

## CHAPTER III

### KINSHIP

#### 3.1. Consanguinity

What constitutes kinship was for a long time a debated subject. Fox<sup>1</sup> regards kinship as a social relationship based on consanguinity. Consanguinity is usually defined in terms of common descent from an ancestor (or ancestors). When common descent is taken as the criterion of kinship, only those who are related cognatically to, that is, those who share a common ancestor with ego are to be reckoned as kin.

For some purposes, however, the descent criterion may be restricted to males and descent may be traced through males exclusively and only those descendants of a common ancestor in the male line will be recognized as kin. This suggests that in the patrilineal system, ego can have kin only on the father's side and not on the mother's side; his kin will be only agnatic. Similarly, in a matrilineal system, where descent is traced through the females exclusively, ego's kin can only be uterine. Of course, unilineal descent is kinship. But it is only a kind of kinship; it does not exhaust kinship.

But in the unilineal descent groups like clans, ego can trace kinship-- consanguineal connection with the agnates--only upto a certain degree. There are a number of agnates in such unilineal descent groups to whom kinship links may not be traced. This

raises the following questions: Is it proper to regard as kin those people to whom ego cannot trace kinship links? What else is then the difference between those to whom kinship links can be traced and those to whom they cannot be traced? How is it right to place them together in the kinship network?

Scheffler and Lounsbury<sup>2</sup> hold that kinship is based on genealogy and kin relationships should be defined by genealogical reckoning. Keesing<sup>3</sup> also shares the view and states that everywhere kinship is reckoned in genealogical terms. The emphasis those writers place on genealogy for kinship reckoning implies that only those relations that can be genealogically defined can be kin relationships.

It is thus made clear that mere sharing a common ancestor does not form consanguinity. Descent from a common ancestor should be genealogically proved. When there is no possibility of establishing genealogical relationship, descent from a common ancestor cannot constitute consanguinity.

Again, there is a problem in defining kinship in terms of consanguinity. When kinship is taken to be biological or genetic, there can be no such phenomenon as social kinship. The genetic principle of kinship does not operate in the case of adopted children who lack a genetic link with the foster-parents and the adopted children are, of course, non-kin. However, the relationship between them is assimilated into one of real kinship.<sup>4</sup> Though not a genitor, the foster-parent is treated as the father (pater) and

the adopted child as the son/daughter. The adopted child becomes a member of the foster-father's descent group and carries the descent line without any break; his children become the heirs to his 'father'.

Fox<sup>5</sup> says that kinship system usually works on the 'genetic' model. Kin relationship is biological. Should any non-biological relationship occur, it is just assimilated into one of biological relationship.

### 3.2. Affinity

When kinship is restricted to consanguinity, it excludes affinity or relationships that flow through marriage. Not only is affinity excluded from kinship but it is also deemed to be distinct from kinship. Quite often, kinship is contrasted with affinity. Kinship is taken to mean relationship by blood and affinity, relationship by marriage.

But the distinction between kinship and affinity is a mere exaggeration. Affinity forms part of kinship. As Freedman<sup>6</sup> remarks, it is impossible to speak of kinship without including marriage and consequent relationships. Kinship is bilateral. Not only the consanguineal relations, but also affinal relations constitute kinship. In other words, kinship is consanguinity plus affinity.

### 3.3. The Piramalai Kallars' Concept of Kinship

The Piramalai Kallars' concept of kinship includes both consanguinity and affinity. Those who are related by blood ties

and those who are related by marriage are both deemed to be kin.

The Piramalai Kallars use the word kele for kin relationship and the word kelakārri for kinsfolk. Those who are related by blood ties and affinal relatives are both designated kelakārri.

### 3.3.1. Tracing of Kinship

Among the Piramalai Kallars, one can be kelakārē or kelakāri<sup>7</sup> to ego, only when the relationship is traceable. Anyone to whom ego can trace relationship of any kind is taken as a relative.

But the kinship need not be traced in a direct, straight line. It can be traced in a roundabout way. One may not come in a straight, direct line of kinship to ego. Yet one may be recognized as a kelakārē or kelakāri, if one is related to a direct kelakārē or kelakāri of ego. If one's kinship to a relative can be traced, one may be reckoned <sup>as</sup> a relative.

Thus, the Piramalai Kallars insist upon traceability of kinship to recognize a person as a relative. When kinship is beyond tracing, it ceases to be kinship. Mere claim is not sufficient to establish the kinship.

### 3.3.2. Classification of Kinship

The Piramalai Kallars classify kinship into dūratti kele, meaning "distant relation" and kiṭṭa kele, meaning "close relation." The basis of such classification of kinship is not intimacy of contact, but degree. Those who happen to be the kinsfolk of the known kinsfolk are designated dūratti kelakārri and those whose

kinship is straightway traced from the kitta kelakārri.

However, this classification of kin relationship is based not merely on degree. It is indeed based upon kinship obligations. While the close kin are bound to exercise certain kinship obligations,<sup>8</sup> the distant kin have no such obligations.

Kin relationship is valid to the extent to which it is activated. It is activated by the exercise of kinship obligations which are demanded of a relative. Otherwise the kin relationships will be apt to break. One can remain a relative in ego's kin circle only when one exercises the kinship obligations expected of one. The failure or refusal to exercise the due kinship obligation leads to the snapping of the kin relationship.

When two persons stand in the maternal uncle-nephew relationship, they are bound by certain mutual obligations. The nephew is obliged to marry the maternal uncle's daughter and the maternal uncle, on the other hand, is bound to give his daughter in marriage to his sororal nephew. When either of them fails or declines to exercise the kinship obligations expected of him, the kin relationship is broken and further interaction stopped.

The following concrete case illustrates this point.

#### CASE 3.1

Periya Karuppa Tēvar, son of Māyānti Tēvar, wanted to marry the daughter of his maternal uncle, Vīrana Tēvar. But, as Periya Karuppa Tēvar was poor, his maternal uncle refused to give him his daughter in

marriage, even though Periya Karuppa Tēvar, as his sister's son, had a birth right to claim her hand in marriage and Vīraṇa Tēvar, as the maternal uncle, is under the obligation to give his daughter in marriage to his sister's son. Due to the refusal of the maternal uncle to exercise the kinship obligation expected of him, Periya Karuppa Tēvar broke his kin relationship with his maternal uncle. His parents and brothers also followed him and stopped their visits to the household of Vīraṇa Tēvar and gave up attending his household functions. Even though Periya Karuppa Tēvar was not on good terms with his brothers, they also followed his example.

Sometimes, the snap of the kin relationship does not end with the generational line of the snapper. It continues into his succeeding generations. The posterity take it over and sustain it.



NOTES

- 1 J.R.Fox, "Kinship", in A Dictionary of Sociology, ed. G. Duncan Mitchell (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968; reprint ed., 1970), p.104.
- 2 H.W. Scheffler and F. Lounsbury, A Study in Structural Semantics: The Serino Kinship System, cited by Roger M. Keesing, Kin Groups and Social Structure (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975), p.119.
- 3 Keesing, Kin Groups and Social Structure, p.119.
- 4 Fox, "Kinship," in Dictionary of Sociology, ed. Mitchell, p.106.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Maurice Freedman, "Kinship and Kinship System," in A Dictionary of the Social Sciences, ed. Julius Gould and William L. Kolb, comp. under the auspices of the UNESCO (New York: Free Press, 1964; reprint ed., 1969), p.366.
- 7 The words kelakarē and kelakarī are singular forms, meaning "kinsman" and "kinswoman" respectively. The word kelakarva is a plural form, meaning "kinsfolk."
- 8 For details, see infra chap.VI.