

Discussing Family In India Through Popular Sociological Work

PART II



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Objective

- The presentation discusses the basic tenants of sociological understanding of Family in India. It discusses the field view and the book view involved in development of sociological understanding of family in India. At the end of the presentation every student will be equipped with fair understanding of
- Concepts of family system,
- Important work of sociologists like A.M. Shah, I.P.Desai, K.M. Kapadia, Iravati Karve and the like,
- Debates in defining family, household and joint family.

***The power point must be substituted with readings material from following sources

- <http://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/18841/1/Unit-6.pdf>
- https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/1965_17/30/the_durable_joint_family.pdf

Characteristic feature of Joint Family in India

- According to Kapadia, “The basis of the Hindu joint family was that the different members of it should dwell in the same house, take their meals and perform their worship together and enjoy the property in common” (1955:236).
- “Scholars have considered the joint family to be one of the three most fundamental structures in Indian society, the other two being caste and village” (A.M. Shah 1974:107).

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- Industrilization and Modernisation did have a great impact on the family structures in India.
- The family as an institution has adopted to the economic and technological changes around it.
- It was thought that the nuclear families are on rise giving away the tradition social structures of joint family.
- The cultural patterns were impacted by capitalism, liberalism and conspicuous consumption.

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- There was rise in individual interest and people also started migrating in search of greater economic stability.
- Property owned together by joint family meant to give its members a sense of social security.
- The function of providing social security was taken up by government and other organizations.

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- The concept of property changed. It was an asset owned by all the male members of joint family and there were cases of property dispute on rise.
- The tradition pattern of family system was disrupted and the constitution as well as law gave The Hindu Law of Inheritance (1929), The Hindu Women's Right to Property Act 1937 which evolved the family structure in India.

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- ❑ The traditional joint family seemed to give away lot of functions it carried out to bureaucratic institutions.
- ❑ The function of joint families of being a producing unit in itself was taken by the industries.
- ❑ However, the sense of belongingness was still rooted in the village home or the ancestral place.
- ❑ The joint household remained the centre to return and special occasions, that was the place where family deities were worshipped.

I.P. Desai's view on family

- Desai (1953) discusses the changing structure of joint family in India. The joint families have not vanished are less but have modified themselves.
- Desai(1953) sees joint family as having a dynamic range of relationships and not just a prototype of large number of nuclear families staying together.
- He says that the question of joint families reducing in number is poor reflection of studies being done.
- Industrialization is just an external source and it alone can not change the structure of families until the change comes from within

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- He defines family as a relatives staying together and sharing a range of relationship right from sharing, care, competition and even conflict.
- A joint family can be distinguished from nuclear family (residentially nuclear units) based on behavioral patterns and role taken up by members.
- The joint-ness of a family can be studied using religious rituals like shraddha, marriage, sanctions during birth and death.
- Family and household are two distinct things
- He points out four types of household based on his study in *Mahuva*

Desai's (1964) classification of household based on Size of household, kinship ties and property rights

- Type I a: Husband and Wife
- Type I b: Single-member household
- Type II a: Husband, wife and married sons without children, and other unmarried children
- Type II b: Husband, Wife and other relatives
- Type III : Three-generation group of lineal descendants
- Type IV : Four or more than four generations of lineal descendants. (Also called joint family).

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- Even though the family systems in India has been changing but the joint-ness persisted even without owning a joining property or joint residence. (Kapadia 1955, Desai 1964).
- **On basis of joint-ness I.P. Desai classified five types of household**
- Zero degree joint-ness: Nuclear household also synonymous to nuclear family. Single member household with an old widow/widower, or a bachelor, or husband and wife with no children

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- Low degree of joint-ness: Husband, wife and unmarried children. No property relation with other kins. Mutual obligation towards each other. Residential nuclear household
- High degree of joint-ness: Residentially nuclear but common property held by kins. Joint family is all ways except residence.
- Marginally Joint families: Higher degree of joint-ness. Husband, wife, children and one of the parents and some dependent. Less than three generations living together with or without relations with other household
- Highest degree of joint-ness: Traditional joint family with three or more generations staying together.

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- Joint-ness was more in traditional occupation based families.
- Common ownership of property maintained joint-ness but not responsible for holding all the members together.
- Urban influence did not affect joint-ness.
- Residential separation did not been joint families were reducing in number.

A.M.Shah on Family in India

- Shah discusses the common phrases in which family is generally defined. But, he also asks to distinguish each phrase from the other for sociological analysis.
- He puts forth the definition of family as per The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (1959) and Notes and Queries on Anthropology (1951 :70):
 - (a) “household, the body of persons who live in one
 - house or under one head, including parents, children, servants, etc”;
 - (b) “group consisting of parents and their children, whether living together or not”;

A.M.Shah on Family in India

- (c) “in wider sense, all those who are nearly related by blood and affinity”;
- (d) “those descended or claiming descent from a common ancestor; a house, kindred, lineage”(Shah 1964:2).
- ‘An elementary family is generally defined as “a group composed of a man, his wife and their children” which may or may not share a common household (Shah 1964:2).

A.M.Shah on Family in India

- Shah's (1998) key contentions are that: (a) there is no historical evidence to assume that the joint household was strong in Indian society in the past;
- (b) the norm appears to be weakening in one section of society, mainly the urban professional class, which is proportionately small;
- (c) family ties entailing inter household relations have become stronger; and
- (d) India is a plural society, and every caste and tribe is an endogamous group and is 'distinguished from other castes and tribes by, among other things, its own customs of family and marriage.

Based on his study in Gujarat he discussed six major types of incomplete elementary family

- (i) “husband and wife,
- (ii) widower father and unmarried children,
- (iii) widow mother and unmarried children,
- (iv) unmarried brother and sister,
- (v) an unmarried, widowed or divorced man, and
- (vi) a widow” (Shah 1964:3).
- Thus there should be a strict distinction between elementary and incomplete elementary family.

Problems in defining joint family in India

- He reviews some scholarly work like that of I.P. Desai, T.N.Madan, A.C.Mayer and the like to point out the distinction they have tried to make between elementary and incomplete elementary family.
- He chooses a general definition of joint family as “two or more elementary families joined together” (Shah 1964:4).
- Making it evident that the discussion is centered to patrilineal joint family common to Indian joint family system he raises the question of the limit to which the patrilineal descent can be extended.

Problems in defining Joint family

- Shah points out that this limit is at times set through using the term generation (which is not clearly defined) and may at times also refer to dead generations.
- The use of term generation to limit the extension of joint family raises the question of whether to include wives and their agnates in the generation;
- There is prevalent confusion between definition of two generation joint family and elementary family, or three generation or four generation joint family

Problems in defining joint family in India

- The term joint family does not bring clarity to the function of the joint family. Shah looks for neutral terms like “ joint property group”, “coparcenary”, “dependents” and the like to make a sociological analysis of joint families in India.
- This would avoid the risk of assumptions that the legal framework offers. He suggests to use the term ‘joint family’ only for joint property group

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