

Sociological Understanding of Social Structure and Kin-based Human Behavior

Shukra Raj Adhikari

Associate Professor of Sociology, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Nepal

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Corresponding Author

Shukra Raj Adhikari

Email

shukrarajadhikari3@gmail.com

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Orcid

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4099-1761>

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ABSTRACT

The social structure is formed by various elements of society that are interrelated. Within this structure, kinship is considered a micro-social institution by sociologists. This article aims to analyze how different sociological theoretical perspectives explain the social structure and the role and nature of kin-based behavior within it. To achieve this objective, both primary and secondary data were used under the qualitative research approach. Various methods under the qualitative research design were employed, with a focus on autobiography, observation, and content analysis. Primary data was collected through empirical study, using autobiography and observation methods. Secondary data was gathered from sociological references and journal articles based on the thematic categories of theoretical explanations, social structure, and kinship, using the content analysis method. The data was analyzed and presented using content analysis. Within the social structure, the kinship system appears to influence everything from human daily activities to birth, death, status, honor, social and cultural responsibilities, duties, and rights.

Keywords: Kinship, society, social structure, human behavior and relationship, culture

Introduction

Society is a form of the relationship between humans. As soon as a baby is born from the mother's womb, it starts crying, screaming and yelling. After coming out of the womb, the baby cries for help to overcome the external environment's cold and hunger. This means a human cannot fulfill all their needs alone. They have to ask others for help. The baby appeals and expresses its needs through crying and screaming, while those who can speak do so or use other means. In sociological terms, crying, screaming, speaking, writing or expressing through gestures to fulfill one's needs is understood as interaction. Through such ongoing interactions, an interrelationship develops between humans. This integrated form of interrelationship is understood as

society. As humans grow up in society, they adopt different lifestyles and get divided into various classes, castes, statuses and groups (Matson, 2005). The interrelationships between these different groups and statuses have developed various social processes, procedures, codes of conduct, traditions and value systems (Palgrave, 1997). These social values and norms have led to the development of social frameworks like marriage, family, kinship, politics, religion and other social institutions (Adhikari, 2020a). The interrelationship of these various lifestyles, groups, castes, classes, procedures, marriage, kinship, family, religion and politics constitutes the social structure. In this process, mutual and distinct relationships, roles, positions, rights and statuses of humans get defined



and determined within the evolving social structure (Adhikari, 2024).

Statement of Problem

Generally, structure refers to the objective state of any entity formed by the integrated combination of various parts and elements (Adhikari,2020). Every entity has an interrelationship of different units within its structure. This interrelationship of units constitutes the structural framework of the concerned entity. For example, when we talk about the structure of a room, we refer to the interrelationship of elements associated with the room like windows, doors, walls, roof etc. The integrated state of the interrelationship between the different parts of the room like walls, windows, doors, roof etc. determines the structure of the room. Thus, a structure is the systematic and sequential state formed by the organized combination or interconnection of various elements. Similarly, the social structure is formed by the interconnected state of various social elements that are indispensable for the existence of a society - individuals, interaction, interrelationships, social values, marriage system, family, kinship, economy, politics, religion and so on (Adhikari, 2014). In this context, this article attempts to briefly highlight the theoretical concepts of social structure and examine the forms, levels and relationships of kinship within it.

Research Objective

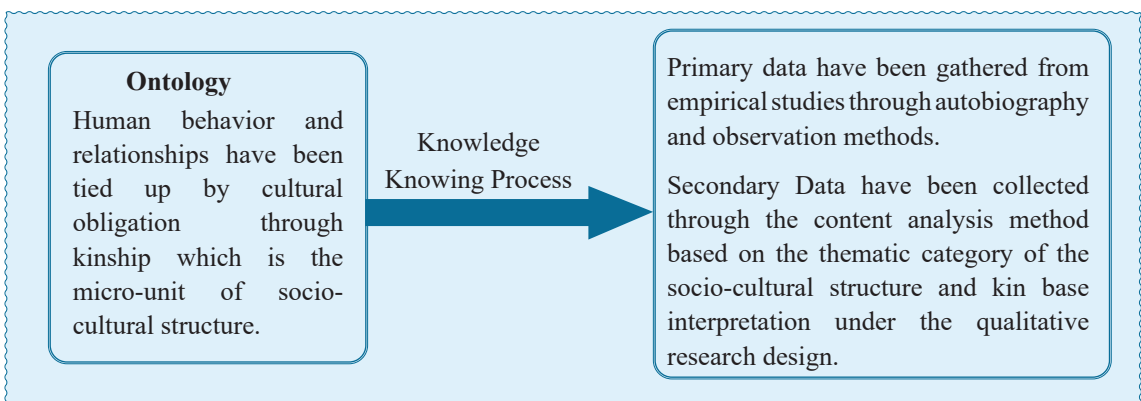
This article attempts to analyze how different sociological theoretical perspectives explain the social structure and what is the nature, types and human role of the kinship system within it

Methodology

The philosophical standpoint of this research is human behavior and relationships which are tied up by cultural obligation recognized by kinship as a micro-unit of socio-cultural structure. It is the ontology of this paper. Based on this reality, qualitative research designs have been applied to gain knowledge as epistemology. To meet the mentioned objective both primary and secondary data have been used under the qualitative research approach. There are various methods under the qualitative research design. Autobiography, observation, and content analysis methods have been more focus for this research. Primary data have been collected through the empirical study with the support of autobiography and observation methods. An observation checklist has been used to apply the observation method. Secondary data have been gathered from sociological references, and journal articles based on the thematic category of theoretical explanations, social structure, and kinship through the content analysis method. The data have been analyzed and presented through the content analysis method.

Figure 1

Methodological Framework



Results and Discussion

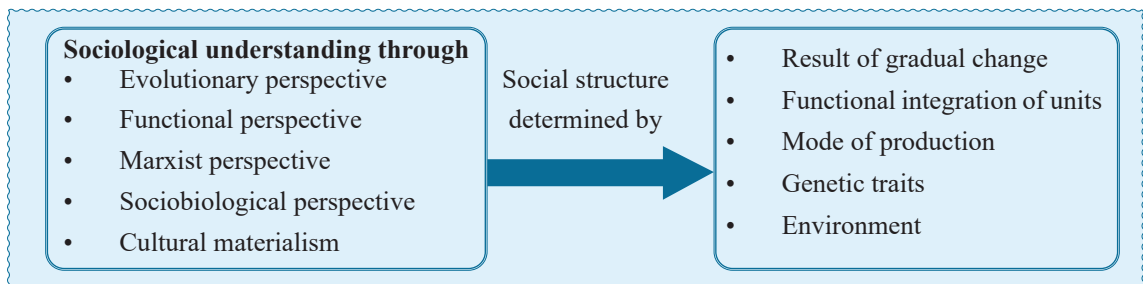
Sociological Understanding of Society and Social Structure

Abraham and Morgan (1995), quoting August Comte, have stated that social and cultural structures have evolved from the spiritual level to the metaphysical level, and from the metaphysical level to the scientific level. At the spiritual level, people in ancient and undeveloped conditions had a culture of believing in supernatural powers in all animate and inanimate objects, along with beliefs in magic and superstitions. As they reached the metaphysical level, reasoning and logic started to develop. The spiritual level's beliefs in supernatural powers also started to be questioned with the context of why and what. At the scientific level, the process of finding causes for every social and cultural event, establishing the relationship between events and causes, and scientifically analyzing every object began. This is Comte's explanation. Ritzer (1996), quoting Herbert Spencer, has stated that social structure has gradually transformed and evolved from the hunting-gathering stage

to the pastoral stage, from the pastoral stage to agriculture, and from agriculture to the industrial stage. In the hunting-gathering stage, human needs were limited to finding food. The systematic development of marriage, family, and laws had not taken place. After thousands of years in this stage, the structure transformed into the pastoral stage due to the diversity in human needs and practices. In the pastoral stage, permanent settlements, private property, and the proto-forms of marriage and family emerged. In the agricultural stage, humans engaged in polygamous marriage, patriarchal families, and agricultural production systems. After the agricultural stage, with the development of technology, society evolved into an industrial form. Humans started consuming manufactured goods. With large-scale production and advanced technology, social complexities increased, according to Spencer.

Figure 2

Theoretical Framework



Coser (1996), quoting Karl Marx, has stated that the form of the social structure has gradually transformed from the primitive communist era to the slave era, from the slave era to the feudal era, from the feudal era to the capitalist era, and from the capitalist era to the socialist era. In the primitive communist era, people did not have a sense of private property; all objects were communal and shared. With the establishment of private ownership over means and resources and the unequal distribution of land, the landless became slaves, and the landlords became masters. Over time, as

the slaves were freed, they became land laborers for the landlords, while the landlords became residents, and the landless became bonded laborers to sustain their livelihoods. With the development of technology, the capitalist era began, where large-scale machine-based production started. The capitalists started exploiting the workers(Marx & Engels, 1848). When the workers organized and established collective ownership over the means of production, the socialist structure developed, according to Marx. Coser (1996) has stated that according to Karl Marx, the development and

progress of a structure always occurs due to conflicts between opposing forces. The social structure is the relationship between human consciousness and objects. Life and the world are an endless chain of conflict, motion, novelty, the downfall of the old, and the emergence of the new. It is due to this conflict that the social structure develops from a lower to a higher level. The development process of an object occurs through the conflict between the old and the new, the victory or rise of the new, and the defeat of the old. Based on this historical process, the social and cultural structure is formed permanently, according to Marx's perspective.

Emphasizing the belief that the interconnection and cooperation of elements within society and culture, such as people, interpersonal interactions, relationships, social processes, customs, traditions, rituals, procedures, various social institutions, and groups, form the social and cultural structure, the functionalist interpreter Emile Durkheim has stated that the division of labor develops interdependence between individuals and groups, gradually giving continuity to the social structure. Radcliffe-Brown has stated that cultural value units like social institutions, traditions, and beliefs are systematically or orderly linked to each other, creating an integrated social structure (Turner, 1995).

Turner (1995), quoting R.K. Merton, has stated that not all parts within the same social structure perform the same functions, and their roles cannot be of the same nature. Social structures are not just formed from units and elements with homogeneous characteristics; there can also be contradictions or internal contradictions within them, which create both positive and negative functions within the social structure. According to Merton, it is through both positive and negative functions that the social structure operates. Bohannan and Glazer (1988), quoting Julian Steward, has stated that the cultural structure is formed according to the degree of adaptation to the environment. According to Steward's belief, humans develop their cultural form or structure in accordance with the environment to fulfill various needs. Harris (1971) has stated that the form of the cultural structure

is shaped according to the environment and the combination of technology and environment.

Turner (1995), quoting Habermas, has stated that when systems within the social structure become privatized, consumerist cultural ideas and feelings emerge, and the process of individualism and hedonism poses a threat to the very process of socializing individuals. This makes it difficult for the social system to function. The social system falls into crisis, and the capitalist state system instills individualistic feelings in people. The growth of individualistic feelings cannot bind society together. Without unity, the state cannot perform social, political, administrative, and other functions, leading the state into a legitimate crisis. In this way, the capitalist system undermines the public sphere of the social structure, according to Habermas. Ritzer (2000), quoting Giddens, has stated that for any social structure to exist, there must be active individuals or actors. Individuals perform various actions to fulfill their needs, and every individual action occurs within the context of the social structure. Without actors, neither society nor social action nor the structural process can be formed, according to Giddens' premise.

Marshall (1998) has argued that a person's entire behavior and nature are determined by biological and genetic traits. Social values and norms evolve based on behavior and nature, shaping the form of the structure. The construction of social and cultural structural units like marriage, family, kinship, along with all the procedures and processes designed to operate those units, are based on the foundation of biological and genetic traits. Therefore, according to Wilson, biological factors play a crucial role in determining social and cultural structures. Turner (1995), quoting Blumer, has stated that an individual's reaction to another individual is not aimed at the action itself but at finding the meaning of that action. Social structures operate through the mediation of symbolic interactions between humans, according to Blumer.

The aforementioned concepts suggest that social structures change based on the various lifestyles adopted by people, that the relationships between

structural elements are influenced by the respective social environment, that the functional relationships between structural elements operate. Findings and Discussion

Kinship System

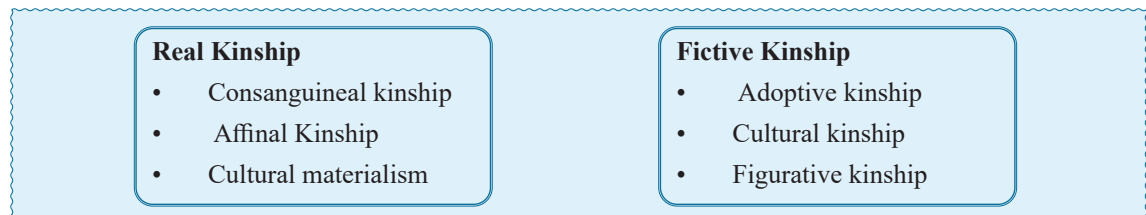
Kinship is a unit within the social structure. Sociologists have considered it a micro social institution. It is kinship that has earned the credit for giving humans, as members of the animal kingdom, a distinct existence and culture different from other beings (Rivers, 1914). What would happen if we, all the members gathered in the living room right now, imagined that there is no kinship system from today onwards? How would the relationships between each member be defined? Who would have the daughter-sister relationship? Who would have the husband-wife relationship? Would everything not become chaotic? Certainly, confusion would arise within us. We may even end up in an animal-like state, similar to sheep and goats. Our dignity, status, honor, responsibilities, and everything would face difficulties. This is why humans are considered distinct from animals

and civilized, because kinship has organized human relationships, responsibilities, and decorum (Prabhu, 1961). Therefore, the kinship relationship is considered an indicator of human civilization (Majumdar & Madan, 1980). Various sociologists have analyzed the kinship system from different perspectives. The anthropologist Tylor (1988), considered the father of modern anthropology, has explained kinship as customary practices formed by kinsmen produced through blood relations. The kinship scholar Dube (1992) has defined the kinship system as relationships determined through genealogies. Similarly, the anthropologist Ember & Ember (1999) has described the kinship system as a dynamic system of person-to-person relationships while explaining kinship. According to the aforementioned discussions, it can be said that kinship is a form of human relationship that is constructed by descent, marriage, and cultural norms.

Although various anthropologists have interpreted kinship differently, the forms of kinship can be presented as follows:

Figure 3

Types of Kinship



Real Kinship

Human relationships formed on the basis of blood relations, descent, and marriage are included in real kinship which is categorized in two forms.

Consanguineal Kinship (blood relations)

Consanguineal kinship refers to blood relations or descent-based ties. The relationship associated with a person's ancestry and genetic lineage is called a blood relationship. It involves a biological connection, such as between father-daughter, mother-son, brother-sister, sister-brother, etc.

Affinal Kinship

The relationship acquired after the establishment of a marital relationship is called affinal kinship. Such as: husband-wife, in-laws, son-in-law, father-in-law, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, etc. Under this relationship, after marriage, all people related by blood to the boy's side and all people related by blood to the girl's side are included in the affinal kinship.

Fictive Kinship

The human relationship that exists within the cultural norms of society, despite the absence of

lineage or marital ties, is called fictive kinship. Various types of relationships fall under this.

Adoptive Kinship

The relationship acquired when an individual treats someone else's child as their own son or daughter and brings them into their home and family is called adoptive kinship. Such as a dharma son/daughter, dharma father/mother, etc.

Cultural Kinship

Particularly in Nepali society, the relationship between a guru and disciple formed after receiving a mantra or initiating a ceremony is considered a cultural kinship. This kinship relationship has been an identity of Nepali society.

Figurative Kinship

When referring to someone with whom there is no actual kinship relationship, addressing them using a kinship term based on their age and imagining them in the role of that actual kin relation is called figurative kinship. For example, calling an elderly man on the street "baa" (father) would be a figurative kinship.

Levels of Kinship

Not all kinship relationships have the same level of closeness or distance. The responsibilities, rights, and duties associated with kinship vary. Accordingly, levels of kinship have been established. The social anthropologist Murdock (1949) has explained three levels of kinship:

Primary Kinship

The kinship group involving the closest emotional bond is called primary kinship. It involves not only emotions but also primary responsibilities, duties, and rights. This level includes seven blood relationships and one affinal relationship, totaling eight:

1. Father - Daughter (blood)
2. Father - Son (blood)
3. Mother - Daughter (blood)
4. Mother - Son (blood)
5. Father - Mother (marital)
6. Sister - Sister (blood)
7. Brother - Sister (blood)
8. Brother - Brother (blood)

Secondary Kinship

The relationships between the primary level and the secondary level are called secondary kinship. Such as grandfather-grandchild, son-in-law - father-in-law, son-in-law - elder brother-in-law, sister's husband - sister-in-law, etc. Murdock (1949) has stated that there are 33 types of such kinship relationships.

Tertiary Level of Kinship

The relationships between the primary and secondary levels are called tertiary level kinship. Such as the relationship between a great-grandfather and great-grandchild, or between one's own child and a cousin's child - these kinds of relationships fall into the tertiary level. It can also be said that all relationships remaining after the primary and secondary levels are included in the tertiary level. Murdock has mentioned that there are 151 tertiary level kinship relations.

Kinship and Social Structure and Behavior

Different practices exist in our society according to the various types and levels of kin-based human behavior and relationships.

Property Inheritance System

In Nepali society, the question of who gets to enjoy and utilize one's ancestral property after the demise of the ancestors is determined by the level of kinship relationship. Members within the primary kinship relationships have the first right over the transfer of ancestral property. Only if primary level kin are not available does it pass to the secondary level kinship. Even then, the rights are determined according to the cultural structure. For example, the right over property goes to sons, daughters, and spouses. Only if they are not available does it pass to the secondary level kin. Similarly, the rights to claim and receive/give an heirless property are also associated with this.

Tika/Tilak and Donations

There is a tradition of determining the order and amount of donations given during Tika/Tilak ceremonies based on kinship levels. For example, during a wedding, the groom's father has the first turn and receives the highest donation amount.

Then it passes to brothers, followed by secondary and tertiary level kin, and then fictive kin. Similarly, when a daughter-in-law takes Kosheli (gifts) to her brothers, the largest Kosheli bag is reserved for the closest primary level male kin, followed by secondary and tertiary levels.

Addressing by Name

There is still a tradition in Nepali society of not uttering the names of certain kin relations out of respect. For example, a wife does not utter her husband's name, a disciple does not utter their guru's name. In rural areas, women use alternative terms, nick names, or relate to their husband through the children instead of directly addressing them by name. In some government offices and hospitals, when a wife has to provide her husband's name, she feels shy, hesitates, and looks for alternatives to avoid directly stating his name. However, this tradition is fading away in educated and urban societies, and love marriages are also breaking this tradition, according to sociologists.

Prohibited Kin Relations

In Nepali society, there are certain kinship relations where physical contact is prohibited, such as between a sister-in-law and elder brother-in-law, or between a brother-in-law and elder sister-in-law. Anthropologists have explained this as 'kinship avoidance' - it may have developed as a way to control sexual behavior with elder kin relations according to the cultural context.

Joking Relationship

In Nepali society, the relationship between a brother-in-law and sister-in-law (devar-bhauju) and that between a husband's sister and wife's brother (sāli-bhinaju) is considered a joking relationship. There is a tradition where physical intimacy with one's wife's sister is permitted, and even sexual relations leading to offspring are accepted, with the possibility of marriage. This is likely why there is a saying in Nepali society - "You don't have to woo your sister-in-law, nor a pumpkin." Similarly, the brother-in-law and sister-in-law relationship is also viewed as a joking relationship like the sāli-bhinaju one. While a wife cannot have physical contact

with her husband's brother, she shares an extremely joking relationship with her own brothers. Various instances from the Mahabharata also mention the practice of using the brother-in-law (devar) as a secondary husband for procreation with the sister-in-law. The traditions of not letting a sister-in-law remain a widow and of marrying the sister-in-law were also cultural practices.

Responsibility of Death Rituals

Nowadays, due to social mobility, people are living away from their ancestral homes in different places. Even during important death rituals in Hindu traditions, the level of kinship relationship plays an effective role. If possible, the deceased's body is handed over to a member of the closest primary kinship relation. Not only that, but for the rituals, either the son or the closest available male kin has the responsibility to stay and perform them, regardless of personal closeness - the obligation arises from the kinship relation. In the current context, when someone dies, all acquaintances sit in a mourning crowd, but they do not participate in activities like lifting, carrying, burying or cremating the body - they are merely attendees. Only the deceased's lineal blood relations stay until the end and take responsibility for the daily rituals that follow.

Nuna Barne (Salt Restriction)

After a person's death, there is a Hindu tradition of restricting salt intake. The duration of 1, 3, 5, 7, 10 days etc. is determined according to the level of kinship relation. This tradition shows that the closer the kinship relation, the longer the period of salt restriction, which gradually decreases with more distant relations. While the scientific reasoning behind this may not be understood, it is still followed as an outward practice.

In reality, when someone close dies, the grief is greater, and excessive salt intake can increase stress and cause problems. Therefore, this cultural practice was instituted. As the relation becomes more distant, the grief decreases, so the period of salt restriction is also reduced. We follow it as a tradition, but every culture has an underlying scientific rationale that has not been researched.

The sociological understanding of social structure and kin-based human behavior is crucial for understanding the dynamics of human behavior within organizational settings (Mishra, and Aithal, 2022). The concept of ethical capital, which is the foundation of ethical behavior, is influenced by demographic characteristics such as work experience, marital status, and job position (Mishra & Aithal, 2023a&b). Human resource management plays a significant role in promoting ethical behavior through standards, training, and codes (Mishra & Aithal, 2023a&b). The Eastern approach emphasizes the importance of integrating Eastern and Western perspectives in management, highlighting the potential for new management ideas and conceptual foundations (Mishra, 2022). In contrast, the Western approach focuses on the technical aspects of management, often neglecting the social and human aspects of study (Mishra, 2022). The integration of these approaches can provide a comprehensive framework for understanding kin-based human behavior and promoting ethical behavior within organizations as value creation tool (Mishra, 2019).

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussions above, the sociological understanding of socio-cultural structure encompasses various dimensions. The social structure is shaped by the systematic relationships between individuals, interactions, relationships, social values, marriage systems, family, kinship, economy, politics, religion, and other social institutions. According to August Comte, social and cultural structures have evolved from a spiritual stage to a metaphysical stage, and then to a scientific stage. Herbert Spencer proposed that social structures have transformed from a hunter-gatherer state to pastoralism, then to agriculture, and finally to an industrial state. In contrast, Karl Marx argued that social structures have transitioned from primitive communism to slavery, then to feudalism, capitalism, and finally to socialism. Merton suggested that social structures are driven by both positive and negative functions, while Marvin Harris proposed that the environment type determines technology development, and the

combination of the environment and technology shapes the cultural structure. Within this context, the kinship system plays a significant role in our socio-cultural structure. Social anthropologists have categorized kinship into actual and fictive types and have established a three-tier hierarchical system of kinship levels that define social behaviors within the social structure. The kinship system determines various aspects of our daily lives, including birth, death, status, honor, social and cultural responsibilities, duties, and rights. Therefore, it can be concluded that the kinship system serves as an indicator of civilization.

Implication of this Research

The information in this paper is relevant to various aspects of everyday human life. It delves into the study of social structure from different theoretical perspectives and also examines the various types and levels of kinship, as well as kin-based human behavior within the socio-cultural framework. This paper will provide insights into managing social systems, understanding socio-cultural status, and respecting human relationships in the contexts of family, marriage, and ritual-based life. It will be a valuable resource for researchers and sociocultural planners who are interested in understanding the different levels of human behavior within the socio-cultural structure.

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