**The kinship system** is one of the oldest and most important elements in the study of social organisation. It includes socially recognised relationships based on genealogical ties. These ties or bonds are of three kinds: relation of affinity (relation between spouses), relation of consanguinity (relation between siblings), and relation of descent (relation between parent and child). The primitive and irreducible character of the basic unit of kinship is actually a direct result of the universal presence of incest taboo. (Levi-Strauss, 1973: 46). In human society, a man must obtain a woman from another man, who gives him a daughter or sister. Thus, in a kinship structure, a kind of role is associated with his or her status. (Levi-Strauss: ibid). Each person is reckoned by a particular term and has a particular place in the kinship structure. And each one has to do certain duties or obligations to the related members of that society. This study tries to understand the role and the nature of relationship between the primary kins both in society as well as in mythical life by studying the myth of the Pathinaicken community. It places the informant as Ego (a person who is the basic point of reference) for drawing a genealogical tree, including the ascending and descending generations.

The Pathinaicken myth of lunar eclipse collected from secondary sources is analysed in this study in Levi-Straussian terms. Though this myth might contain several interpretations, this study focuses only on the relationship between consanguineal and the affinal kins in the myth.

**The Pathinaicken tribe**

The Pathinaicken is a diminutive tribal community numbering 440 persons, living in the semi-evergreen forest areas of Nilambur Valley, Malappuram district, Kerala. This community is considered to be an offshoot of the major tribe called Kattunaicken and is not listed separately in Census records. They live in settlements and each settlement consists of 30-60 people, who are related to each other either through marriage or by blood. Each settlement has a headman known as Chemmakkaran, who acts as the socio-political head. A nuclear family is the basic economic unit. The people subsist on food-gathering, hunting, small-scale hunting, non-wood forest produce collection, forest labour and wage labour.

**Kin relationship in social life**

The kinship system of the Pathinaicken community allows a man (see Figure-1) to marry his father's sister's daughter i.e., parallel cousin (A), mother's brother's daughter i.e., cross cousin (B), brother's widow (C), his deceased wife's sister i.e., levirate (D) and marriage by exchange (E).

Among the Pathinaicken, the same kinship term, Chinnappan, is used by Ego to denote his father's younger brother, mother's younger sister's husband and step-father and similarly Chinnaice is used to denote his mother's younger sister, father's younger brother's wife and stepmother. A man is allowed to have more than one wife, but a woman is prohibited to marry more than one man at a time. Marriage ties are very fragile: a man can desert his wife if she is a barren and remarry another. Frequent desertions and remarriages are common and a kind of serial monogamy is the result. A man or woman in his/her life-time can make two or three alliances.

The brother has an important role in his sister's life. He is supposed to look after his sister if she become a widow or divorcée. He also takes care of his sister's children if she dies earlier. He takes the initiative in conducting the marriage of his sister's son. He also names the child of his sister's son/daughter. In turn, the sister plays an important role in the life-cycle rites of her brother's daughter. She gives a helping hand to her brother's daughter at the time of menstruation and confinement. At the rice feeding ceremony, it is the sister who first feeds her brother's daughter's child. A girl at the time of marriage wears the new dress given by her father's sister. Seven days after marriage, the bride's father visits the groom's house and takes both of them to the bride's natal home. The couple spends a night there and before leaving, the groom puts some money under the pillow. This amount belongs to the bride's father's sister.
Kin relationship in myth

The myth of the Pathinaicken related to lunar eclipse is as follows:

Once upon a time there lived seven Pathinaicken brothers and their wives. The brothers had a young sister. One day, the sister asked the wives of her brothers for a handful of water to drink. One woman said, “Oh, dear, the water is spoilt because I put my hand in.” Another woman said, “See, the water is full of mucus that fell from the children’s nose.” And, finally, none of them gave her water. The girl went to the water tank with a vessel to drink water. When she dipped the vessel into the water, she heard a voice say, “Do not take the water.” She again dipped the vessel. Again the voice was heard. Dejected and disgusted, she dipped the vessel in the water a third time. This time she saw a huge serpent, which asked her, “What will you call me?” She said, “I’ll call you anna, elder brother.” The serpent refused to give her water. He again asked her the same question. She answered that she would call him maamma, the maternal uncle. The serpent did not give her water. She said, “I’ll call you tintapaa, father’s younger brother. The serpent did not agree again. Finally, frustrated and helpless, she asked him, “Tell me, what should I call you?” The serpent answered “Call me aalen, the husband. She had to agree because her tongue and throat were parched with thirst. The serpent allowed her to drink the water. After drinking, he asked her to sit on top of him. They crossed the seven hills and he took her to a big stone cave. When they reached the cave, the snake remembered that there was nothing for his wife to eat. Then, he brought a sack of rice and asked her what else she wanted. She wanted copper vessels and ladles. Whatever she asked was brought to her. Like any ideal husband, he looked after her properly with care and love.

After a week, not seeing the sister, the brothers went in search of her. After a long search, they found her in a serpent’s cave. When the serpent was away, they took the sister back home. The brothers planted sickles all over the seven paths to prevent the serpent from coming in search of the girl.

The girl was pregnant. As soon as they reached home, the brothers made a fire and she gave birth to her children into the fire. The young ones were multi-coloured little serpents. Among them, one serpent child escaped from the fire and climbed up a jack fruit tree, waited to grow up and join his mother.

In the meantime, the serpent came back and found that his wife was not in the cave. At once he set out in search of her. On the way his body was being cut into pieces by the sickles that the brothers had planted on the way. The lovelorn husband, longing to see his wife, never realised that his body was being cut. Finally, his whole body was cut into shreds and his head fell into his wife’s lap.

Time passed. The serpent child grew up on the jack fruit tree. The brothers came to know that the young snake was waiting there to get his mother back. They thought of a plan to cheat the serpent. They brought a rabbit and dressed it up like a woman. The serpent child thought that the rabbit was its mother. As the rabbit hopped, the serpent child followed it. The rabbit climbed a tree and jumped from branch to branch until it reached the feet of the moon. The serpent caught hold of the rabbit. Since the rabbit was at the feet of the moon, the serpent bit the moon too. This is the lunar eclipse.

As pointed out earlier, this study focuses only on the relationship between the consanguineal and affinal kins in this myth.

1. Sisters-in-law refused to give water - Affinal
2. Water is not given to bloodrelatives - Affinal
3. Snake gives water in the name of marriage - Affinal
4. Brothers took their sister back home - Consanguineal
5. The snake (husband) was killed - Victimised
6. Children born are put into fire - Victimised
7. One snake escaped - Life
8. The snake was killed - Victimised

Thus, Consanguineal : Affinal : Life : Victimised

It is seen that in this myth, a thirsty Pathinaicken woman is not given water by her sisters-in-law. Later, a snake gives her water in the name of marriage. The snake takes her to a distant place and they start living as husband and wife. But when her brothers came in search of her, she leaves her husband and returns to her natal home with them. She even stands alongside her brothers to kill her husband. This myth itself shows that the relationship between husband and wife is negative and between brother and sister is positive.

When we go through this myth, there is no place to wonder why a woman leaves her husband when her brothers come to take her. This is because of the kinship system of the Pathinaicken that makes this lore unique to that community.

References

Notes
1. A person’s very close relatives such as father (F), mother (M), brother (B), sister (Z), son (S), daughter (D), husband (H) and wife (W).