Introduction
Kin groups are social units whose membership can be found out and whose activities can be observed. There are different kinds of kin groups in different societies. These can be family groups such as nuclear family, expanded households having extended family kins or descent groups. Nuclear family is a widespread kin group consisting of a married couple and their unmarried children. But there are also alternatives, for instance, extended families and descent groups. Besides, descent group is an important and basic kin group among non-industrial societies. It is a social group whose members claim common ancestry.

Unlike families, descent groups have perpetuity through generations. Even though its membership changes as members are born and die, move in and move out, the descent group endures. Its membership is enrolled by virtue of birth and is life-long. There are several types of descent groups, such as lineage, clan, phratry and moiety.

In the present discussion we will focus only on the descent based kin groups - lineage, clan, phratry and moiety.

Lineage
A lineage is a descent group that can demonstrate their common descent from a known apical ancestor. Unilineal lineage can be matrilineal or patrilineal depending on whether they are traced through mother or father. In matrilineal lineage, descent is traced through mother whereas in patrilineal lineage, descent is traced through father. Lineages are often designated by the name of the common ancestor or ancestress.

In some societies it is the genealogical segment of a clan. Evans-Pritchard describes four orders of such groupings among the East African Nuers. A Nuer clan is the largest group of agnates who trace their descent from a common ancestor and between whom marriage is forbidden and sexual relations considered incestuous. Under this genealogical structure there are four degrees of lineages - maximal, major, minor and minimal.

Here clan A is segmented into maximal lineages B and C which are then bifurcated into major lineages D,E, F, and G. Minor lineages H,I, J and K are segments of major lineages D and G. Minor lineages H and K are further segmented into minimal lineages L,M and N, O.

The Meiteis of India also have lineages segmented in the manner somewhat similar to the Nuers. T.R. Singh describes this
genealogical segmentation. *Mutum* lineage, for instance, is a lineage that belongs to Ningthouja clan. The lineage members believe that they have descended from Khamlang Pamsaba and Angouba Nganglou Lanthaba Chanu. Khamlang Pamsaba was the son of king Irengba (984 - 1074) and one of his wives called Haoreima Pidongnuphabi. *Mutum*, the maximal lineage has around 34 major lineages, e.g., *Lalhambung taba* (meaning settled at Lalhambung), *Mutum thangsaba* (meaning the dao-maker Mutums), etc. These major lineages are further segmented into minor lineages, each bearing the name of lineage of orientation and the place of new habitation. An example of this is *Khongman dagi khaiba Mutum Chandakhongtaba* i.e., Mutum settling at Chandrakhong which has been separated from *Khongman taba* major group. Sub-segmentation into minimal lineages carries on each being identified by the name of the segment head known as *piba*, such as *Mutum Nambul taba Birsing* meaning the segment of Mutum Nambul taba group headed by Birsing. The smallest segment has the social relationship known as *phunga punba* (sharing a common hearth) by which the members of this cognate group observe the social defilement for a certain period when someone is born or die within this unit. In this way, the exogamous lineages of the Meiteis are segmented.

A child has its claim to inherit property by virtue of being the member of a lineage. The dignitary offices can be succeeded, even kingship is entitled. The members of a lineage often have residential unity and definite territory. Such lineages are described as local descent group. Among the Meiteis, localities are commonly named after the dominant lineage, for instance, Oinam after the lineage - *Oinam*, Soibam Leikai after the lineage name - *Soibam*, etc.

**Clan**

Some anthropologists especially in the United States use the word 'clan' to distinguish groups in which descent is counted on the mother's side. The group that reckons descent of the father's side is called *gens*. Lowie chose the word *sib* as a common term and differentiated it into mother-sibs and father-sibs. However, the word 'clan' is widely used to denote those broad unilineal kinship aggregates.

A clan is a set of kin whose members believe themselves to be descended putatively or really from a common ancestor or ancestress. It is usually a non-corporate descent group whose link back to that ancestor may not even be known or traceable. Clans with patrilineal descent are called patrilineal clans; clans with matrilineal descent are called matriclans.

Clan membership is dispersed rather than localized and it does not usually hold tangible property corporately. It tends to be unit for ceremonial matters. Clans may handle integrative functions. Like
lineages, they may regulate marital exogamy. They give the right of entry into area of their local groups to the individuals of the same clan who are residing at other areas. One is usually expected to give protection and hospitality to one's fellow clan members. However, as there is a great diversity of clan organization in the world, some societies have territorially organized clans. The clan members of this type may spread over a particular territory and they are confined to a particular area. The Ollar-Gudhas of Koraput, Orrisa are a typical example of the territorial clans.

Another type of clan organization is the one which is organized on a totemic basis. The word totem comes from Ojibwa Indian word ototeman, 'a relative of mine'. Goldenweiser mentioned that the clans associated with totem may trace descent from the totemic plant or animal; the killing and/or eating of the totemic species may be tabooed, but may consume it on ceremonial occasions; the death of a totemic species may be ceremonially mourned. The clans of a totemic tribe are named after the totem. Totemic clans are found in North and South America, in Africa, Australia, Melanesia and India. Among the North American Indians members of the bear clan believe that they have descended from a bear and a woman, and members of the dog clan believe that a dog and a woman were their ancestors. The Kamars in central India believe that their progenitors are a he-goat and a girl. Stephen Fuchs (1982) mentions about totemic species as the saviour of the forefathers of that clan. The Gonds of central India have a goat clan because their ancestors once stole a goat for sacrifice; but they were saved from the punishment of stealing as the goat turned into a pig and thereafter they regarded goat as their totem. The Korkus of central India have tree totems, as their ancestors hide under various trees to save themselves from their enemies. The Balahis of central India have snake and owl totems; these animals saved and protected their ancestors when by accident they had been left behind in the field as helpless babies.

When a clan becomes very large in size, it may be segmented and each segment may acquire a part of the totemic species as the new totem. For instance, a tiger clan may split into sections which regard the head, tail, claws, teeth, etc., of the tiger as their totems. This gives rise to the concept of a phratry, group of brother clans. The clans are sometimes named after some nicknames and such clans are found mostly among the Australian tribes. The Crow-Indians of America are also divided into thirteen exogamous matrilineal clans. These units are designated after nicknames.

**Phratry**

Phratry is derived from the Greek word phrater which means brother. A phratry is a kin group of brotherhood in which there are several clans combined together. Thus, a phratry is a unilineal descent
group composed of at least two clans that are supposedly related. Like individuals of a clan, members of a phratry are unable to trace accurately their descent link to a real apical ancestor though they believe such an ancestor existed. Lowie suggested several possibilities for such combinations. He said that several clans may combine together without losing all survivals of their previous separateness or a clan may grow so large that it splits up into lesser groups without completely severing the former bonds of unity. Instances of both fission and fusion of clans to form phratries are evident from some of the tribes of Chotanagpur region specially the Oraon, the Ho and other cognate tribes of the Munda region.

Haviland describes about the descent groups Hopi Indians, a farming people living at the villages or pueblos in northeastern Arizona. Their society is divided into a number of named clans, based strictly on matrilineal descent. Two or more clans together constitute larger, super clan units, or phratries of which there are nine in Hopi society. Within each of these, member clans are expected to support one another and observe strict exogamy. As the members of all phratries reside in a given pueblo, marriage partners are found in one's home community. This same dispersal of membership provides individuals with rights of entry into villages other than their own.

Moiety
When a whole society is divided into two kin groups based on unilineal descent, each group is called moiety (after the French word for 'half'). The members in each moiety believe them to be descended from a common ancestor even though they can not specify how. But societies with moiety systems have relatively small population in comparison to societies with phratries and clans. W.H.R. Rivers had reported about a moiety system existing among the Todas of Nilgiri Hills in Kerala, India. They have a dual organization of two groups - teivaliol and tarharol. Each of the two halves is again divided into a number of clans. The two moieties are exogamous.

Among some tribes in Manipur, a northeastern state of India, there are moiety systems of social organization. The Monsangs who inhabit at six villages in Chandel district of this state belong to this type kin group combination. According to their oral tradition, two groups of this people emerged out of a cave to this world. These two groups form the moiety of this people. The moiety known as rinhinti has six clans viz., rohenti, wanglar, tesongti, hongamti, shongshir and khatur. Rinhe is the forefather of these clans. The other moiety is known as simputi and it has four clans - ngarati, thumhitti, kiiriiti and chiiriiti. Thumpungpa was the progenitor of this moiety group. Ideally the moieties are exogamous.
Combination of descent group
Although there are different types of unilineal descent groups, there are different combinations of descent groups. For example, some societies have only lineages, some have lineages and clans, and others have clans and phratries but no lineage. And still some other societies may have clans and moieties but neither phratries nor lineages.

Conclusion
Descent based kin groups are of different types. The largest may be moiety which may divide into phratries and then, into clans. The smallest of these may be lineage. There may also be other combinations. Even though societies have more than one type of descent based kin groups there is no ambiguity about membership, and so, small groups are simply subsets of larger units. People can trace up to the larger units and it is just a question of space and span in the social structure.