

The kinship system of yanomamo culture

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The lifestyle of the Yanomamo tends to be replete with violence and aggression. It is only owing to the fierce lifestyle and strong will of the Yanomamo people that they have managed to remain untouched by the contemporary technological and social advances. One of the important social systems that the Yanomamo culture has managed to remain intact over the years is its kinship.

The kin term in the Yanomamo culture affiliates to the Iroquois classificatory pattern (Simpson & Kenrick, 1997). This pattern of kinship strongly subscribes to patrilineal descent, marked by bilateral cross cousin marriages (Simpson & Kenrick, 1997). This system of kinship is based on bifurcate merging. In this system of kinship, though the institution of marriage remains closely confined to the family, it sternly prohibits marriages between parallel cousins.

It is just because the Yanomamo people tend to hold kinship so dear that they tend to form groups and manage intergroup relationships by resorting to alliances and warfare (Simpson & Kenrick, 1997). The Yanomamo people tend to organize themselves locally relying on the patrilineal descent. The depth of the lineage groups seldom extends more than three adult generations. Individuals are not allowed to mention the names of their dead as it is considered to be inauspicious (Simpson & Kenrick, 1997). In a practical context it means that the name of ancestors and the human ties associated with them are soon forgotten. Marriage to more than one woman is considered by the males to be a symbol of social status. The social life is

woven around striking relationships between groups either through alliances or warfare. Both these methods of striking relationships involve the exchange of women between groups and it is mostly this exchange that gives way to violence and warfare.

The Marriages alliances involve a marriage between two groups belonging to two different tribes. In the Yanomamo system of kinship, the individual loyalty and allegiance of a tribe member automatically passes on to the tribe in which that member marries (Simpson & Kenrick, 1997). Perhaps Yanomamo adhere to this kinship going by the need for the males to help tribes survive in an environment marked by scarce resources. Yanomamo people also tend to forge feasting alliances with tribes that are not united by a marriage, but are also not divided by aggression and war. In a broader context the Yanomamo idea of kinship originates from their philosophy that considers nature to be a unified and sacred force, marked by its power to create everything (Simpson & Kenrick, 1997).

Unlike the Yanomamo kinship, in the Western culture the ancestry of the families could be traced back to many generations. Also, the loyalty towards the family into which one is born does not dissolve with marriage. In a modern and scientific context, the inter cousin marriage of any type is considered to be unhealthy and wrong. In the modern Western society, marriages are seldom resorted to, to maintain familial or political ties. Hence, it would not be wrong to say that the kinship system of the Yanomamo culture is unique and one of its kind.

References

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