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Q8(c)

In what way does queer kinship challenge the traditional kinship system? Substantiate by giving illustrations

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- **State traditional kinship:** blood, marriage, descent, alliance, heteronormative household
- Explain queer kinship as chosen, performed, and legally precarious families
- **Show the challenge:** to blood as destiny, to alliance as man-woman marriage, to gender of kin terms
- **Illustrate:** [hijra gharanas](#), chosen families, friendship as kin, legal debates

Revision summary

Traditional kinship canonically runs on descent, marriage alliance and binary gendered terms.

Queer kinship organises care, parenthood and belonging beyond that monopoly.

Weston's chosen families and Schneider's critique of blood as symbol are theoretical anchors.

Indian [hijra gharanas](#) illustrate initiation-based relatedness outside the patriline.

Law often still privileges conjugal heterosexual kinship, which is part of the challenge.

The point is that kinship is done through practice, not only inherited as blood.

Introduction

Traditional kinship systems, in the anthropological and sociological canon, organise relatedness through descent and through marriage alliance. Blood, lawful marriage and the gendered household have been treated as the natural grid. Queer kinship names the ways lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and other non-normative people actually make lasting care, parenthood and belonging. Those practices challenge the monopoly of blood-and-marriage as the only real family.

Body

What is being challenged

David Schneider already argued that American kinship's "blood" is a cultural symbol, not a raw fact. Kath Weston, in [Families We Choose](#), showed gay and lesbian networks in which friends, ex-lovers and co-parents do the work of kin. Judith Butler and later queer theory stressed that the heterosexual family is a regulatory ideal, not a description of all intimacy. Traditional systems assume binary gender for terms such as mother, father, uncle, and they assume that legitimate children follow a recognised marriage. Queer kinship interrupts all three: who counts as a parent, which body can be a mother or a father in law and in daily care,

and whether a household must be conjugal.

Illustrations

In India, hijra and kinnar gharanas organise guru-chela relatedness, ritual work and care in old age outside the patrilineal house. That is kinship by initiation, not by descent from a father. Urban chosen families appear after natal rejection: shared rents, hospital signatures, funerals. Adoption and marriage equality remain legally constrained, which shows how tightly traditional kinship is wired into law. Friendship as kin during illness is an everyday challenge.

The challenge is not that biology disappears. It is that care and name can be organised otherwise, exposing kinship as a political arrangement of gender and legitimacy.

Flow diagram

Traditional kinship -> Blood descent
Traditional kinship -> Heterosexual marriage alliance
Queer kinship -> Chosen care
Queer kinship -> Guru-chela gharana
Queer kinship -> Legal lag
Queer kinship -> Traditional kinship

Conclusion

Queer kinship challenges traditional systems by relocating relatedness from compulsory heterosexual marriage and blood to chosen and practiced ties. Illustrations from **hijra gharanas** and urban chosen families show that the challenge is already social, even where law still lags. Kinship is revealed as made, not merely given.

Facts & figures

Families we choose

Weston's ethnography of gay and lesbian kinship through friendship, ex-lovers and co-parenting.

Hijra gharanas

Guru-chela households that organise work, ritual and care as a kinship form outside natal patriliney.

Legal lag

Decriminalisation of intimacy has not automatically produced marriage, adoption or inheritance equality.