

JOINT FAMILY SYSTEM IN INDIA: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract

Family communication is usually interface interpersonal communication. The family is the smallest segment of the society and the family members discuss various topics of interest sharing freely their thoughts happiness, frustration, fear, pain and joy. This is possible because the pillar of trust develops right from the childhood when child interacts with father, mother and elders and as he/she grows the trust and topic they share change with time and family members. Similarly, the grown-up family members bonded by strong relationship communicate freely and discuss their topic of interest. The type of family communication varies within relations they maintain with one other. Various mass media communication sources like-newspaper, magazines, radio and new media sources like- television, computer, internet and social media have eventually occupied both time and space in Indian households and has become the interface interpersonal communication in Indian family system today. The joint family is also known as undivided family and sometimes as extended family. It normally consists of members who at least belong to three generations: husband and wife, their married and unmarried children; and their married as well as unmarried grandchildren. The joint family system constituted the basic social institution in many traditional societies, particularly in the Eastern societies. In India, this system prevailed among the Hindus as well as non-Hindus. The family in India does not consist only of husband, wife and their children but also of uncles, aunts and cousins and grandsons. This system, called joint family or extended family system is a peculiar characteristic of the Indian social life. A son after marriage does not usually separate himself from the parents but continues to stay with them under the same roof messing together and holding property in common. The family has joint property and every person has his share in it since the time he is born. The earnings of all the members are put in a common fund out of which family expenses are met. Non-earning members have as much share as the earning members. The Indian family system is thus like a socialistic community in which everyone earns according to his capacity and receives according to his needs. The family in India is based on patrilineal

descent. Children are identified by name and allegiance with the father's family. Property is passed from generation to generation within the father's family

Introduction

Every society or social structure is characterized by the basic unit i.e. family. These are the building blocks of social structure. They have a common motto, culture, rules and values. The key function of family is to preserve, protect and promote its generation year after year. Elder members of the family are responsible for rearing their off springs. They make sure the fulfilment of basic needs of family viz. food, shelter and clothes. According to Merriam Webster Online Dictionary the basic unit in society traditionally consisting of parents rearing their children where children refer to the young dependent members and parents refer to the adults taking care of the children. Even the traditional families whenever mentioned give us the impression of a bread winning father and a home making mother with two or more children. The joint family, the caste system and the village system are often regarded as the pillars on which the whole Hindu social edifice is built. The joint family is the bedrock, on which Hindu values and attitudes are built. It is found in almost all the parts of India. Family for a Hindu is a sacred institution deriving sanction from religion and social traditions with myths and legends. Hence this form of family is still found in India. It is deeply rooted in the traditional Hindu culture. It is an age-old system having a long history of its own

Types of Family in India

Matriarchal Family

The matriarchal family known as mother cantered or mother dominated family. The mother or the woman is the head of the family. She exercises authority and manages the property. The descent is traced through the mother hence it is matrilineal in descent. Daughters inherit the property of the mother. The status of the children is decided by the status of the mother. Matriarchal family is matrilineal in residence. After the marriage the wife stays back in her mother's home. The husband pays occasional visits to the wife's home. In theory mother exercises authority and power in the matriarchal family. She is the head of the family and her decisions are final. But in practice some relatives of the family, her brother

exercises authority in the family. The maternal family brings together the kinsmen and welds them in a powerful group.

Patriarchal Family

The patriarchal family is also known as father centred or father dominated family. The father is the head of the family and exercises authority. He is the administrator of the family property. The descent, inheritance and succession are recognized through the male line. Patriarchal families are patrilineal in character because the descent is traced through the male line. Only the male children inherit the property. Patriarchal family is matrilocal in residence. Sons continue to live with the father in his own house even after their marriages. Only the wives come and join them. Women have secondary position in these families. Children are brought up in their father's family.

Nuclear Family

The individual nuclear family is a universal social phenomenon. It can be defined as a small group composed of husband and wife and children that constitute a unit apart from the rest of the community. The nuclear family is a characteristic of all the modern industrial societies in which a high degree of structural and functional specialization exists. The nuclear family comprises a cohabiting man and woman who maintain a socially approved sexual relationship and have at least one child. The traditional nuclear family is a nuclear family in which the wife works in the home without pay while the husband works outside the home for money. According to Lowie it does not matter whether marital relations are permanent or temporary; whether there is polygyny or polyandry the one fact stands out beyond all others that everywhere the husband, wife and immature children constitute a unit apart from the remainder of the community. T.B.Bottomore states that the universality of the nuclear family can be accounted for by the important functions that it has been performing. The nuclear family has been performing the sexual, the economic, the reproductive and the educational functions. The indispensability of these and few other functions has contributed to its universality. A major factor in maintaining the nuclear family is economic cooperation based upon the division of labour between the sexes. The structure of the nuclear family is not same everywhere. Bottomore makes a distinction between two kinds of family system Vogel and Bell have presented a functional explanation based on the intensive study of American families with emotionally disturbed children. Often the tension and hostility of unresolved conflicts between parents are projected onto the child. The child is thus used an emotional

scapegoat by the parents to release their tension. It serves as a personality stabilizing process for the parents and keeps the family united but the child pays the cost of such unity.

The Joint Family

The joint family is also known as undivided family or extended family. It normally consists of members belong to two-three generations: husband and wife, their married and unmarried children and their married or unmarried grandchildren. The joint family system constituted the basic social institution in many traditional societies' particularly Asian societies like Indian. The joint family is considered as bedrock on which Hindu values and attitudes are built. The joint family is a mode of combining smaller families into larger family units through the extension of three or more generations. In joint family the members are related through blood and spread over several generations living together under a common space and work under common head. According to Iravati Karve, the joint family may be defined as a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred.

Definition of Joint Family

- ❖ The joint family is a mode of combining smaller families into larger family units through the extension of three or more generations including at least grandparents, parents and children.
- ❖ The joint family is one which consists of members related through blood and spread over several generations living together under a common roof and work under a common head.
- ❖ The definition given by Smt. Iravati Karve seems to be more satisfactory. According to her, the joint family may be defined as "a group of people who generally live under one roof who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common, and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred"

Types of Joint Family

The joint family may assume two forms

- Patriarchal joint family, and
- Matriarchal joint family. Both the forms are found in India.

The patriarchal joint family is father-centred and the matriarchal joint family is mother-dominated.

The Meaning of Joint Family

- “The joint family is a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred.”
Karve
- “We call that household a joint family which has greater generation depth than individual family and the members of which are related to one another by property, income and mutual rights and obligations.” I.P. Desai
- “The joint family consists of persons having a common male ancestor, female offspring not yet married, and women brought into the group by marriage. All of these persons might live in a common household or in several households near to one another. In any case, so long as the joint family holds together, its members are expected to contribute to the support of the whole and to receive from it a share of the total product.” Davis
- “In a joint family not only parents and children, brothers and step-brothers live on the common property, but it may sometime include ascendants and collaterals up to many generations.” Jolly
- “The Hindu joint family is a group constituted of known ancestors and adopted sons and relatives related to these sons through marriage.” Henry Maine

Features of the Joint Family

Large Size

The first characteristic of the joint family is its large size. A single family consists of only the husband, wife and their children. But a joint family consists of parents, children, grandchildren and other near relatives along with their women. It is a group of which several basic families live together at one and the same time.

Joint Property

In a joint family, the ownership, production and consumption of wealth takes place on a joint basis. It is a cooperative institution, similar to a joint stock company, in which there is joint property. The head of the family is like a trustee who manages the property of the family

for the material and spiritual welfare of the family members. The total earnings of all the family members are pooled together.

Common Residence

The members of joint family usually live under the same roof. They may also live in separate houses in close proximity to one another. They eat the same food and wear the same type of clothes.

Co-operative Organisation

The basis of joint family system is cooperation. A joint family consists of a large number of members and if they do not cooperate with one another it is not possible to maintain the organisation and structure of the joint family.

Common Religion

Generally the members of a joint family believe in the same religion and worship similar deities. They perform jointly the religious rites and duties. They celebrate all the festivals and social functions jointly. They also hold themselves jointly accountable for participating in social ceremonies like marriage, death and other occasions of family sorrows and rejoicing. They all share the family burden together.

A Productive Unit

This feature of joint family is found among agricultural families. All the members work at one and the same field. They do the sowing and harvesting of the crops together. Even in the case of artisan classes all the members of a joint family do one and the same function.

Mutual Rights and Obligations

The rights and obligations of the members of joint family are the same. None except the head of the family has special privileges. Every member of the family has equal obligations. If one female member works in the kitchen, the other does the laundry work, and the third one looks after the children. There is rotation of duties as well.

Origin of Joint Family System

It may not, however, be presumed that joint family system originated in India. This institution is said to be the outcome of the settling down of the Aryans in different parts of the

world. We have similar institutions practically all over the world. As we have learnt before in the ancient Roman society, the supreme authority rested in the eldest male member of the family who, in administering the family affairs, was entitled to take all steps. When the pastoral stage was over and the people began to live a settled life by tilling the soil, constructing the house and maintaining the patrimony, joint family system came into existence. Difficulties of communication and travel compelled all the members of the family to live together and carry on jointly the family occupation in agriculture or trade. Over and above these causes the kinship idea and the religion emphasizing ancestor worship further made joint family a complex organisation catering to the spiritual and economic needs of the large family groups which composed the society. In other parts of the world while joint family system has disappeared, in India, it still continues through suffering heavy strains brought about by industrialization and urbanization.

Merits of Joint Family System

Ensures economic progress

It enables economic progress of the country since everyone in the family is guaranteed bare subsistence, a first condition of economic progress. Unless people are assured of food and shelter they would not devote themselves sincerely to the work of country's progress. It is an essential condition of national progress that the citizens must at least get two meals a day. Joint family provides this to its members and thus enables them to devote themselves to nation's progress.

Division of labour

It secures the advantages of the division of labour. Every member in the family is given work according to his abilities without being taxed unduly. Every phase of family's life is managed by all members including women and children. Thus, during the harvest season every member of the family helps in harvesting the crops. No outside labour is required.

Economy

It secures economy of expenditure. Since things are consumed in large quantities they are secured at economic prices. Within small means a large family can be maintained if it lives jointly.

Opportunity for leisure

It provides opportunities for leisure to the members. The female members divide the household work and finish it within a little time spending the rest of it in leisure.

Social insurance

In the joint family the orphans find a comfortable asylum instead of being thrown out. Similarly, widows are assured of their proper living for whom remarriage in India is unthinkable. The joint family acts as a social insurance company for the old, sick and incapacitated.

Social virtues

It fosters great virtues like sacrifice, affection, co-operation, spirit of selflessness, broadmindedness among its members and makes the family a cradle of social virtues. Under the care of elders the undesirable and anti-social tendencies of the young are checked and they are prevented from going astray. They learn to exercise self-control. All members learn to obey family rules and respect their elders.

Socialism

According to Sir Henry Maine, the joint family is like a corporation where trustee is the father. Everyone in the joint family works according to his capabilities but obtains according to his needs. Thus it realises the socialistic ideal from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.

Demerits of Joint Family

If joint family system has received the highest praise for its many advantages, it has no less been vehemently denounced.

Home for idlers

Joint family is the home for idlers and drones as the non-earning members do not want to earn their livelihood. When a person can eat comfortably without exerting himself, he is unlikely to indulge in any strenuous activity. Mostly, in the joint family it happens that some people have to exhaust themselves while the others lead a life of utter lethargy.

Hindrance in the development of personality

In joint family there is very little opportunity for the fostering of individual autonomy or self-dependence. The whole environment of the family is not congenial for the growth of the individual because he is bound down by the minutest rules and regulations framed by the head of the family who looks upon men and women as children even when they attain adulthood.

Encourage litigation

The joint family system encourages litigation, for at the time of partition of common property generally disputes crop up which are not settled without a recourse being taken to

law. In case of agricultural families partition leads to fragmentation of holdings which is harmful from the viewpoint of agricultural progress.

Leads to quarrels

It is the hotbed of quarrels and bickering especially among the female members. Generally, there is hatred and jealousy between the wives of brothers. There is continuous strife and fighting over the doings of children. There is also the clash of ideas and temperaments on account of which there are constant quarrels between the elder and young members of the family.

Privacy denied

In a joint family privacy is denied to the newlywed couple. The brides of the sons do not get an opportunity to develop their personality. They serve the entire family like slaves. They hardly meet their husbands during the day. The invariable presence of other family members shames the bride and she cannot freely talk to her husband. Any natural love between husband and wife is prevented from blossoming. There is also no limit to the injustice done by the mother-in-law. In some cases this injustice becomes so inhuman and unbearable that women become fed up and commit suicide.

Unfavourable to accumulation of capital

It is not favourable to large accumulation of capital. When one has to share one's income with large family, it is not possible to save much. The property of the family being jointly owned is sometimes allowed to go waste.

Uncontrolled procreation

In the joint family the responsibility for bringing up and educating the children is shared. No individual feels responsibility to control procreation because of the limited income of the family. The offspring of one member will be treated on the same footing as others. No distinction is made between the statuses of the family members. In this way no direct benefits occur to an individual in the joint family by practising family planning or earning more. Thus the joint family system has got both its strong proponents as well as opponents. However, we are to remember that no institution is perfect and also that no institution full of defects can exist very long. The joint family system has been in existence since the society changed from the agricultural stage of economic development. While the system is breaking down in cities, it still largely prevails in the villages especially among the agricultural families. Though there may be exceptions here and there, yet it cannot be said that the system has been completely abolished. It is no doubt true that the system once

considered the pillar of stability is finding it difficult to withstand the dizzying pace of social mobility and the transformation of values.

Types of Joint Family

Ramakrishna Mukherjee while giving five types of relations conjugal, parental-filial, inter-sibling, lineal and affinal has maintained that a joint family is a co-resident and commensal kin-group which consists of one or more of the first three types of relations and either lineal and/or affinal relations among the members. While I.P. Desai has given five types of family nuclear, functionally joint, functionally and substantially joint, marginally joint, and traditional joint, K.M. Kapadia has given five types of family: nuclear (husband, wife and unmarried children), nuclear with married sons (what I.P. Desai calls Marginal Joint and Aileen Ross calls small joint family), lineal joint, collateral joint, and nuclear family with a dependent (widowed sister, etc.) Aileen Ross has given four types of families: large joint, small joint, nuclear, and nuclear with dependents.

Taking all these types of families together as given by different scholars, a joint family may be defined as 'a multiplicity of genealogically related nuclear families, joint in residence and commensal relations and functioning under one authority. M.S. Gore has said that a joint family should be viewed as "a family of coparceners and their dependents" instead of viewing it as a multiplicity of nuclear families. He holds that in a nuclear family, the emphasis is on conjugal relationship while in a joint family, emphasis is on filial and fraternal relationships.

According to Gore, joint family is of three types

- Filial joint family (parents and their married sons with their offspring).
- Fraternal joint family (two married brothers and their children).
- Filial and fraternal (combined) joint family.

Conclusion

Although the joint family system seems to be general in India, it is a peculiar characteristic of the Hindu social system. As a matter of fact we find joint family system in some non-Hindu communities. Moreover, all Hindus do not follow the Brahmin pattern of family and, therefore, there are different types of joint families. Collateral Joint Family is 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. Supplemented Collateral Joint Family 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. 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. Supplemented Lineal Joint Family is a lineal joint family together with unmarried, divorced or widowed relatives who do not belong to either of the lineally led nuclear families: for example, the father's widower brother or the son's wife's married brother or sister. 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. Supplemented Lineal-Collateral Joint Family in this type are found a lineal collateral joint family plus married, widowed, separated joint family plus married, widowed, separated relatives who belong to none of the nuclear families, for example, the father's widowed sister or brother or an unmarried nephew of the father.

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