SOCI 222
Comparative Social Institutions

Session 4 – The Patrilineal Descent System

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The Patrilineal Descent System forms the Uni- Lineal Descent system where only one line (male) is recognized for tracing descent. This session introduces students to the Patrilineal Descent system in terms of membership, inheritance and succession, residential pattern among others.
The key topics to be covered in the session are as follows:

• Topic one – Membership and Examples of Societies Practicing Patrilineal Descent
• Topic two - Marriage and Residential Pattern
• Topic three – Inheritance and Succession
• Topic four - Other Essential Features
MEMBERSHIP
Patrilineal Descent System

- This descent traces genealogical connections through the male line only.
- The patrilineal descent group is made up of all persons male and female, who have descended from a common male ancestor;
- Children born to male members belong to the group, but children of female members do not belong to it.
- The Patrilineal Descent is also known as Agnatic Descent and people related patrilineally are referred to as Agnates.
Illustrating Ego’s Patrilineage for Three Generations

- A = B
- C = D
- E = F = G
- H = I = J

EGO

Patrilineal Descent Group

Slide 7
Examples of Societies

• Examples of Societies practicing the Patrilineal Descent system in Ghana are:
  – Ewes, Ga, Krobo, Adangme, Tallensi, Kokomba and Lowilli;

• In other parts of Africa, we have:
  – Nuer of Southern Sudan
  – Swazi of Swaziland
  – Zulu of South Africa
  – Yoruba of Nigeria.
Topic Two

MARRIAGE AND RESIDENTIAL PATTERN
Marriage under the Patrilineal Descent

• The Patrilineal Descent is largely exogamous: i.e. marriages are largely forbidden among members.

• Children of brothers (Parallel-Cousins) are not allowed to marry one another since they belong to the same group.

• However, parallel-Cousin marriage is widely practiced among the Tongu Ewe especially among the people of Tefle.

• Marriage between children of brother and sister (Cross-Cousins) may be allowed.
Residential Pattern in Patrilineal Societies

• **Patri-local Residence** is where the couple lives in the husband’s father’s compound

• **Viri-local Residence** is where the residence is provided by the husband himself not necessarily on his father’s compound

• The *Ga* of Ghana though a Patrilineal Society are an exception as they practice the **Duo-local Residence** - where the married couple continue to live separately in their own natal homes after marriage.
INHERITANCE AND SUCCESSION
Succession and Inheritance in Patrilineal Societies

• **Succession** refers to the transfer of office, status or position

• **Inheritance** is the transfer of property

• There are **three** major categories of Inheritance and Succession within Patrilineal Societies:
  – Transfer of both the position and property from father to all the children;
  – Transfer of the office/position to the father’s brother and property to the children;
  – Transfer of both property and office/position to the father’s brother and later to the children, when the children are of age or at the death of the father’s brother.
Inheritance and Succession

• In the Inheritance, two types of properties are inherited:
  – Self-Acquired Property – those acquired by the deceased father and this goes to the children;
  – Lineage Property – the resources belonging to all the lineage members and this goes to the lineage and not the children;

• In patrilineal societies, lineage properties do not belong to children of a deceased father since such property goes to the next senior most male in the lineage.
Distribution of property amongst children

- Property can be distributed in three ways:
  - Transfer of property to sons to the total exclusion of the daughters
  - Transfer of property to all the children, but the larger share goes to the male children
  - Transfer of property equally among the wives who have children with the deceased husband and in turn among the children
Inheritance and Succession

• Among the Anlo Ewes, the father’s property is transferred to the children but males have more than the female children.

• In polygynous families, two methods are applied;
  – Sharing the property equally among the wives who have children for the deceased husband regardless of the number of children and their sex;
  – The property can also be shared according to the number of children and their sex; such that males have larger share than females.
Inheritance and Succession

• Among the Krobo in terms of Inheritance, the Principle of Primogeniture (Seniority) is used i.e. inheritance of the eldest son
  – In monogamous marriages, the eldest son of the deceased man inherits the properties and takes care of the mother and other siblings;
  – In polygnous marriages, property is shared among the eldest sons of all the wives, who use their share to take care of their mother and other siblings;
• Among the Tallensi, the property is transferred from the deceased father to the sons only but not based on seniority.
Topic Four

OTHER ESSENTIAL FEATURES
Other features of the Patrilineal System

- Two of the practices associated with Patriliny which affects inter-personal relations are:
  - Opposition of Adjacent Generations
  - Social Equivalence of Siblings;
Other features

- **Opposition of Adjacent Generations:**
  - This describes the prescribed relationship between a father and his first son in Patrilineal societies.
  - This relationship is characterized by taboo, formality and sometimes avoidance; a man and his eldest son do not eat together.
  - Among the *Tallensi*, a man is not regarded as a full-fledged adult as long as his father lives and its only after the father's death that he becomes a man.
  - A man’s first-born son must not wear his garment or look into his granary during his life time since that would bring misfortune on both of them.
  - As a result, the two harbor fear, resentment and hostility towards each other since the son thinks the father is an obstacle to his adulthood and the father also thinks the son is wishing his death.
Other features

- **Social Equivalence of Siblings**
  - In Patrilineal societies, fathers are disciplinarians while mothers treat their children with love and care.
  - Children therefore see their father as wicked and difficult, while mother is considered loving and caring.
  - There is the tendency on the part of children to extend their attitude towards their parents to their parent’s relatives.
  - Mother’s relatives are called and treated just like mother and father’s relatives are also treated as father.
  - Among the **Nuer**, a man is more close to the mother’s people than his agnatic relatives and he would seek property from his uterine relatives when his father is dead.
Sample Question

• Find out some inheritance and succession practices amongst other patrilineal societies which have not been provided here.