CHAPTER-IX

ROLE OF KINSHIP IN SOCIAL LIFE

Due to embedded relation between kinship and other aspects of social organization, the role of kinship can only be realized by referring those spheres such as economic, political, religious and social. Descent, residence and marriage are key factors in many societies, and so are often inseparable from political and economic institutions. Kinship always bear some relation to the ways in which people perceive the world around them, whether this be in the form of ancestor-worship, “Totemism”, origin myths, or symbolic association between kinship categories and other indigenous concepts (Barnard and Good, 1984). Starting from socialization of a child to the assurance of social stability, kinship has undeniable command in every society. This is no exception among the Saoras. Kinship serves the Saoras as a corporate unit by rendering social, political, economic, religious, and juridical services and is discussed in the following sections.

9.1 Kinship in Socialization

Through socialization, a child learns to accommodate itself to its social system. Through instructions he/she learns the socially prescribed manners, habits, idealism, arts, crafts, and his/her role in different social and religious ceremonies and rituals. However, a child has its basic relationships within family i.e. among primary kins. Among Saora, parents are more responsible for a child’s socialization. There is no severe social distinction in the status of daughter and son except under the rule of patrilineal descent. However, a son is trained by his father how to cultivate the agricultural land (Bagada) and become aware of the economic necessities of different items, household management etc. In Gamango, Buyya and other birunda fathers train their sons how to manage the societal responsibilities from generation to generation. Similarly,
the artist of ‘Idital’ or Ikon known as “Idaimar” often tries to train his son with his own quality. A daughter learns the technique of domestic management such as cooking, maintaining house, serving food, bringing drinking water from stream, arranging fire woods, taking pigs for grazing, helping parents in shifting and terrace cultivation and sometimes she ploughs like the male person. By the way they get the knowledge about taboos and other social rules such as how to respect others, how and whom to avoid, with whom to joke etc. They conceive their own roles in different social and religious occasions by observing the elders of their “kheja” and village members. The interaction between the members of “kheja” instructs them the co-operative knowledge and various other etiquettes and expectations. Not only these but from socialization they learn how to enjoy one, in various recreational activities like dance, music, games and feast. They also learn about nursing, dress pattern, ways of caring etc. Grand parental generation has also necessary contributions in socialization. They pass down the social ideals, moralities and tradition through jokes and story telling. One learns to accommodate with affinal relatives, which is again taught by the elder members. Thus, through kinship a Saora is facilitated to maintain socialization and to continue the tradition.

9.2 Kinship in Economic cooperation

Being a clan less society, it tries to maintain itself through its indigenous culture. A Saora identifies himself through reckoning the genealogy of his ancestral people with his Birmda. One village consists of two or more Birmda people. The patrilineal group is known as “kheja” and it functions through its members. The main economic source of Saora is shifting cultivation and terrace cultivation from which they meet their sustenance and livelihood. As shifting cultivation involves various stages like clearing the woods, burning the trees, showing seeds, watching the crop and harvesting etc. the role of kinmembers is very much felt among the Saora.
Though inheritance of property involves the principle of equal sharing, the uneven fertility rate of the agricultural lands is compensated by the system of exchanging agricultural lands among brothers in alternate years. Then, Saora culture has its unique system of labour cooperative, which is called as "Anseer/Antera". This cooperative includes the consanguineal, affinal and ritual kinmembers. Though not all, but the familiar ones contribute their labour through this group. Sometimes the polygynous system helps in cultivation. Besides, they domesticate pigs, goats and hens and do basketry. This serves as a supplementary to their economic life. The younger members usually take the charge of collecting fire woods and other forest products.

On various ceremonial and ritual occasions, kinmembers help each other through gifts. Their gifts are mostly in the form of rice, cereals and buffalos or goats. They observe the rituals like "Amba Nuakhia" etc. and do not take the harvested products until the Nuakhia ceremony is observed. Beside the name giving ceremony and initiation, kinmembers exchange gifts mainly during marriage and "Guar" festivals, as these are more costly occasions. They assist the marriage ceremony mainly in the arrangement of bride price and contribute rice and liquor and buffalo in "Guar" festival. Thus, kinship serves as an economic unit among the Saora.

9.2.1 Labour cooperative

The labour cooperative "Anseer" or "Antera" maintains the economic stability as (a) Division of labour based on sex constitutes the dominant form of economic specialization, (b) There is a simple technology, (c) production is carried out to the extent necessary to provide members of the domestic units with their livelihoods, not to produce a surplus.
Saora have developed their age-old method for self-management particularly for exploitation and utilization of forest resources and agricultural land. The unique structure is called *Anseer* or *Antera* which consists of kin members and friends. These members are from within the village, from neighboring villages and seldom from the distant villages. The difficult job undertaken while cutting the hill slopes and cultivating the land are made easier by the help of these members. Exchange of labour on various phases of cultivation helps Saora to save time, money and to maintain cordial relationship and interdependence throughout the culture and generations. The principle underlying the labour cooperative helps to supplement the food materials in exchange of labour. At least one member from each family has to represent the labour cooperative group when needed.

In the agricultural activities there is division of labour based on site. In shifting cultivation, women do several items of work like cleaning debris, digging, hoeing, weeding, watching the crops, harvesting, winnowing and storing. The men do all these work with women except, winnowing and storing. In addition to these men cut the big trees and set fire to the felled trees. In wet cultivation both men and women drive plough. In addition to this, women carry on the important tasks of transplanting, weeding, reaping, harvesting and storing the produce from the terrace cultivation. Even the girls of the age group of 7 (seven) to 8 (eight) bring seedling from the seed buds.

9.2.2 Gift exchange

On receiving the invitation from the relatives they act first and prepare themselves for their contributions. The sister and her family members are the kins who have to contribute the most and the best. Next come the matrilineal kin members who are invited through the village messages or *Birnda* members. These relatives after receiving formal invitation prepare
themselves to participate in the ritual irrespective of their engagements. They bring some sun
dried rice and liquor which is consumed by all the guests in the Guar ceremony. The father-in-
laws families of the deceased and the doer are also invited through the Birinda member or the
village messenger. Their contribution is relatively meager than the contribution of the sister. The
members of the wife's family occupy generally lower position in comparison to the sister's
family. These relations may live with the Birinda member's family in the villages. The ritual kins
are the next group of kin members who are invited from nearby villages. Their participation is
usually through liquor which adds colour to the festival. Their participation promotes socio-
religious solidarity not only in the doer's family but also within the village as whole. Their kin
members usually inhabit in the village dormitories or such other places identified for the
purpose.

A buffalo contributed by mother's brother or member of family and father's sister's son
or member of his family is called sarebongon in saora. After the buffalo is beheaded, it is exactly
cut into two equal halves. One half is given for the Guar ceremony and the other half is taken
home by the donor. The half given for the Guar is eaten at the Guar feast and the donor and his
family get their share.

A buffalo is also offered by a specially close friend of the host or his father or by
someone who stands in the relationship of father-in-law to one of the children, is called
Panogisbongan. It is too carefully divided into two equal parts. The host receives the legs and
head, while the donor gets hind legs and other parts of the body. After the feast is over the host
sends one leg along with a basket of rice and wine to the donor. The offering of gifts are made
indeed for pleasure and thus is reciprocated while celebrating Guar.
9.3 Kinship in Rituals and Ceremonies

Saoras engage themselves in various rituals and ceremonies throughout the year. Though they have various hardships, mainly economic, they try to manage it through kinship network. The rituals and ceremonies observed by Saoras are described in the following sections.

9.3.1 Birth Ritual

Saoras have no concept of inhibition either during birth or during death. During birth, the child and mother are kept aside for seven to eight days in the same room. On the 40th day, the name giving ceremony is arranged. A hen is sacrificed on this occasion. The Buyya recalls the name of Ancestors and Ancestress and if he can know the actual ancestor or ancestress that has taken rebirth then the child is named accordingly. Otherwise, the child is named after the flowers, the days on which he/she is born or names of the animals. The former two are more common. Then the maternal uncle takes the child and moves around the village to acknowledge it as his nephew/niece. Then the father of the child aims the arrow from the middle of the village to a direction. If the arrow goes a long distance then the child is expected to have a long life. On this occasion, a feast is organized to which very few are invited specifically, the kheja brothers of newly born child’s father and child’s mother’s parents, ritual kins and sometimes neighbours.

9.3.2 Initiation (Kinknon)

This is a village level ritual where the role of maternal uncle is felt more. The boy sits on the lap of the Buyya and the parent cry as their child is grown up. Then the maternal uncle covers the body of the boy with nails. Then the dance starts. After the dance, the maternal uncle takes off the nails. Thus the boy is considered to be initiated which is followed by a feast. Girls are not
required to pass through the initiation ceremony. But girls use turmeric paste on their body so that other will recognize their stage of puberty.

9 3.3 Marriage (Bansaserum)

In the marriage ceremony of Saoras and in other ceremonial feast, congregation of the consanguineal, affinal and ritual kinsmen takes place. The groom’s kinsmen shoulder the cost of bride price along with the ceremonial feast. Bride’s party is responsible for the proper organization of feast for the groom’s party. However, groom’s party, most of the time is accompanied with liquors. In the marriage ceremony the younger sister of the bride tries to pat the groom’s face with turmeric paste secretly and this is a part of the marriage ceremony. During the marriage the father of the bride cries out singing a song (Anagandikin). When the marriage is over another song (Kanamdakin) is sung by the bride’s kin when the bride goes to her husband’s house. In groom’s house, a feast is organized after the arrival of the bride. Before that a dance is being held during which the bride tries to escape. Then, with the help of friends, groom goes to take back the bride.

9 3.4 Death Ritual

On the death of a kinmember, the kinmembers gather and collect fire woods for the funeral. The dead body is taken to the funeral ground by the kins with the beating of drums. Some kinmembers, if they can, bring rice and other cereals. After the funeral they cook it and eat together. They have no system of pollution. But from the starting day “Maduar”, followed by “Hajeep” Secunda, ‘putapani’ to Guar, the kinmembers specifically the patrilineal group observes these. Their role is more realized on the second burial ceremony known as ‘Karjya’.

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Each kun members should be with some gifts and buffalo which is considered as the most prestigious item of gift.

The participation and encouragements of kun members particularly consanguines, may be of same village or of other village, play the leading role in observing the various death rituals and disposal of dead bodies. The Bimuda members are the main workforces. They are first informed about the death and then they rush to the deceased’s home with paddy, rice, cereals etc to see the person for the last time and to make preparation for cremation. They inform the village head about the death and as per the request of the doer, they go to the cremation ground and prepare the platform for funeral pyre. Beating drums is an integral part of the funeral ceremony and the person is intimated accordingly by the “Kheja” members. The drummers come along with their musical instruments to accompany with the procession and drink liquor when the pyre is lighted. They collect the firewood from the near by forest and clean the place properly where the pyre is to be lighted.

The pyre specialists (Siggamaran) are intimated by the Kheja members. The messenger of the village, Barika, is sent to the deceased’s sister’s house with the permission of the headman of the village. The father’s sister’s husband is also intimated in the same process. The father’s sister’s son plays an important role in the funeral ceremony. He presents a buffalo on the 10th day of the rites. The presentation of buffalo by the sister’s son signifies the strength and bond of kinship ties with the sister’s house. The in-laws of the daughter/daughters of the deceased are uniformly informed in the subsequent days. They also reach out the deceased’s house with paddy, rice, cereals, liquor etc for the occasion. The in-laws of son’s are also informed through the messenger (Barika) with the instruction of village headman. They also bring grains and liquor along with some amount of money, ranging between ten to forty rupees, depending on the...
economic ability of the family. The information regarding the death of an individual is also served to the father-in-law of the deceased. When the members of the father-in-law's family come to the home of the deceased to attend the funeral ceremony, they also bring some amount of money, liquor and a piece of cloth for the wife of the deceased. The mother-in-law of the deceased, if present, accompanies the procession to funeral ground. Since the women are not allowed to participate in preparation of pyre they remain at a distance from the platform of pyre where as the male members of the lineage such as, sister's son, mother's brother, wife's father and wife's brother contribute a piece of long wood each for the pyre. The ritual kins like affinal and consanguine are also informed by the messenger of the village about the death news and death ritual. When they come, they also bring grains like paddy, rice, and cereals with them and actively participate in the ritual.

The contributions of kin members physically, economically and mentally help the doer to face the unseen situation. The cooperation and support of the kin's men help the doer to gather strength both psychologically and socially so that he prepares himself to face the situation courageously. It is the essence of social mechanism on which the Saora society is built up and maintained. Their support and unity at the time of crisis bring unity and integrity among the villagers in general and the family in particular.

The kins men are the pillars of social relation. The consanguine, affine and the ritual kins come forward to support the family of the deceased to overcome their earlier difficulties if any. The situation provides opportunity to many outsiders to believe that the crisis is not restricted to the specific family concerned but is the responsibility of the whole kins men to feel it as if it is their own problem and thus they find solution for the same.
The ritual performances and the involvement there, provides condition for the smooth passage of the soul to the underworld. If the doer doesn’t perform his duties effectively, the deceased’s soul may not find suitable place in the underworld. Not only this, when the doer dies, it is expected that he will receive the same treatment for this soul. Apart from this, so long as he lives he will be torched by the unsatisfied soul. His family members may meet unnatural death or may suffer from serious diseases. His agricultural land may turn unproductive and he may lose forest collection. Moreover, he may be criticized by his kins men, villagers and the near and dear ones.

The doer observes restriction, refrains himself from non-vegetarian dishes and shares food with the others. He doesn’t live in his house till tenth day is completed. He takes every care to keep the death lamp lighted, because if the lamp goes out, it is believed that the soul is unsatisfied and will cause harm to the family and Birmda members. So he requests his family members, particularly his sister, to keep the lamp burning. He carries adequate ‘karanya’ oil for the purpose.

The daughters and sisters are the main economic assets in the Soara family. It is important on the part of the son to keep good relationship with deceased’s sister and his daughter in order to make the deceased’s soul happy. Moreover, their female members don’t want to create any problem for the deceased’s son so that their own family will live happily and free from evil eyes of the supernatural being. In a way, it is a relationship of service and counter service.

Through death rituals the doer gets an opportunity to express his deep gratitude towards the deceased. The contribution which the deceased made at the time of rearing and well-being of the family are reflected through the ritual performances of the doer. This is a form of
socialization in which the youngsters of the kin members learn how to pay respect to the deceased and his deeds. By performing the ritual ceremony and maintaining properly the ritual rites, the doer sends a message to the other members of the society to follow the same path. This process helps in preserving and respecting the status of the old and aged, who are dependent on the productive force of the society. The old becomes dependent on the younger generation and the younger generation feels it to be their duty to maintain the old and support them during their need and finally when they perform the death ritual it signifies the continuity of respect and devotion even after death.

In Saora society the contribution of sister to her brother's family is very important. Literally speaking the sister is the nerve center and is consulted in every occasion, may be social or economical. Before her marriage, she is the total caretaker and after her marriage her contribution and cooperation is indisputable to her brother's family. She is invited first on all religious and social occasions. On receiving the invitation they act first and prepare themselves for their contribution. The sister and her family members reside in the house of the doer. On the death of the sister or daughter, the brother or other close living relatives come and collect the ashes and bones of the dead from the funeral ground (kmtalla). The maternal kin members are next in importance to the above that are invited through the village messenger or Birmda members. After receiving formal invitation they prepare themselves to participate in ritual rites irrespective of their engagement. Their roles are not as important as doer's family. On their participation they bring some sun-dried rice and liquor, which is consumed by all the participants at the Guar ceremony. They depart early after the ceremony and reside in a home near the doer's house specially constructed. The father-in-law's family of the deceased is also invited through the Birmda members or village messenger. In Saora society the contribution of wife is relatively
meager than the contribution of the sister and the members of wife's family occupy generally lower position in comparison to the sister's family.

The ritual kins are the next group of kin members who are invited from nearby villages. Their participation is usually through contribution of liquor. Their participation promotes socio-religious solidarity not only in the doer's family but also with the villagers as a whole. These kin members usually inhabit in the village dormitories or such other places identified for the purpose. A buffalo (Bantelea) contributed by mother's brother or members of family and father's sister's son or members of his family are called Sarebongon in Saora. After the buffalo is beheaded, is removed for ceremonial purpose, is cut exactly into half, half is given for the Guar ceremony and the other half is taken home by the doer. The half given for the Guar is eaten at the Guar feast and the donor as well as his family gets their share. A buffalo given by a specially closed friend of the host or of his father or by some who stands in the relationship of father in law to one of the children, is called 'Panogisbongan.' It is too carefully divided, the host receives legs and the head, the donor keeps hind leg and all the rest of meat, including lever. But after the feast is over, the donor goes home and the host sends for him one leg, together with a basket of rice and wine.

9.3.5 Other Ceremonies

The Amba, Kandula, Janna Nuakhia ceremonies are organized by the Saoras before consumption of a newly produced cereal in the year. They invite their kin members and appraise them with feast and liquor. On this occasion gift in general, is not expected. They worship their ancestors on the Idtal or Ikon and the "Sadaru"

The kinship fulfills the requirements in rituals and ceremonies.
9.4 Kinship and political institutions

The social fabrication has its mercurial structure to which each and every aspect is necessarily knitted. Political unit is one of the indispensable functional units in Saora society. Among Saoras, kinship serves as a political supplement to other similar structures such as economic, religious, and social. Though Saora culture has no format of clans, but each village has a headman called Gamango. If there is no Gamango Brinda, then the Mandala Birinda headman substitutes it. He is the headman of both the village and of its “Kheja”. He is the hereditary political head and under his hegemony the villages functions. But, these Gamango and Mandala were appointed by the representatives of Paralakhemundi king, called “Bisous” and the concept is gradually disappearing. The Gamango is the most economically reach group that exercise the leadership and act as the ultimate decision maker in the village. Next to them are Mandala who generally assist the Gamango in decision making, in arranging various rituals and ceremonies. The Buyyas are the religious practitioners. Raitas are the poorer section that obeys the directions given by the other three “Brinda”. At present the political system has changed significantly but the traditional structure is yet working as a shadow. Similarly, within “Kheja” group the eldest member serves in maintaining customary laws, social conventions, norms and rules (marriage rules and descent rules).

9.5 Kinship and Social Stability

Kinship can be perceived as the best mechanism in maintaining the social stability in Saora society. Besides the rules of descent and marriage through which the members are recruited into kinship, it also works as a device for social control and resolving inter-group conflicts. In the Saora society, each member confirms himself to the social norms and
regulations. The kinship obligation serves as a moral force in restricting one from social
deviance and violation and thereby maintains smooth social order. Through socialization
process, the social laws and regulations are poured into the unconscious mental process and habit.

The kinship usages are the best device in regulating sexual, joking, avoidance, economic
and political etiquettes. Saoras have strict versions of incest taboo, which regulates their marital
life and brings tranquility in the society. They consider the sexual relationship among the blood
relatives as incestuous. Likewise, the joking and avoidance rules control the social instability by
exerting pressures and hence are precious tools of social control. For any deviations or anomaly,
the above rules prescribe heavy punishments.

The kinship usages also resolve domestic conflicts within a family or village. The head of
the “Kheja” has the responsibility to dissolve the family conflicts, such as between parents,
children, between brothers and the like. The head of the Kheja also resolves conflicts arising out
of land owning or other economic interests. Religious and ritual interests mainly cause inter
group conflicts. For example, in the marriage ceremony, conflicts arise regarding bride-wealth,
bride-capture, and marriage relation with “Punja” or patrilineal group and cross cousin marriage.
However, the elder members under the leadership of village headman “Gamango” settle these
conflicts.

Thus, kinship in Saora society serves to maintain the social probity and stability by
executing social, economic, religious, and political castles for their continuity.