricem. The first type of rights are over a woman considered as a sexual and domestic partner ; the other types of rights consider a woman as a mother. In modern societies the rights are changing forms and implications.

In many patrilineal societies every man is bound to have legitimate progeny, as a result of which system of adoption of children formalising inheritance has been established. In many patrilineal societies a man's heir is his next brother, who succeeds to his responsibilities and his status generally as well as inheriting his possessions. He thus becomes the guardian of his widows as well as of his children, he is permitted to cohabit with dead brother's wife thereby virtually accepting a conjugal relationship with her. This is known as levirate.

Recent societies are witnessing several changes in the form & functions of these traditional institutions. Marriage as an institution has passed through many experiments. Presently, monogamy is the commonest practice in all the societies but as an institution marriage is definitely losing ground.

## FAMILY

A family is a domestic group in which parents and children live together, and in its elementary form it consists of a couple with their children. In most of the societies family is accepted as the basic unit. This type of family is generally designated as 'nuclear' or 'elementary' family. Evans-pritchard made a classification of types of family which is commonly practiced even under different names sometimes.

- **Natural family** consists of parents, whether marriage or not, and their children.
- Simple legal family consists of a married couple and their children.
- Complex legal family can be described as a member of separate families linked by their relationship to a common father.
- A ghost-family consists of the ghost (the pater), his wife, their children and the kinsman who became their genitor in virtue of his duty towards the ghost. This type he found among the Nuer and some other African peoples, who believe in the responsibility of kinsmen to help any male member to get married. They may offer cattles or property from the common share. If even after all sorts of corporation the respective male fails to get married, the nearest kinsman should now be responsible to marry the selected bride and take care of her would be children.

Some exception to this classification can be identified as among the matrilineal society of the Nayons, Lineage relationship is more important than family relationship and the children become the responsibility of the lineage rather than their biological father. Also the family need not be a domestic group among the Ashanti, where husband and wife after marriage go on living among their own kin, and they do not prefer to form a new home for themselves. Among the Jao and Cewa of Malawi, when a man first marries he must live at his wife's home, but later he may be

allowed to remove her to a village of his own matrilineal kin. So by the time his daughters are old enough to marry he will be the head of the homestead to which their husbands come.

The place of living of a young couple and their children is important for the society as this determines his relationship and inheritance of lineage. Marriage is thus divided in terms of place of living as patrilocal and matrilocal societies. These are now used to explain rules of residence and not marriage. The societies in which new families are to be settled under the guidance of mother's brother, those are known as avunculocal. Two more terms are used, virilocal implying 'with the husband's people' and uxorilocal, meaning with the wife's people.