BSOC-109 : SOCIOLOGY OF KINSHIP

Programme : BASOH/ BAFSO
Course Code: BSOC-109
Assignment Code: ASST/BSOC 109/ 2026-27
Total Marks: 100

There are three Sections in the Assignment. You have to answer all the questions.

Section I

Answer the following Descriptive Category questions in about 500 words each.

1. Critically examine the alliance approach to the study of kinship. 20

2. Examine the feminist contributions to the study of kinship. 20

Section II

Answer the following Middle Category questions in about 250 words each.

3. How is family defined in kinship studies? 10

4. What do you understand by fictive ties? Explain with examples. 10

5. Discuss the relationship between caste and kinship. 10

Section III

Answer the following Short Category questions in about 100 words each.

6. Polygyny 06

7. Matriarchy 06

8. Incest Taboo 06

9. Cross-cousin marriage 06

10. Double descent 06

1. Critically examine the alliance approach to the study of kinship. 20

Answer

Kinship refers to the socially recognised relationships through which people identify relatives, arrange marriage, organise households and pass on rights and responsibilities. Early studies often emphasised descent, or the links joining people to common ancestors. The alliance approach shifted attention towards **marriage as a relationship between groups**. It is mainly associated with Claude Lévi-Strauss and his work The Elementary Structures of Kinship. Its central contribution is the argument that kinship does not simply connect people by birth; it also creates enduring ties between families and descent groups through marriage.

Incest prohibition and the formation of alliances

Lévi-Strauss began with the incest taboo, meaning rules that prohibit sexual or marital relationships among certain categories of close relatives. He argued that the taboo is not only a negative restriction. By prohibiting marriage within a recognised circle of kin, it encourages people to seek spouses outside that circle. A marriage may then establish an alliance between the spouse-giving and spouse-receiving groups. In this sense, the restriction on marriage helps turn separate families into a wider network of social relationships.

For instance, two families connected by marriage may support each other during ceremonies, exchange gifts, share responsibilities and settle disagreements through their affinal relationship. Such ties can endure beyond the married couple. The expression “exchange of women” appears in classical alliance theory because Lévi-Strauss analysed marriage from the standpoint of groups that arrange marriages. It describes his theoretical model, but it should not be accepted as a neutral description of women's agency.

Elementary and complex marriage structures

Alliance theory distinguishes **elementary structures**, which specify preferred or prescribed categories of spouses, from **complex structures**, which mainly specify people one must not marry, leaving a much wider field of possible spouses. In systems with a rule favouring a particular kind of cousin, the relationship between marriage and a wider network of relatives can be observed especially clearly. The approach examines the social logic behind such rules rather than treating each marriage as an isolated event.

Lévi-Strauss also described two broad patterns of exchange. In **restricted or direct exchange**, group A gives a spouse to group B and receives one from group B, creating a reciprocal relationship between the two. In **generalised**