

AMIT KHAWAS
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR (SOCIOLOGY)
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF LEGAL STUDIES
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FAMILY

MEANING

The concept of family is viewed in terms of certain criteria applicable to all societies. For instance, it is felt that the family is a primary kinship unit, which carries out aspects of the sexual, reproductive, economic and educational functions keeping in view these definitions, we generally picture a family as a durable association of husband and wife with or without children, or a durable association of a man or woman along with children. Thus, members in the family live together, pool their resources and work together and produce offspring. A family is also viewed as an adult male and female living together with their offspring in a more or less permanent relationship such as marriage which is approved by their society. These definitions point out the basics or the minimum essentials of the family as a special kind of social grouping:

- (i) it involves a sexual relationship between adults of opposite sexes;
- (ii) it involves their cohabitation or living together,
- (iii) it involves at least the expectation of relative permanence of the relationship between them; and

- (iv) Most important of all, the relationship is culturally defined and societally sanctioned-it is a marriage.

Marriage and the family are not just something people become involved in on their own. Some of the ways in which they must relate to each other are decided for them by their society. It is a well-known and recognised fact that marriage is the basis for the family

DEFINATION

1. **MACIVER AND PAGE:** “Family is by far the most important primary group in society. The family is a group defined by sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the production and upbringing of children”.
2. **KINGSLEY DAVIS:** Family is more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without children or of a man or women alone, with children.
3. **Burgess and Locke define family in their book *THE FAMILY (1953)* attempted to define in the fallowing terms:** The family is a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood or adoption; constituting a single household, interacting and communicating with each other in their respective social role of husband and wife, mother and father, brother and sister; creating a common culture.
4. **Elliot and Merill** define family as “biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children.

FAMILY AS AN INSTITUTION

Family is one of the pivotal and most significant institutions of all societies. There are various forms of family found all over the world; but most sociologists and anthropologists agree that universally the most common features of a family is that it is composed of individuals related to each other by blood, marriage, or adoption. Family, like any other institution of society forms around complex, socially significant problems, solving the problems of social existence is critical to collective living in all societies.

George Murdock (1949; 4- 1 1) lists four important functions served by the nuclear family, these functions serve to resolve four major problems of society. According to him the nuclear family along with other social institutions, serves to:

- i) regulate sexual relations;
- ii) account for economic survival ;
- iii) controls reproduction; and
- iv) socialises children

Out of all these functions, some thinkers believe that socialisation of children is one of the most central tasks of the family. Thus, one can see that family, as an institution, helps solve the problem of regulating sexual behaviour, surviving economically, reproducing new members of society and socialising them to become effective members of that society and culture.

VARIATIONS IN FAMILY FORMS

The bewildering variety of family forms, noticed in societies throughout the world in the course of human history, is a cultural phenomenon of considerable interest. For instance, with regard to residence some societies are **matrilocal** in their marriage and family customs, while others are **patrilocal**.

Matrilocal: The young married couple takes up residence at the home of the bride's parents.

Patrilocal: the couple takes up residence at the home of the bridegroom's parents. Residence in most parts of India is patrilocal in that it gives to the husband and not the wife the right to choose the place of residence after marriage.

The issue of descent as to who will be related to whom and how, is not as simple as it might first appear. Those who are socially defined by a given society as "relate, ", are called kin. Therefore from the point of view of lineage, there are three different systems for tracing descent;

1. **Matrilineal society:** The descent is traced through the female line and female hold the dominant position in the family in decision-making and house hold activities.
2. **Patrilineal society:** The descent is traced through the male line and male holds the superior position in the family by making decision and managing the family and its members in authoritarian way.
3. It is also common to trace descent bilaterally in some societies.

However, in modern societies of today, social and cultural change is tending to establish more equalitarian pattern of decision-making in which authority is shared between the conjugal pair.

Another distinction is made between the **Conjugal family** and **Consanguine family**

CONJUGAL FAMILY: The family form by the marriage. It consists of Parents and their children.

CONSANGUINE FAMILY: Family by blood, based on the membership type of the family. Consanguine family is made up of both parent and the units' blood relatives, such as, mother, her children, her parents or father, his children, his parents etc.

Finally, we can also classify families into nuclear and extended types based on the way they are organised.

NUCLEAR AND JOINT FAMILY SYSTEMS

We say that the nuclear and the joint family systems have to be viewed as a continuum. This means that these two types of family systems have to be looked at as something interrelated in a developmental cycle. The structure of a family changes over a time period in terms of size, composition, role and status of persons, the family and societal norms and sanctions. There probably is rarely a family in India, which remains perpetually nuclear in composition. Often additional members like an aged parent or unmarried brothers and sisters may come to live with a man, his wife and unmarried children and relatively long period of time, the ritual, economic and sentimental link with relatives who compose a joint family are often maintained.

The nature of nuclear family in India, **Pauline Kolenda (1987)** has discussed additions/modifications in nuclear family structure. She gives the following compositional categories.

- i) **Nuclear family;** refers to a couple with or without children.
- ii) **Supplemented nuclear family;** indicates a nuclear family plus one or more unmarried, separated, or widowed relatives of the parents, other than their unmarried children.

- iii) **Sub nuclear family;** is identified as a fragment of a former nuclear family for instance a widow/widower with her/his unmarried children or siblings (unmarried or widowed or separated or divorced) living together.
- iv) **Single person household**
- v) **Supplemented sub nuclear family;** refers to a group of relatives, members of a formerly complete nuclear family along with some other unmarried, divorced or widowed relative who was not a member of the nuclear family. For instance, a widow and her unmarried children may be living together with her widowed mother-in-law.

In the Indian context, it is easy to find all these types of family.

JOINT FAMILY (INDIA)

Joint family, comprising three or more generations has been depicted as the ideal family unit of Hindu society.

M.S. Gore (1968: 4-5) points out that ideally, the joint family consists of a man and his wife and their adult sons, their wives and children, and younger children of the paternal couple. In this ideal type the oldest male is the head of the family. The rights and duties in this type of family are laid down to a great extent by the hierarchical order of power and authority. Age and sex are the main ordering principles of family hierarchy. The frequency and the nature of contact/communication between members vary on the basis of sex. A married woman, for instance works in the kitchen with her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. Younger members are required to show respect to the older members and can hardly question the authority or decision taken by elders even when it directly concerns them. Children of the joint family are children of all the male members in the parental generation.

Emphasis on conjugal ties (i.e. between husband and wife) is supposed to weaken the stability of the joint family. The father-son relationship (filial relationship) and the relationship between brothers (fraternal relationship) are more crucial for the joint family system than the husband-wife or conjugal relationship.

- **What Constitutes Jointness in Joint family in India? or Features**

Their Jointness is reflected in the factors of commensality, common residence, joint ownership of property, cooperation and sentiment of Jointness, ritual bonds like worship of common deity. We shall discuss them one by one.

1. **Commensality:** Most of the studies of joint family use commensality (eating together) as a defining criterion. The joint family is the hearth group; members cook and eat food from the same kitchen.
2. **Common Residence:** In some studies the joint family as the residential family group is stressed. Though it is possible to find a joint family having the same hearth but not sharing the same dwelling or vice versa, by and large commensality and common residence are taken as essential ingredients of jointness (refer to Cohn 1961, Dube 1955, Mukherjee 1969, Kolenda 1968).
3. **Joint Ownership of Property:** Some scholars have regarded joint ownership of property or coparcenary as the essence of jointness, irrespective of the type of residence and commensality. In legal terms, this is the most crucial factor used for defining a joint family.
4. **Cooperation and Sentiment:** Scholars like I.P. Desai (1964) and K. M. Kapadia (1958) point out that jointness should be looked in functional terms. A functionally joint family lays stress on fulfilment of obligations towards kin. A patrilineal joint family may consist of a number of households headed by males related through the

father. They may be located even at distant places and may not even have property in common. But what is common is that they identify themselves as members of a particular 'family', cooperate in rituals and ceremonies, render financial and other kinds of help; and they cherish a common family sentiment and abide by the norms of joint living.

5. **Ritual Bonds:** The ritual bonds of a joint family are considered to be an important component of jointness. A joint family, thus, is bound together by periodic propitiation of the dead ancestors. The members perform a 'shraddha' ceremony in which the senior male member of the joint family appeases his dead father's or mother's spirit, offering it the 'pinda' (balls of cooked rice) on behalf of all the members.

Another ritual bond among joint family members can be common deity worship.

Still another important bond is pollution. Birth and death results in pollution and the group observing pollution consists of the members of the joint family, patrilineal or matrilineal. The bonds created by ancestor worship, family deities and observation of pollution persist even after the joint family has split into separate or smaller residential and commensal units (Srinivas 1969: 71).

Pauline Kolenda (1987: 11-2) presents the following types of joint family on the basis of the relatives who are its members.

- a) **Collateral joint family:** It comprises two or more married couples between whom there is a sibling bond. In this type, usually a brother and his wife and another brother and his wife live together with unmarried children.

b) Supplemented collateral joint family: It is a collateral joint family along with unmarried, divorced or widowed relatives. The supplemented relatives are generally the widowed mother of the married brothers or the widower father, or an unmarried sibling.

c) Lineal joint family: Two couples, between whom there is a lineal link, like between a parent and his married son or some times between a parent and his married daughter, live together.

d) Supplemented lineal joint family: It is a lineal joint family together with unmarried, divorced or widowed relatives who do not belong to either of the lineally linked nuclear families; for example, the father's widower brother or the son's wife's unmarried brother or sister.

e) Lineal collateral joint family: In this type three or more couples are linked lineally and collaterally. For instance we can have a family consisting of parents and their two or more married sons together with the unmarried children of the couples.

f) Supplemented lineal - collateral joint family: In this type are found a lineal collateral joint family plus unmarried, widowed, separated relatives who belong to one of the nuclear families (lineally and collaterally linked), for example, the father's widowed sister or brother or an unmarried nephew of the father.

The Sharing of Common Property

Researchers, like F.G. Bailey (1963), T.N. Madan (1961), have advocated the limitation of the term joint family to a group of relatives who form a property owning group, the coparcenary family. M.S. Gore (1968), for instance, defines a joint family as a group consisting of adult male coparceners and their dependants. The wives and young children of these male members are the dependents. The female members have not been included in the

category of the coparcenary. They have rights of residence and maintenance only as dependents.

In 1937 an attempt was made to confer the same right, i.e., the right of inheritance of property on a Hindu widow as her son would have in the estate of her deceased husband. The Act enabled her to enjoy the income only from the immovable property of her husband during her lifetime.

Until the passing of the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, two systems of inheritance dominated among patrilineal Hindus.

- **Mitakshara School:** It is adopted in most region of India. In this system a son has a vested interest in his father's ancestral property from the moment of his birth. The father cannot give away any part of this property to the detriment of his son's interest.
- **Dayabaga School:** It is adopted in Bengal and Assam the father is the absolute owner of his share and has a right to alienate his property the way he wants.
- **Stridhana:** Among the patrilineal Hindus, some movable property is given to the daughters at the time of marriage as Stridhana.
- With the passing of the **Hindu Succession Act of 1956**, a uniform system of inheritance has been established. The individual property of a male Hindu, dying intestate (having made no will), passes in equal shares between his son, daughter, widow and mother. Male and female heirs have come to be treated as equal in matters of inheritance and succession. Another important feature of the Act is that any property possessed by a female Hindu is held by her as her absolute property and she has full power to deal with it the way she likes. This Act has also given a

woman the right to inherit from the father as well as from the husband. However the benefit deliberated on a woman is limited when compared to the rights of the male members who still have rights to coparcenary ancestral property by birth. Daughters are not part of the coparcenary and have no birth rights.

FACTORS OF CHANGES IN THE FAMILY

A host of interrelated factors, economic, educational, legal, demographic, have affected the family in India. The impact has been differentially felt by different groups through time. Let us look at each factor separately keeping in mind that all these factors had a cumulative effect on different aspects of family living.

Economic Factors: Monetisation (introduction of cash transactions), diversification of occupational opportunities for employment in varied spheres, technological advancements (in communication and transport) are some of the major economic factors, which have affected the joint family system in India. The economic system established by the British encouraged monetisation i.e., cash payment for services rendered and goods sold. The British also threw open opportunities for employment in government service. Those who were attracted by the employment opportunities and facilities provided by the British, often left their traditional occupations and moved to cities or towns where Family, Marriage and Kinship these occupations were available. This meant residential separation from their ancestral home. If they were married, they sometimes took their wives and children (and even one or two relatives) along with them.

Since Independence, opportunities for and diversification of occupations have increased. With a constitutional commitment to promote equality between the sexes and to integrate

women into the development process, a further impetus has emerged to draw women into varied kinds of occupations. In families where both the men and women go out to work, role relationships between different members of the family are affected

Educational Factors: Again it was during the British rule that opportunities for higher education emerged in a significant way. All castes and communities had access to the facilities provided by the British with regard to education. Some of those who were able to gain access and exposure to English-medium education (exposure specially to the individualistic, liberal and humanitarian ideas) began to question some of the Hindu customs and practices relating to child marriage, denial of rights of education to women, property rights of women and ill-treatment of widows. Educated young men not only desired to postpone their marriage to a much later age than what was prescribed by family tradition, but also wanted to marry women with some educational background. Educated women (especially college educated) were expected to have a different kind of influence on family matters than uneducated or less educated women.

Legal Factors:

Legislations regarding employment, education, marriages, and property, have affected the family system in many ways. Labour laws passed for the benefit of employees like the Indian Workmen Compensation Act (1923), the Minimum Wages Act 1948, helped to reduce the economic dependence of members on the joint family for economic support.

In 1930 the Hindu Gains of Learning Act was passed whereby it was declared that the property acquired by a Hindu out of his education was his personal property though his education was paid for by the joint family. The distinction between self-acquired property and joint family property was drawn.

In 1937, during the British rule a law was passed by which a woman acquired a limited right to her husband's property. She could hold the property of her husband after his death as a limited owner during her lifetime. But after she died the property devolved to the heirs (usually the sons) of the husband.

With regard to marriage, the **Child Marriage Restraint Act** was passed in 1929, to curb infant marriages. It prescribed the minimum age (18 and 14 years respectively) at marriage for boys and girls. This Act also aimed to give women an opportunity for education. Now in India the prescribed minimum age at marriage is 21 for boys and 18 for girls.

After Independence the **Hindu Succession Act (1956)** was passed which gave a daughter and son equal rights to the father's property. These legislations challenged the inheritance patterns that prevailed in joint families prior to the passing of this Act and the dependent position of women within the family.

Urbanisation:

The process of urbanisation has also affected the pattern of family life in India. It denotes the movement of people from rural to urban areas and a shift from agricultural to non-agricultural occupations. It also implies the adoption of an urban way of life. Urban life reflects increased Family and its Types density of population, heterogeneity of population, diversification and increased specialisation of occupations, complex division of labour. It also includes increased availability of educational and health facilities. Limited availability of living space, impersonality and anonymity also characterise urban life. Partly as a result of population pressure on land, there has been a continuous influx of people into cities seeking education, jobs, medical care etc.

What impact does migration to cities have on the families in villages?

Residential separation due to mobility of members from one place to another affects the size and composition of the family. A man may take his wife and children along with him to establish a nuclear family in the city. There have been many studies, which show that migration to cities from villages and small towns has contributed to the rapid disintegration of large size family units. These observations have been mainly based on census data, which show a high percentage of nuclear families in cities (Mies 1980: 74). In the city, with problems of finding accommodation and limited space available for living, it becomes difficult for an average urbanite to maintain and support a large family. The other factors which have been held responsible for encouraging smaller units are

- i) opportunities for higher education
- ii) heightened ambitions
- iii) increased occupational mobility
- iv) Growing sense of individuality (i.e., thinking in terms of individual needs and ambitions rather than in terms of kinship needs and larger familial requirements).

Factors of Change Leading to Reinforcement of the Joint Family

So far we have talked about the forces that were seen to negatively affect the joint family functioning as commensal, co-residential and large size unit. Sociologists while trying to measure the changes taking place in family life observe that urbanisation and industrialisation have, in fact, served to strengthen some aspects of joint family system. Here we will discuss three important studies to illustrate our point.

- i) K.M. Kapadia (1972), for instance, has drawn our attention to the fact that families, which have migrated to cities, still retain their bonds with their joint

family in the village or town. Even after they residentially separate themselves from a joint family and form a nuclear family, they do not function as an isolated or completely independent unit in the city. These families retain their kinship orientation and joint family ethic. This is evident from the physical presence of relatives at the time of certain events like birth, marriage, death, illness and so on. Sometimes members from the families living in a city go to the village to participate in such events or sometimes members from the rural family come to the city to involve themselves in functions or ceremonies or activities of their kin members. The joint family ethic is very much evident in the performance of certain role obligations. These may include physical and financial assistance to kin members. A family in the city has the duty to give shelter and sustenance to all subsequent immigrants from the rural family, mostly young men in pursuit of education and work or relations seeking medical treatment in urban centres. So it can happen that in the course of time, a kind of joint family is formed in 18 Family, Marriage and Kinship the city, which is linked to the family in the village by close family ties, by a system of mutual rights, duties and obligations and also by the undivided family property.

- ii)** Again the thesis that the joint family is dysfunctional to the process of industrialisation has been challenged by those who point out that some of the successful industrial establishments in the country are managed by the individuals who strictly live by joint family rules. They maintain residence, common hearth, contribute and share economic resources. In his study *The Indian Joint Family in Modern Industry*, Milton Singer (1968) points out that the joint family continues to be the norm among industrial entrepreneurs,

despite changes in their material conditions of living. He observes that changes have taken place, within three generations, in residential, occupational and educational spheres. Social mobility has increased and ritual observations have been reduced in number and/or in importance. However, these alterations, he points out, have not transformed the joint family into isolated nuclear families. On the contrary, a modified joint family organisation has emerged in the urban industrial setting where even members from the ancestral home or village move into the urban setting. Thus, according to Singer, the industrial centre has simply become a new area for the working of the joint family system.

- iii) Kolenda in her study *Regional Differences in Family Structure in India* (1987: 4) observes that industrialisation serves to strengthen the joint family because an economic base has been provided to support it or because more hands are needed in a renewed family enterprise or because kin can help one another in striving for upward mobility. No doubt the joint family that functions today in urban settings is different in many ways from the joint family which functioned in pre-independent and non-industrial India.

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