

ANANTAM IAS · OPTIONAL NOTES

# Anthropology Optional Marriage, Family and Kinship

**Paper 1 · Unit 5**

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The oldest and most technical part of the anthropology optional: why marriage and family resist a universal definition, the descent and alliance machinery, and how to keep the vocabulary of kinship exact enough to earn marks.

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## UPSC SYLLABUS

1.8 Marriage: Definition and universality; Laws of marriage (endogamy, exogamy, hypergamy, hypogamy, incest taboo); Types of marriage (monogamy, polygamy, polyandry, group marriage); Functions of marriage; Marriage regulations (preferential, prescriptive and proscriptive); Marriage payments (bride wealth and dowry). 1.9 Family: Definition and universality; Family, household and domestic groups; Functions of family; Types of family (from the perspectives of structure, blood relations, marriage, residence and succession); Impact of urbanization, industrialization and feminist movements on family. 1.10 Kinship: Consanguinity and Affinity; Principles and types of descent (Unilineal, Double, Bilateral, Ambilineal); Forms of descent groups (lineage, clan, phratry, moiety and kindred); Kinship terminology (descriptive and classificatory); Descent, Filiation and Complementary Filiation; Descent and Alliance.

## Marriage — Definition and Why It Resists One

Marriage looks like the easiest institution to define and is in fact the hardest, because every neat definition is broken by an ethnographic case. The examiner is not testing whether you can quote a definition, but whether you know why each one fails and what survives the wreckage. Lead with the classic definition, break it, and land on the bundle-of-rights position.

- The classic definition comes from Notes and Queries on Anthropology (Royal Anthropological Institute): marriage is a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognised as the legitimate offspring of both partners. It packs three claims into one sentence: heterosexual, dyadic, and centred on legitimate offspring. All three are contradicted by real cases.
- Evans-Pritchard's Nuer (Kinship and Marriage among the Nuer, 1951) supply the two standard counter-cases. In ghost marriage a man marries a wife in the name of a dead kinsman, and the children are reckoned to the dead man to continue his line. In woman-to-woman marriage a barren woman of means takes a wife, pays bridewealth, and stands as the legal father (pater) of children a hired genitor begets on that wife. Both separate the social father from the biological father and both break the man-and-woman clause.
- Kathleen Gough's Nayar study (The Nayars and the Definition of Marriage, 1959) is the decisive case. Among the Nayar of Kerala a girl went through the tali-kettu ritual with a ritual husband who assumed almost no further obligation; she then took a series of visiting sandbanham partners; residence, economic support and childrearing lay with the matrilineal tarawad under the mother's brother. No conjugal household, no cohabitation, no economic cooperation, no exclusive sexual right, yet the institution regulated legitimacy. On the Notes and Queries definition the Nayar had no marriage, which is a defect of the definition, not of the Nayar.
- Gough's own reformulation shifts the criterion from cohabitation to legitimacy: marriage is a relationship established between a woman and one or more other persons, which provides that a child born to the woman under circumstances not prohibited by the rules is accorded full birth-status rights of the society. Note the deliberate width: 'one or more other persons', not 'a man', so it survives polyandry, woman-to-woman and ghost marriage.
- Edmund Leach (Polyandry, Inheritance and the Definition of Marriage, 1955) drew the methodological conclusion: no single definition applies to all societies, so marriage should be treated as a bundle of separable rights, of which any given society allocates some and not others. He listed classes of rights marriage may establish: legal fatherhood (pater) of the woman's children, legal motherhood, monopoly of the partner's sexuality, rights to the partner's labour and property, rights over a joint fund, and a socially significant affinal relationship between the two kin groups. Define marriage polythetically, by a cluster, not by a common essence.

- The distinction Leach and Gough force you to keep is between pater, the socially recognised father who holds the jural rights, and genitor, the biological begetter. Marriage assigns paternity as a status; it does not track biology. The Nuer ghost marriage makes the dead man the pater; the Nayar sandbanham partner was at most an acknowledged genitor with no jural claim.
- The surviving universal is Malinowski's principle of legitimacy: every society has a rule that a child needs a socially recognised father to give it full status, whatever the biology. This is not a claim that marriage as cohabitation is universal, only that the assignment of a legitimising social father is. It is the function marriage most consistently performs across the ethnographic record.
- On universality: the institution that regulates legitimacy and creates affinal alliance is very nearly universal, but its form (cohabiting couple, visiting husband, group of brothers, female husband) is not. The exam-safe formulation is that marriage is universal as a jural function and variable as a domestic arrangement.

Definitions of marriage and what breaks them

| Definition        | Criterion it rests on                                       | Case that breaks or rescues it                                          |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Notes and Queries | Union of a man and a woman, legitimate offspring            | Nuer woman-to-woman and ghost marriage break the 'man and woman' clause |
| Malinowski        | Every child needs a socially recognised father (legitimacy) | Survives most cases; the durable universal                              |
| Gough (1959)      | Legitimacy: full birth-status rights for the woman's child  | Rescues the Nayar; 'one or more persons' survives polyandry             |
| Leach (1955)      | A bundle of separable rights, allocated variably            | Handles all cases by refusing a single essence                          |

#### KEY TERMS

**Pater** — The socially and jurally recognised father, who holds rights over the child, as against the biological begetter.

**Genitor** — The biological father who begets the child; may or may not be the pater.

**Principle of legitimacy** — Malinowski's claim that every society requires a socially recognised father for every child.

**Sandbanham** — The Nayar visiting-partner union that provided a genitor without conjugal residence or jural fatherhood.

## Types and Forms of Marriage

This is the section most often written as a bare list and therefore scored low. The marks are in the ethnographic case attached to each type and in the ecological or economic reasoning behind it. Name the society whenever you name the form.

- Monogamy is the union of one man and one woman at a time. Serial monogamy, a sequence of monogamous unions through divorce and remarriage, is the statistically dominant Western pattern. Monogamy is the numerically commonest practice worldwide even where other forms are permitted, because the roughly balanced sex ratio limits how many men can take multiple wives.
- Polygamy is plural marriage and splits into two forms. Polygyny, one man with two or more wives, is the most widely permitted form in Murdock's cross-cultural sample, though permitted is not the same as practised: it is typically the privilege of the wealthy, the elder and the powerful. Sororal polygyny, where the co-wives are sisters, is common because sisters are held to quarrel less; the sororate can flow from it.

- Polyandry, one woman with two or more husbands, is rare and clusters where resources are scarce. Fraternal (adelphic) polyandry, where the husbands are brothers, is the classic Toda case (South India) and the Tibetan and trans-Himalayan pattern (Kinnaur, Ladakh, Jaunsar-Bawar among the Khasa): brothers share one wife and hold the estate undivided, which prevents fragmentation of scarce land and caps population. Non-fraternal polyandry, where the husbands are not kin, occurred among the Nayar, where paternity was assigned by a ritual, not by the biological father.
- The Toda case carries a linked institution: because polyandry with skewed sex ratios (aggravated historically by female infanticide) left surplus wives scarce, the Toda practised a form of assigning fatherhood, the pursutpimi bow-and-arrow ceremony, in which one husband ritually became the legal father of a child regardless of biological paternity. Use it to show that polyandry too separates pater from genitor.
- Group marriage, several men married collectively to several women, was posited by nineteenth-century evolutionists (Morgan) as an early stage of humanity, but firm ethnographic evidence for it as a stable, institutionalised form is essentially absent. Treat it as a theoretical category, not an attested type; what look like group marriages are usually overlapping polygyny and polyandry.
- Levirate and sororate are secondary marriages that keep an existing alliance alive after a death. In the levirate a widow marries a brother (usually) of her dead husband; in the junior levirate specifically a younger brother. In the sororate a widower marries a sister of his dead wife, or a man whose wife is barren takes her sister. Both are mechanisms for the two kin groups to preserve the affinal tie and the transferred bridewealth rather than dissolve the relationship the marriage created.
- The reasoning to attach: marriage form is not arbitrary custom but tracks demography and ecology. Polyandry appears with scarce land and the need to hold estates undivided; polygyny with wealth differentials and where women's labour adds to a man's estate; the levirate and sororate with corporate descent groups that have invested bridewealth and want to protect the alliance.

Forms of marriage with defining cases

| Form                    | Definition                                                | Case and rationale                                              |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Monogamy                | One spouse at a time                                      | Commonest in practice; sex ratio limits alternatives            |
| Polygyny                | One man, several wives                                    | Widely permitted; privilege of the wealthy; sororal form common |
| Fraternal polyandry     | One woman, several brothers as husbands                   | Toda, Tibet, Jaunsar-Bawar; holds scarce estates undivided      |
| Non-fraternal polyandry | One woman, unrelated husbands                             | Nayar; paternity assigned by ritual, not biology                |
| Group marriage          | Several men and several women collectively                | Posited by Morgan; not firmly attested; treat as theoretical    |
| Levirate / sororate     | Widow weds husband's brother / widower weds wife's sister | Preserve the alliance and bridewealth after a death             |

## KEY TERMS

**Polygyny** — Plural marriage of one man to two or more women; the most widely permitted plural form.

**Fraternal polyandry** — One woman married to a set of brothers, keeping a scarce estate and the sibling group undivided (Toda, Tibet).

**Levirate** — Marriage of a widow to a brother of her deceased husband, sustaining the alliance between the groups.

**Sororate** — Marriage of a man to a sister of his deceased or barren wife, sustaining the alliance.

## Laws and Regulations of Marriage

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The syllabus separates laws of marriage (endogamy, exogamy, hypergamy, hypogamy, incest taboo) from regulations (preferential, prescriptive, proscriptive). Keep the two lists distinct in your answer, because they answer different questions: who you may not marry, and whom you are steered towards.

- Endogamy is the rule that you must marry within a defined group: caste or sub-caste (jati), varna, tribe, religion or race. Exogamy is the rule that you must marry outside a defined group: clan, gotra, lineage, village (in much of North India) or the sapinda range. Every real system combines the two, endogamous at one level and exogamous at another. Indian caste is the classic case: jati-endogamous but gotra-exogamous, so the field of eligible partners is fenced on both sides.
- Hypergamy (anuloma) is the practice of a woman marrying into a status group equal to or higher than her own, so status flows upward for the bride's family. Hypogamy (pratiloma) is the reverse, a woman marrying a man of lower status, and is generally disapproved. North Indian Rajput and Kulin Brahmin hypergamy is the standard example; it concentrated women in higher groups, producing shortages of brides lower down and surpluses of unmarried women higher up.
- The incest taboo, the prohibition on sexual relations and marriage between specified close kin, is treated by anthropology as the one near-universal rule and the great theoretical problem. Its content varies (who counts as too close differs between societies) but the existence of some such prohibition, minimally on parent-child and full-sibling unions, is universal, with the well-known royal-lineage exceptions (Ancient Egypt, Inca, Hawaiian ruling houses) that keep divine blood and property within the line.
- The competing explanations of the incest taboo are a standing exam topic and must be attributed correctly. Edward Westermarck (*The History of Human Marriage*, 1891): early childhood co-residence produces sexual indifference, so the taboo merely codifies an existing aversion; supported by Arthur Wolf's Taiwanese minor-marriage data and by kibbutz peer-group findings. Sigmund Freud (*Totem and Taboo*, 1913): the taboo suppresses a real and powerful desire, hence its force. Edward Tylor and later Levi-Strauss: the taboo is not really about sex but about alliance, it forces marriage outward, 'marry out or be killed out' in Tylor's phrase, and so builds society; this is the alliance-theory reading.
- Marriage regulations steer choice within the permitted field. A preferential rule favours a category of kin as the desired spouse but does not compel it (for example, cross-cousin marriage is preferred). A prescriptive rule requires marriage into a specified category, so the system will not function otherwise (many two-section Australian systems). A proscriptive rule forbids a category (parallel cousins, one's own clan).
- Cross-cousin versus parallel-cousin marriage is the distinction UPSC most rewards. Parallel cousins are children of same-sex siblings: father's brother's children and mother's sister's children. In unilineal systems parallel cousins fall in your own descent group and are classified as siblings, so marrying them is incest. Cross cousins are children of opposite-sex siblings: father's sister's children and mother's brother's children. They fall in the opposite group and are, across a great many societies, the preferred spouses.

- Cross-cousin marriage further divides by which cross cousin is preferred, and this feeds directly into alliance theory. Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage (a man weds his mother's brother's daughter, MBD) creates generalised exchange: wife-givers and wife-takers stay distinct and the women circulate in one direction, A to B to C to A. Patrilineal cross-cousin marriage (a man weds his father's sister's daughter, FZD) creates delayed exchange, the direction reversing each generation. Parallel-cousin marriage (specifically FBD) is the notable exception found in the Arab and Islamic world, where it keeps property within the patrilineage rather than exchanging it out.
- The South Indian Dravidian system is the case to have ready: it is prescriptively cross-cousin and uncle-niece (a man may wed his elder sister's daughter in parts of the south), the terminology bifurcates kin into cross and parallel from ego's generation outward, and Louis Dumont read it as making affinity a value reproduced across generations rather than a fresh transaction at each marriage.

Cross versus parallel cousins

| Relation                 | Who they are                                    | Marriage status in unilineal systems                         |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Parallel cousins         | Father's brother's / mother's sister's children | Classified as siblings; marriage is incest (except Arab FBD) |
| Cross cousins            | Father's sister's / mother's brother's children | Fall in the opposite group; often the preferred spouse       |
| Matrilateral cross (MBD) | Mother's brother's daughter                     | Generalised exchange; women circulate one way                |
| Patrilineal cross (FZD)  | Father's sister's daughter                      | Delayed exchange; direction alternates each generation       |

#### KEY TERMS

**Endogamy** — The rule requiring marriage within a defined group such as caste, tribe or religion.

**Exogamy** — The rule requiring marriage outside a defined group such as clan, gotra or village.

**Hypergamy (anuloma)** — A woman marrying into a status group equal to or higher than her own.

**Prescriptive vs preferential** — Prescriptive rules require marriage into a stated kin category; preferential rules only favour it.

**Cross cousin** — Child of an opposite-sex sibling of a parent; the preferred spouse in many descent systems.

## Acquiring a Mate and Marriage Payments

Two syllabus items sit together here: the ways a society lets people acquire a spouse, and the transfers of wealth that accompany marriage. Indian tribal ethnography supplies vivid examples for the first; Jack Goody supplies the theory for the second. Do not describe payments without saying which direction the wealth flows and why.

- The recognised ways of acquiring a mate, drawn from tribal ethnography, include: marriage by negotiation or arrangement (the commonest, elders settle the match); by exchange (two families swap a brother-sister pair, avoiding payment); by service (the suitor works for the bride's family, as with the ghar-jamai or the Gond practice, echoing the biblical Jacob serving Laban); by capture (a mock or real seizure of the bride, reported among the Ho, Munda, Birhor and Naga groups); by intrusion (a girl forces her way into the desired man's house and refuses to leave until accepted, reported among the Birhor and Ho as anadar or nir-bolok); by probation or trial (cohabitation before formal marriage, among the Kuki); by elopement (the

couple runs away, later regularised); by mutual consent or love marriage; and by purchase where bride price is heavy.

- The point to draw from the list is that the mode of acquisition tracks the payment system and the labour value of women. Where a bride is economically valuable, capture, service and heavy bride price appear; where families are roughly equal, exchange sidesteps payment; where property must move with the daughter, negotiated arrangement dominates.
- Bridewealth (bride price) is a transfer of goods, livestock or money from the groom's kin to the bride's kin. It is not a purchase of the woman but compensation to her natal group for the loss of her productive and reproductive capacity, and it legitimises the transfer of her children to the husband's descent group. It circulates: the cattle a family receives for a daughter fund the bridewealth for a son's wife, which is why Goody called African bridewealth a societal fund that keeps moving sideways within a generation.
- Dowry is a transfer in the opposite direction, from the bride's kin, going with the bride into her conjugal home or to the couple. Jack Goody's central argument (Bridewealth and Dowry, 1973, with S.J. Tambiah) is that dowry is a form of pre-mortem inheritance, the daughter's share of the parental estate handed over at marriage rather than at death, and part of what he called diverging devolution, in which property passes to children of both sexes.
- Goody's correlation is the analytic core: bridewealth belongs to relatively homogeneous, unstratified societies with hoe agriculture where women's labour is central (much of sub-Saharan Africa); dowry belongs to stratified, class-differentiated, plough-agriculture and property-owning societies (Eurasia, including India and pre-modern Europe), where the concern is to marry a daughter into an equal or higher household and endow her accordingly. The direction of the transfer therefore encodes the whole political economy of the society.
- The Indian dowry system illustrates the pathology of the form: hypergamous marriage plus dowry means a bride's family must both marry up and pay to do so, escalating demands into dowry harassment and dowry death. The legal response, the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 and Sections 304B and 498A of the Indian Penal Code, treats dowry as a social evil, whereas among tribal groups bride price (the reverse transfer) was traditional and non-exploitative, which is why blanket condemnation of marriage payments misreads the ethnography.
- Other payment types worth naming with precision: bride service (labour in lieu of goods), token bridewealth (a symbolic payment marking legitimacy without real transfer), gift exchange (reciprocal flows in both directions, as Malinowski found in the Trobriands), and woman exchange (a bride against a bride, the payment being another woman).

Bridewealth versus dowry (Goody)

| Feature               | Bridewealth                                          | Dowry                                             |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Direction of transfer | Groom's kin to bride's kin                           | Bride's kin to the bride or couple                |
| What it is            | Compensation for lost labour and reproduction        | Pre-mortem inheritance to the daughter            |
| Society type          | Homogeneous, hoe agriculture, women's labour central | Stratified, plough agriculture, property-owning   |
| Devolution            | Circulating societal fund, moves sideways            | Diverging devolution, property to both sexes      |
| Regions               | Sub-Saharan Africa, many Indian tribes               | Eurasia, India's caste society, pre-modern Europe |



## KEY TERMS

**Bridewealth** — Goods transferred from the groom's kin to the bride's kin, compensating for her productive and reproductive loss and legitimising the children.

**Dowry** — Property that moves with the bride from her natal family; Goody's pre-mortem inheritance.

**Diverging devolution** — Goody's term for property passing to children of both sexes, the pattern associated with dowry.

**Marriage by intrusion** — Acquiring a mate when a woman forces herself into a man's household until accepted, reported among the Birhor and Ho.

## Functions of Marriage; Family — Definition and Universality

Marriage and the family are joined here because the functionalist claim runs across both: marriage founds the family, and the family performs society's irreducible work. State the functions, then move to the family and to the two cases (Nayar, kibbutz) that were used to attack its universality.

- Functions of marriage, stated as an examiner would reward: it regulates sexual access and reduces conflict over mates; it assigns legitimacy and social fatherhood to children (Malinowski); it establishes the sexual division of labour within a cooperating unit; it creates affinal alliances between two kin groups, which is the alliance theorists' central function; and it provides for the transmission of property, name, office and ritual status across generations.
- The family, in Murdock's much-cited definition (Social Structure, 1949), is a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction, including adults of both sexes at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children. Murdock claimed on a sample of 250 societies that the nuclear family, or some grouping of nuclear families, is universal and performs four functions: sexual, economic, reproductive and educational.
- The universality claim was attacked with two cases. The Nayar (Gough) had no cohabiting nuclear family: the matrilineal tarawad, not a conjugal couple, did residence, economics and childrearing, and the visiting sandbanham partner performed none of Murdock's four functions in a shared household. If a whole society can organise reproduction and socialisation without Murdock's unit, the unit is not universal.
- The Israeli kibbutz (studied by Melford Spiro, Children of the Kibbutz, 1958, and Bruno Bettelheim) is the second case. Children lived in a communal children's house, were raised by trained metapelet nurses, and ate collectively; the couple's role was reduced to companionship, with the economic, educational and even much of the socialising function transferred to the collective. Spiro initially concluded the kibbutz refuted Murdock, then qualified it by widening 'family' to the collective itself, which shows how the universality claim survives only by stretching the definition.
- The third standing challenge is the matrifocal family, documented by R.T. Smith for the Afro-Caribbean (The Negro Family in British Guiana, 1956) and echoed in African-American studies: a stable mother-and-children core with the conjugal tie marginal or absent, the man peripheral and often non-resident. Here too the nuclear conjugal unit is not the load-bearing structure.
- The resolution most answers should reach is the one already forced in the marriage section: the family as a conjugal household is not universal, but the performance of its functions, socialisation, legitimacy, economic cooperation, is universal, distributed differently across the domestic group, the descent group or the collective. What is universal is the work, not the form.
- Keep three terms apart, because UPSC has rewarded the distinction. Family is a kinship unit defined by descent, marriage or adoption. Household is a residential and economic unit, people sharing a dwelling and



a hearth, who may include non-kin. Domestic group is the unit that actually carries out the daily tasks of production, consumption and childrearing, and may or may not coincide with either. The Nayar make the point vividly: the family (matrilineal kin) and the domestic group (the tarawad) coincided, but neither was a conjugal household.

#### KEY TERMS

**Nuclear family** — Murdock's unit of a couple and their children; claimed universal, challenged by the Nayar, kibbutz and matrifocal cases.

**Household** — A co-residential and commensal unit defined by shared dwelling and hearth, not by kinship; may contain non-kin.

**Domestic group** — The unit that performs the daily tasks of production, consumption and childrearing, which need not equal the family or household.

**Matrifocal family** — R.T. Smith's mother-and-children core with a marginal conjugal tie and peripheral, often non-resident, male.

## Types of Family and the Impact of Change

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The syllabus wants types of family classified along several axes (structure, blood relations, marriage, residence, succession) and the impact of urbanization, industrialization and feminism. Classify cleanly, then argue the change, because the change question is where the discrimination between candidates happens.

- By structure: nuclear (a couple and unmarried children), extended (nuclear plus other kin, vertically or laterally), and joint (the Indian variant of the extended family, holding property in common with a common kitchen, common worship and a recognised head or karta). The stem family (Le Play's *famille souche*) keeps one heir with the parents while other children leave.
- By blood relations, that is by which tie is the structural core: conjugal, organised around the husband-wife bond with spouses central and blood kin peripheral, against consanguineal, organised around a blood core such as a set of brothers or a mother and her daughters, with spouses peripheral. The matrilineal Nayar tarawad and the Ashanti household are consanguineal; the modern Western household is conjugal.
- By marriage form: monogamous, polygynous or polyandrous families, the household composition following the marriage type.
- By residence: patrilocal or virilocal (couple lives with or near the husband's father), matrilocal or uxorilocal (with the wife's kin), neolocal (a new independent residence), avunculocal (with the husband's mother's brother, a common matrilineal solution), and duolocal or natolocal (each spouse stays in their natal home, as among the Nayar and Ashanti). Residence and descent vary independently, which is the point of the matrilineal puzzle.
- By succession and authority: patriarchal, matriarchal (not attested as female rule; only matriliney and matrilocality are documented, which is a different claim) and egalitarian; and by the line of inheritance, patrilineal, matrilineal, bilateral or double.
- The impact of industrialization is the classic debate. The functionalist thesis (Talcott Parsons, and William Goode's *World Revolution and Family Patterns*, 1963) holds that industrial society favours the isolated or conjugal nuclear family, because it needs geographical and social mobility unencumbered by kin claims, and status is achieved through the job market rather than ascribed by the descent group. Goode adds that the ideology of the conjugal family often travels faster than the economic structure that supports it.

- The anthropological and historical evidence qualifies the thesis heavily, and citing it lifts the answer. Household size was small in pre-industrial Europe (the Cambridge Group's data on English households), so there was no large extended family for industry to have destroyed; early industrialisation in some settings increased kin co-residence because mutual aid was the only available insurance. In India, A.M. Shah (The Household Dimension of the Family in India, 1973) showed that the joint family was never as statistically dominant as assumed and that nuclear households often reflect the developmental cycle rather than a break from tradition; I.P. Desai and M.S. Gore reached compatible conclusions. Co-residence has contracted; the kin network and joint obligations persist through remittances, ritual and mutual aid.
- The impact of urbanization is real but two-sided. It reduces co-residence and shifts economic functions to the market and the state, yet urban kin sustain contact, arrange marriages, pool resources and provide migration bridgeheads, so the family adapts in function rather than simply dissolving.
- The impact of the feminist movement is the newest strand the syllabus names. Feminist critique reframed the family as a site of the sexual division of labour and of power, not a neutral haven; it exposed unpaid domestic labour, domestic violence and the gendered transmission of property; and it drove change in marriage law, women's property and inheritance rights (in India the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act 2005 gave daughters coparcenary rights), rising female workforce participation, later marriage and lower fertility, and the slow renegotiation of authority within the household. The direction of travel is from the family as a fixed institution towards a negotiated arrangement, plural in form.

Axes for classifying the family

| Axis                 | Types                                                   | Note for answers                                                   |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Structure            | Nuclear, extended, joint, stem                          | Joint is the Indian type: common property, kitchen, worship, karta |
| Blood relations      | Conjugal (spouse core) vs consanguineal (blood core)    | Decides whether spouses or siblings are the structural centre      |
| Residence            | Patrilocal, matrilocal, neolocal, avunculocal, duolocal | Varies independently of descent                                    |
| Descent / succession | Patrilineal, matrilineal, bilateral, double             | Governs group membership and inheritance, not authority            |
| Authority            | Patriarchal, egalitarian (matriarchal unattested)       | Matriliny is not matriarchy; say so explicitly                     |

#### KEY TERMS

**Joint family** — The Indian extended family holding property in common with a common kitchen, worship and a recognised head (karta).

**Conjugal vs consanguineal family** — Families organised around the spouse tie versus around a blood core such as siblings or a mother-daughter line.

**Developmental cycle of the domestic group** — Fortes's idea that households pass through expansion, dispersion and replacement, so nuclear and joint forms in one village are often the same household at different phases.

**Avunculocal residence** — Post-marital residence with the husband's mother's brother, a common solution in matrilineal societies.

## Kinship — Consanguinity, Affinity and Descent

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Kinship is the culturally recognised network of relations traced through descent and marriage, and the rights, groups and obligations built on it. It is the most technical area of the paper, and the examiner is testing whether you can hold terms apart that sit very close together. Get the descent typology exact.

- Two axes generate the whole field. Consanguinity is relatedness by socially reckoned common descent, that is, ties of blood as a society counts them. Affinity is relatedness created by marriage, the in-law tie. Ego is the reference point from whom a diagram is drawn. Kinship is social, not biological: adoption, the Nuer ghost marriage and the Trobriand denial of physiological paternity all show that a society decides who counts as kin.
- Descent is the socially recognised rule that assigns a person to a group by ancestry, transmitting membership, property, office and ritual obligation across generations. The principal types must be named precisely. Unilineal descent traces membership through one sex only: patrilineal or agnatic descent through males, matrilineal or uterine descent through females. Unilineal rules produce clear, non-overlapping, corporate groups, which is why they are common.
- Cognatic or bilateral descent traces through both parents and produces a kindred, an ego-centred network unique to each individual (except full siblings). Because a kindred has no fixed boundary and overlapping membership, bilateral systems rarely form corporate descent groups; modern urban and many hunter-gatherer societies are bilateral.
- Double (duolineal) descent runs both unilineal rules at once for different purposes: a person belongs to the father's patrilineal group for one set of rights and the mother's matrilineal group for another. The textbook case is Daryll Forde's Yako (Yakö) of Nigeria, where patrilineal groups held land and residence while matrilineal groups held movable wealth.
- Ambilineal or optative descent lets each individual choose which parent's group to affiliate with, producing groups (ramages) whose membership is chosen rather than automatic; common in Polynesia (the Maori hapu). Parallel descent, rarer, assigns men to the father's line and women to the mother's.
- The descent groups, in ascending inclusiveness: the lineage, whose members can actually demonstrate their genealogical links to a known common ancestor (a patrilineage or matrilineage); the clan or sib, where common ancestry is claimed but the links cannot be traced and the founder is often mythical or totemic; the phratry, a grouping of two or more clans; the moiety, the division of the whole society into two halves, often exogamous and often intermarrying. The kindred is different in kind: it is ego-centred and non-corporate, not a bounded group but a network reckoned outward from an individual.
- A descent group is corporate when it acts as a single jural person: it holds property, bears an office, endures beyond its living members and is collectively liable. Radcliffe-Brown and Fortes made corporateness the hinge of descent theory. Evans-Pritchard's Nuer (1940) are the segmentary lineage case to reproduce: lineages segment at every level and fuse or oppose according to the level of the dispute, so groups that fight internally unite against a more distant group, an order without central government that he called ordered anarchy, held by complementary opposition.
- Matriliney is not matriarchy. In most matrilineal societies jural authority over children and property vests not in the mother but in her brother, so the woman transmits membership while a man exercises power. Audrey Richards named the resulting matrilineal puzzle: a man owes authority to his sister's children yet ties of residence and affection to his wife's household, and the two pull apart. Societies solve it by avunculocal residence, by duolocal residence (the Nayar), or by keeping brother and sister and their spouses close.

Malinowski's Trobrianders (matrilineal, the mother's brother as authority and giver of urigubu yams, the father an affectionate outsider) and the Indian Khasi and Nayar are the cases to have ready.

- Fortes's distinction between descent and filiation is a favourite discriminating question. Filiation is the relationship that binds a child to both its parents; it is universal and bilateral, since everyone has two parents. Descent is the jural rule that selects one line for group membership. In a patrilineal system a child is filiated to both parents but takes descent only through the father. Complementary filiation is Fortes's term (from the Tallensi) for the socially significant tie to the parent through whom descent is not traced, the matrilineal tie in a patrilineal system, which carries real emotional and jural weight and explains ties that pure descent theory could not. Leach criticised the notion, arguing that what Fortes called complementary filiation was better analysed as affinity and alliance, which sets up the next section.

Principles of descent

| Type                  | Traced through                   | Group produced / case                                                  |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Patrilineal (agnatic) | Males only                       | Corporate patrilineage; Nuer, Tallensi                                 |
| Matrilineal (uterine) | Females only                     | Matrilineage; authority with mother's brother; Trobriand, Nayar, Khasi |
| Double (duolineal)    | Both lines, for different rights | Yako: land patrilineal, movable wealth matrilineal                     |
| Bilateral (cognatic)  | Both parents                     | Ego-centred kindred, non-corporate; urban societies                    |
| Ambilineal (optative) | One line, chosen                 | Ramage; Maori hapu                                                     |

#### KEY TERMS

**Consanguinity / Affinity** — Relatedness by reckoned common descent versus relatedness created by marriage.

**Kindred** — An ego-centred, non-corporate network of bilateral kin, unique to each individual; not a bounded descent group.

**Lineage vs clan** — Lineage members can demonstrate the genealogical link to a common ancestor; clan members only claim one, usually mythical or totemic.

**Complementary filiation** — Fortes's term for the jurally significant tie to the parent through whom descent is not traced (the matrilineal tie in a patrilineal system).

**Matrilineal puzzle** — Richards's tension between a man's authority over his sister's children and his ties to his wife and her household.

## Kinship Terminology — Classificatory and Descriptive

Terminology is where kinship study began, with Morgan, and where it is easiest to lose marks by muddling the two great types. The core insight is that what people call each other is not random labelling but a map of how the society allocates rights, so terminology correlates with descent.

- Lewis Henry Morgan (Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family, 1871) founded the comparative study of kinship and drew the first great distinction. In a classificatory system a single term merges several distinct genealogical positions, so father and father's brother are both called by one term, or all cousins are called by sibling terms. In a descriptive system each relative is specified separately or by a

compound that isolates the exact position (mother's brother distinct from father's brother, distinct from father).

- The purpose of the distinction is structural, not linguistic. Classificatory merging follows the logic of unilineal descent: if father's brother belongs to your own descent group and stands in a father-like jural relation to you, calling him 'father' records a social fact. Radcliffe-Brown read the practice through the principle of the unity of the lineage group and the unity of the sibling group, whereby people of one group and generation are equated.
- W.H.R. Rivers (*The History of Melanesian Society*, 1914; *Kinship and Social Organisation*, 1911) added the genealogical method, the systematic collection of pedigrees in the field, and argued that kinship terminology is a fossil record of past social institutions, so terms can be used to reconstruct earlier marriage rules. This is the method that let anthropologists treat terminology as evidence rather than curiosity.
- George Peter Murdock (*Social Structure*, 1949) systematised the field into six terminological types, distinguished mainly by how ego's own generation (siblings and cousins) is classified. Learn them by that criterion. Hawaiian (generational): only sex and generation matter, all cousins are called siblings; correlates with ambilineal or cognatic descent. Eskimo (lineal): the nuclear family is terminologically set apart, cousins distinguished from siblings but all cousins lumped together; correlates with bilateral descent, as in modern Western usage.
- Iroquois (bifurcate merging): parallel cousins are called siblings, cross cousins are distinguished (and are the marriageable category); father and father's brother merged, mother and mother's sister merged, but mother's brother and father's sister kept separate; correlates with unilineal descent and cross-cousin marriage. Sudanese (descriptive / bifurcate collateral): every position has its own term, maximum differentiation; correlates with complex, stratified societies concerned with precise status, as in some patrilineal Middle Eastern systems.
- Omaha and Crow are the two skewing systems, and they mirror each other. Omaha correlates with strong patrilineal descent: it skews across generations on the mother's side, merging mother's brother with mother's brother's son, so people of the mother's patrilineage are equated regardless of generation. Crow correlates with strong matrilineal descent and skews the opposite way, on the father's side, merging members of the father's matrilineage across generations. The rule to remember is that each skewing system 'freezes' the descent line that is not ego's own into a single set of terms, because that line's internal generations are irrelevant to ego's rights.
- The examiner's payoff is the correlation itself: terminology is a diagnostic of descent and marriage. If cousins are called siblings you expect no cross-cousin marriage and likely cognatic or Hawaiian organisation; if cross cousins are terminologically singled out you expect prescriptive cross-cousin marriage and unilineal descent. State the correlation rather than only listing the systems.

Murdock's six terminological systems

| System                       | How ego's generation is treated                                  | Correlated descent               |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Hawaiian (generational)      | All cousins = siblings; only sex and generation matter           | Ambilineal / cognatic            |
| Eskimo (lineal)              | Nuclear family set apart; cousins lumped, distinct from siblings | Bilateral (modern West)          |
| Iroquois (bifurcate merging) | Parallel cousins = siblings; cross cousins distinct              | Unilineal, cross-cousin marriage |
| Sudanese (descriptive)       | Every position a separate term                                   | Stratified patrilineal           |
| Omaha                        | Mother's patrilineage merged across generations                  | Strong patrilineal               |
| Crow                         | Father's matrilineage merged across generations                  | Strong matrilineal               |

#### KEY TERMS

**Classificatory terminology** — Morgan's type in which one term merges several distinct genealogical positions (father and father's brother alike).

**Descriptive terminology** — Morgan's type in which each relative is specified separately or by a position-isolating compound.

**Bifurcate merging** — The Iroquois pattern that merges parallel kin with lineal kin but distinguishes cross kin, tracking unilineal descent.

**Genealogical method** — Rivers's fieldwork technique of collecting systematic pedigrees to read social organisation from kinship terms.

## Descent Theory versus Alliance Theory

The central theoretical quarrel of kinship studies, and one the anthropology paper returns to. The question is what the elementary unit of kinship is: the descent group that perpetuates itself, or the marriage that links groups. British structural-functionalism said the first; Levi-Strauss said the second. Frame the debate as a disagreement about the unit, not about customs.

- Descent theory (A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, Meyer Fortes, E.E. Evans-Pritchard) treats the unilineal descent group as the basic building block of society. Groups are perpetuated by descent, they hold property, office and ritual, and they order politics where there is no state; marriage is a device for recruiting members to them and for creating filiation. The empirical base is African patrilineal ethnography, above all the Nuer and the Tallensi, and the intellectual debt is to Durkheim's corporate group and to jural analysis. Fortes's *African Political Systems* (1940, edited with Evans-Pritchard) is the programmatic statement.
- Alliance theory (Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, 1949) inverts the priority. Descent groups exist in order to exchange women, so the marriage tie, not the descent line, is the elementary structure of kinship. Kinship is a system of communication and exchange, and, in his notorious formulation, women are the valuables that circulate between groups of men, the message passed between them. The intellectual debt is to Mauss's reciprocity and to structural linguistics.
- The incest taboo is the hinge of the alliance argument. Levi-Strauss reads it not as a negative prohibition on marrying in but as the positive obligation to marry out, and therefore as the founding act by which humanity passes from nature to culture, the first social rule. Tylor had already given the functional core: 'marry out or be killed out', alliance or extinction. Marriage exchange, forced by the taboo, is what builds society out of families.



- The engine of exchange is reciprocity applied to persons. Restricted (direct, symmetric) exchange has two groups swapping women, typically producing bilateral cross-cousin marriage and two-section systems, and closing on itself. Generalised exchange has women moving in one direction around a circle (A gives wives to B, B to C, C to A), typically matrilineal cross-cousin marriage (MBD), which links many groups but requires trust because the return is deferred across the circle and across generations. Patrilineal cross-cousin marriage (FZD) produces delayed exchange, the direction alternating each generation, which Levi-Strauss judged less integrative, a claim Rodney Needham and Edmund Leach spent careers refining and contesting.
- Louis Dumont carried alliance theory into South India (Hierarchy and Marriage Alliance in South Indian Kinship, 1957) and coined affinity as a value: in Dravidian systems the affinal relation is not a one-off transaction but an enduring relation reproduced across generations, so cross-cousin marriage repeats and renews an existing alliance rather than founding a new one. This is the bridge between the abstract European debate and the Indian material the paper favours.
- The Leach-Fortes exchange sharpens the stakes. Leach argued that ties Fortes attributed to complementary filiation (the matrilineal tie in a patrilineal system) were really affinal, the residue of marriage alliances, so alliance, not filiation, explained them. Fortes defended descent and filiation as the primary framework and treated affinity as secondary. The disagreement is about which relation is analytically prior, blood or marriage.
- The fair verdict, which a strong answer states explicitly: descent theory explains stateless political organisation, corporate property and the continuity of groups well, and marriage poorly; alliance theory explains marriage systems, prescriptive terminologies and cross-cousin rules well, and political process poorly. They are not rival accounts of the same thing but answers to different questions posed to the same data. Later synthesisers (Fox, Dumont in part) treat descent and alliance as two dimensions of every kinship system rather than as competitors.

Descent theory and alliance theory contrasted

| Dimension         | Descent theory                             | Alliance theory                                          |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Founders          | Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes, Evans-Pritchard   | Levi-Strauss, developed by Leach, Needham, Dumont        |
| Elementary unit   | The unilineal descent group                | The marriage exchange between groups                     |
| What marriage is  | A device to recruit members to the group   | The purpose the group exists to serve                    |
| Intellectual debt | Durkheim's corporate group, jural analysis | Mauss's reciprocity, structural linguistics              |
| Explains best     | Property, office, politics without a state | Terminology, cross-cousin marriage, prescriptive systems |
| Regional base     | African patrilineal societies              | South and Southeast Asia, Amazonia, Australia            |

## KEY TERMS

**Alliance** — The enduring relation created between groups by marriage exchange, treated by Levi-Strauss as the elementary structure of kinship.

**Restricted exchange** — Direct symmetric swapping of women between two groups, producing bilateral cross-cousin marriage and two-section systems.

**Generalised exchange** — Circular one-directional marriage exchange (A to B to C to A), typically matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, with deferred return.

**Affinity as a value** — Dumont's idea that in Dravidian kinship the affinal tie is reproduced across generations rather than created afresh at each marriage.

## Last-mile revision

- Marriage resists a universal definition. Notes and Queries breaks on Nuer woman-to-woman and ghost marriage; Gough rescues legitimacy on the Nayar; Leach makes it a bundle of separable rights; Malinowski's principle of legitimacy is the surviving universal.
- Keep pater (jural father) apart from genitor (biological father). Marriage assigns paternity as a status, not by biology.
- Fraternal polyandry (Toda, Tibet, Jaunsar-Bawar) holds scarce estates undivided; polygyny is widely permitted but rarely majority practice; group marriage is theoretical, not attested.
- Laws of marriage: endogamy (marry in, caste) plus exogamy (marry out, gotra) combined in every real system; incest taboo near-universal; Westermarck (aversion), Freud (repressed desire), Tylor and Levi-Strauss (alliance) explain it differently.
- Parallel cousins = children of same-sex siblings, classed as siblings, marriage is incest (except Arab FBD). Cross cousins = children of opposite-sex siblings, the preferred spouse. MBD = generalised exchange, FZD = delayed exchange.
- Bridewealth (groom to bride's kin, homogeneous hoe-agriculture societies, circulating fund) versus dowry (bride's kin to couple, stratified plough societies, Goody's pre-mortem inheritance and diverging devolution).
- Murdock's nuclear family and its four functions; challenged by the Nayar tarawad, the kibbutz children's house (Spiro), and R.T. Smith's matrifocal family. What is universal is the functions, not the conjugal form. Keep family, household and domestic group distinct.
- Descent = jural rule of group membership. Unilineal (patrilineal, matrilineal), bilateral (produces kindreds, not groups), double (Yako), ambilineal (Maori). Lineage links are demonstrable, clan links are not; phratry and moiety are more inclusive.
- Matriliney is not matriarchy: authority sits with the mother's brother (Richards's matrilineal puzzle). Fortes: filiation is bilateral and universal, descent selects one line, complementary filiation is the jural tie to the non-descent parent; Leach called that affinity.
- Morgan: classificatory (merges positions) versus descriptive terminology. Murdock's six systems (Hawaiian, Eskimo, Iroquois, Sudanese, Omaha, Crow) correlate with descent rules; terminology is a diagnostic, not decoration.
- Descent theory (Radcliffe-Brown, Fortes): the group is basic, marriage recruits to it. Alliance theory (Levi-Strauss, Leach, Dumont): the exchange is basic, the group exists to exchange. Incest taboo = the passage from nature to culture. Dumont: in South India affinity is a value.

### Common errors to avoid

- Quoting the Notes and Queries definition of marriage as if it worked. Its whole value in an answer is that it fails: name the Nuer and Nayar cases that break it and move to Leach's bundle of rights.
- Confusing pater with genitor. Ghost marriage, woman-to-woman marriage and the Toda bow ceremony all make the point that the jural father need not be the biological one.
- Calling matrilineal societies matriarchal. No society has been documented as matriarchal in the sense of female rule; matrilineal societies vest jural authority in the mother's brother, which is why the avunculate and the matrilineal puzzle exist.
- Listing forms of marriage or types of family with no ethnographic case. Attach the Toda to fraternal polyandry, the Nayar to the definitional problem, the Yako to double descent, or the answer stays at listing level.
- Muddling endogamy and exogamy, or treating them as opposites at the same level. Every system is endogamous at one level (caste) and exogamous at another (gotra); state both.
- Confusing cross cousins with parallel cousins, or forgetting that MBD marriage is generalised exchange while FZD is delayed exchange. This distinction is exactly what cross-cousin questions are testing.
- Describing dowry and bridewealth without giving the direction of transfer or Goody's correlation with hoe versus plough societies. Direction plus political economy is the mark-earning content.
- Confusing descent with filiation. Filiation is universal and bilateral; descent is the jural rule that selects one line; complementary filiation (Fortes) is the tie to the other parent. Leach reanalysed it as affinity.
- Confusing lineage with clan, or treating the kindred as a descent group. Lineage links are demonstrable, clan links merely claimed, and the kindred is ego-centred and non-corporate.
- Presenting alliance theory as a theory about marriage customs. It is a claim about what the elementary unit of kinship is, and it directly contradicts descent theory. State the contradiction and give the fair verdict that the two answer different questions.