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Q. Define descent group. Briefly describe the different forms of descent groups.

### 1. Introduction:

The concept of descent refers to the socially recognized links between ancestors and descendants; one's traceable ancestry. It can be bilateral; traced through either parents, or unilateral; traced through parents and ancestors of only one sex. There are different forms of descent groups which include lineage, clan, phratriy and moiety based the types of descent which can be unilateral or bilateral.

### 2. Descent Group:

Descent groups are social units wherein members share a claimed common ancestry. This commonality can be traced through various means — matrilineally (through the mother), patrilineally (through the father), or bilaterally (through both parents).

According to Maeyer Fortes: "A descent



group is an arrangement of persons that serves the attainment of legitimate social and personal ends.

## Types of Descent:

Descent

Unilateral (descent is traced through either father's or mother's line) Bilateral

Patrilineal Matrilineal

→ **Patrilineal:** Descent is traced through the male line from father to son. The son inherits the status, name and property of his father.

→ **Matrilineal:** Descent is traced through female line from mother to daughter. The children of both sexes belong to their mother's descent group but only the daughter inherits the name, status and property of her mother.

### **Bilateral:**

The person's descent is traced through both male ~~of~~ and female line.

### **Examples:**

- The Yako of Northeastern Nigeria follow bilineal descent.
- The Toda of southern India follow bilineal descent.



## Forms of Descent group:

The forms of descent group include:

Lineage  $\xrightarrow{\text{combine to form}}$  Clan  $\xrightarrow{\text{combine to form}}$   
Phratry  $\xrightarrow{\text{combine to form}}$  Moiety, and  
Kindred.

- **Lineage:** A group of relatives who trace their descent from a single ancestor is called lineage. The ancestor is not imaginary but real. Normally there are 5 generations in lineage. It is a unilateral descent and exogamous group.

The member of one lineage group has common blood linkage and traced their descent through common ancestry to a single person. It can be traced from either the father's or the mother's side. On the basis, lineage can be of two types: Patrilineal or matrilineal.  
→ Pashtoons from Afghanistan.

- **Clan:** The largest group of relatives that traces its origin from a hypothetical ancestor is called a clan. Here the common ancestor can be mythical like a saint (in the case of Hindu society) or may be totemic things like tigers, fish. They have their totem and spread far and wide.  
A group of lineage forms a clan.



It is a unilateral descent group and an exogamous group.

A clan is termed "Gotra" in Hindu society. Most people do not have knowledge of their gotra, when asked, can tell ~~the~~ little about it. It is not important in their day-to-day life but it is important in a marriage alliance. Marriage is prohibited within a gotra.

**Phratry:** A phratry is bigger than a clan. The little meaning of phratry in Hindi is brotherhood. It has been seen in some tribes that due to some natural calamity or other reasons many people of the clan die, in such cases two-four gotras together form a new unit. This is called phratry.

Like clan, phratry is also unilateral and exogamous.

Examples: Munda, Ho, Oraon etc.  
(all are tribes of India).

**Moiety:** In some communities, it is found that the whole community splits into two unilateral descent groups and these are two different moieties. This system is called dual organization.



This means that it shows two groups of kinship. The members of one moiety are allowed to marry members of other moieties.  
- They are <sup>also</sup> linked clans.

**Kindred:** It is a type of non-linear descent group. Kindreds count all individuals from each parent as relatives. Every individual in a society has a kindred and the kindred of each individual will overlap with his or her next of kin.

No kindred is common for any two individuals <sup>besides</sup> ~~except~~ siblings.

A kindred is not ancestor-focused, rather ego-focused.

Example: Ju/'hoansi Descent - Bilateral Kindreds.

## Conclusion:

Descent in anthropology encompasses the idea of ancestral linkages and lineages of the individuals. ~~but~~ It is based on the types of descent; either unilateral or bilateral. It comes in various forms such as lineages, clans, phratries, moiety and kindreds in different tribes in the world.