

## Unit 9

# The Household and the Family

---

### Contents

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Meaning of the Terms : Family and Household
- 9.3 Joint and Nuclear Family in India
- 9.4 Views on the Family in India
- 9.5 The Myth of Disintegration of the Joint Family
- 9.6 Types of Family Structure
- 9.7 Changes in Family Structure
- 9.8 Perspectives on the Family
- 9.9 Conclusion
- 9.10 Further Reading

### Learning Objectives

Unit 9 aims to look at the family in India as an institution and to see what sociological research has to offer in this regard. Going through the unit should enable you to:

- ≈ define the family and learn of the variations in family types, structure and composition;
- ≈ distinguish between family and household;
- ≈ understand the joint and nuclear forms of family and question if these are essentially evolutionary forms (i.e. examine the modernization thesis with the family as a case);
- ≈ to find out the distinction between the family in scriptural texts and empirical studies;
- ≈ learn the process of phases of household development in relation to joint and nuclear family types;
- ≈ study the functional, conflict, power and cultural dimensions of the family;
- ≈ discuss the changes in the family in contemporary India;
- ≈ ask if there is an alternative to the family as an institution; and
- ≈ to see that family studies have commonly focused on the upper caste Hindu family in India and identify a paucity of research on the family among other groups.

## 9.1 Introduction

The family is a unique institution in that it is both a private and a visibly public institution at the same time. It oscillates between the most intimate to the most public in its various contexts. The family is near universal as well. All of us for most of the time live in families. The very visible and commonplace presence of the family has perhaps lent itself to the impression that the sociology of the family is a soft subject. Or it could be the other way round, in that it is too intimate and private to be brought up to the level of sociological analysis. Notwithstanding either of the possibilities, Uberoi thinks that being commonplace enables everyone to have an opinion on the family, thus inhibiting its consideration seriously. She also points to the intrusive fears that make the family too sensitive to critical inquiry, “It

is as though critical interrogation of the family might constitute an intrusion into that private domain where the nation's most cherished cultural values are nurtured and reproduced, as though the very fabric of society would be undone if the family were in any way questioned or reshaped" (1993: 1-2).

Social philosophers have all through history, though at long intervals, reflected and commented upon the family. The family constituted an important area of study in Sociology in its early infancy. The high status accorded to the family in early Christianity might have influenced the genre of family studies in that period. This continued to be the case until the early 60s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the Indian context too, family studies have been through ups and downs in popularity and focus. The family has remained a central social institution. However, it has, of late, received somewhat inadequate attention in comparison with the 1950s, 60s, and 70s. Given the universality of prevalence of marriage in India, the study of the family has been given somewhat less attention in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The study of the family in Anthropology also had its ups and downs. Being intertwined with marriage and kinship, the institutions that structure rules and behaviour regarding relationships both by descent and alliance, gained predominance over the study of the family (see Uberoi 1993 for elaboration). We do know that these principles and rules routinely get enacted out of the family and the household. Somehow this dimension of the family happened to be glossed over despite Fortes' (1958) view that the domestic group is the workshop for kinship and marriage. It is worth serious consideration that the family is, to use Goffman's (1958) dramaturgical notion, both the back stage and the front stage of a very substantial part of people's behaviour throughout their lives. The family as an omnipresent institution stages and witnesses the drama of life as it unfolds throughout people's lives. Such an approach to the family is less likely to fall under the clearly chartable principles of kinship that Anthropology found more fascinating to study. It largely dealt with neater categories than the existential messiness that the family offered (see Simpson 1994 for analysis of the messiness of the contemporary British family).

The numerous variations in the dynamics of everyday behaviour of the family did not lend itself easily into the fold of certain structural principles. The family was thus best left marginalised from conventional structural Anthropology. Nevertheless, it is a platform from which most of the structural principles of sexuality and relations of reciprocity, hierarchy and exchange are enacted, regulated and reproduced.

Let us halt a bit here and see what is meant by the term family.

## 9.2 Meaning of the Terms : Family and Household

The concept, family, broadly refers to the primary group comprising husband-wife unit (parents) and their children. This definition keeps three types of ties in mind. The ties are: of marriage between the spouses, (i.e. the parents) and of siblingship between children. The two ties are connected through the genealogical one between parents and their children. (For details on the meaning of family you may see Unit 6 of ESO-12 of IGNOU's B. A. Programme.) We shall see below that some families comprise persons descended from a common male parent, while in others from a common female parent. For example a couple, their married sons and latter's' wives

and children make the primary group, stated at the outset of this section as a family, a somewhat larger one. Thus a family may be large or small depending on the prevailing principles of organisation of descent relations between the dependents of married persons. Thus, the family is based on the principles of kinship whose members usually share a common residence. They reside in a house/homestead. This residential unit is called the household. The members of a household have a set of relational ties amongst them. These ties are linked with the statuses held and the corroborating role complexes members of the family are expected to constitute. The household (*ghar*) is a residential and domestic unit composed of one or more persons living under the same roof and eating food cooked in the same kitchen (hearth/*chulah*). It may so happen that not all the members of a family live in the same household all the time. Geographically distanced homes may be occupied by a few of the members of a given family. These members then reside in two or more households but they consider themselves as belonging to the same family. The household is a commensal and co-resident group/ unit (with provision for the phenomenon of single person households). Thus kin and residence rules distinguish between family and household (see Shah 1973, page 3 for an elaboration of the concepts and to see how the household is one of the several dimensions of the family).

Kolenda (1998) is another sociologist who has consistently worked towards clarifying the conceptual issues about family and household. She has proposed the 12 type classificatory scheme in her comparative study of the Indian joint family based on 26 post-1949 ethnographic studies and household censuses (Kolenda 1968). These classes of obtained household compositions take the reader beyond the joint-nuclear or extended-elementary types of families. This scheme does not obscure the phenomenon as a simple joint versus nuclear family one does. The 12 type classes are as follows: 1) Nuclear Family, a couple with or without unmarried children; 2) Supplemented nuclear family; 3) Subnuclear family; 4) Single person household; 5) Supplemented subnuclear family; 6) Collateral joint family; 7) Supplemented collateral joint family; 8) Lineal joint family; 9) Supplemented lineal joint family; 10) Lineal-collateral joint family; 11) Supplemented lineal collateral joint family; and 12) other, a residual class (See Shah 1973: 220-227 for a critical appreciation of Kolenda's classification scheme). See Unit 6 of ESO-12 of IGNOU's B. A. Sociology Programme to clarify how these classes of households are useful in the understanding the continuum between variations of joint and nuclear family forms over a life cycle.

### Reflection and Action 9.1

- 1) See Table 3 in the book by A.M. Shah (1973) on page 13 for household size in 1951 in village and town areas in Gujarat (India) if possible. Take ten houses on a street each in a nearby village and/or town and make a table of household size and compare the Indian census figures for 1951 with your own figures. Compare the 1991 and 2001 census figures for rural and urban India and your state with those given in Shah.
- 2) See Table 17 in Shah (1973) for working out the basis of composition of households. Now prepare a basis for such a composition for the data you have gathered from the twenty households in rural and urban surroundings.

Discuss the difference in figures and patterns of households at your study/  
Counselling Centre.

### 9.3 Joint and Nuclear Family in India

In the two most significant Hindu epics, 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharat', the central families are large joint families. Dashrath's sons in 'Ramayana' and Dhritrashtra's and Pandu's in 'Mahabharata' live together along with their wives for a good part of their lives. Even when separated by force of circumstance, the jointness of concern, respect for togetherness and emotional bonding is visibly a desirable feature of the family in the epics. The epics hold a great deal of influence on the Hindus in India and a large joint family with filial (father-son relationship) piety is considered the ideal. These families are cited as examples to emulate whenever any threat to the family unity is perceived or if the younger generation is to be reminded of norms of filial piety. The husband-wife couple of Ram and Sita of Ramayan is the ideal for others to emulate as filial ties are underscored over conjugal ties in their life.

The two kinship links between i) parent-child and ii) siblings are found to exist in reality in various permutations and combinations. In the manner of their organisation, these links enable the separation between nuclear/elementary and joint/extended families. A nuclear family is defined as a group consisting of a man, his wife and their unmarried children. When there are additional relatives to any of the relations in the nuclear family it turns into a joint one. Thus a joint family is a nuclear family plus all kin belonging to the side of husband and /or wife living in one homestead. The term joint and extended are used interchangeably in Sociology/Social Anthropology. Such a family is a combination of more than one nuclear family based on an extension of the parent-child relationship. By implication it may also include an expansion of the number of siblings of a certain sex and their spouses and children. When descent is traced through the male line, the extended/joint family is based on the extension between father-son relationship. On the other hand, an extension based on mother-daughter relationship forms a matrilineal extended/joint family. A horizontally extended family between brothers, their wives and children is called fraternal or collateral family (see Kapadia's essay in Patel 2005 for illustrations of lineally/vertically and laterally/horizontally extended families).

The ideal Hindu joint family consists of a man, his wife and their adult sons, their wives and children, and the younger unmarried children of the parental couple. This is called a patrilineal, parivirilocal (the newly married couple taking residence in the husband's father's home) family. The oldest male heads the family and authority is hierarchically ordered along the lines of age and sex. In such a family, conjugal ties are considered subordinate to filial and fraternal (relationship between brothers) ties. Members of the family are related by kinship bonds lineally or collaterally or both. As elaborated in Unit 6 of ESO-12 of IGNOU's B. A. Programme, a joint family is seen by the number of generations present, ideally three or four generational family (Desai 1964, Madan 1965). The joint family holds property in common. However, not all members have the same right over the family property. Gore (1968) defines a joint family as a group consisting of adult male coparceners and their dependents. Thus some members do not constitute coparceners even if they are members of the family, and have a right of residence and use of family resources.

We shall see the details of property rights (in both schools of law— Dayabhaga, adopted in Bengal and Assam, and Mitakshara, adopted in most other parts

of India) to different members of the family when we deal with the feminist perspective.

## 9.4 Views on the Family in India

Research on the family in India has adopted different approaches. Like any knowledge on a cultural reality, family research has also been conducted from different points of view. You will see in Unit 12 of this Block that kinship has been approached differently in Indological studies than in empirical sociological and social anthropological research. Similarly, family in India has been studied through the Indological and the empirical approaches. We shall now examine these.

### a) The Textual View

The family in Hindu thought is derived from the idea of *pitri rin*, i.e. ancestral indebtedness. Every man has to repay the debt of his ancestors (the other two being of the teacher and gods) through procreation. The birth of a child, especially a son was not only a reason for being, but also being free of ancestral debt. Raising the next generation, i.e. sons, to adulthood ensures one's way to heaven. The son's privilege and obligation to light the funeral pyre and observe certain death rituals symbolises this indebtedness and the way out of it. Thus the Hindu family was defined as the closest group bound by mutual ties of giving and receiving the funeral oblation (a person and his three immediate ancestors). The family was a three or four generation group depending on how and whom you count in or out. *Shradha* and property were linked in the notion of the family. The text-based dimension of the Hindu family is one of a property holding and *shradha* performing unit.

The Hindu family became coterminous with the Indian joint family through the engagement of British colonial administration with indigenous systems of kinship and marriage as reflected through the Hindu sacred texts, the 'Dharmshastra' (see Kane 1930-62). Maine (1972) projected the Indian joint family as a surviving example of the ancient form of human family. He had discerned the outlines of the ancient family in the legal system in ancient Rome and in the Celtic and Slavic survivals of earlier forms of social organisation. To Maine, this patriarchal family worked as a corporation, with its members as its trustees. Many early Indian sociologists were trained in the Indological approach. Prabhu (1955[1940]) described the patriarchal form of joint family as the family form of all Hindus, rich, poor, urban and village folk. Ghurye (1955) claimed an Indo-European pedigree for the Indian joint family. The Hindu family had for long found itself analysed, commented upon and prescribed as the ideal norm. The upper caste and upper class Indians derived their family morality and norms from liturgical texts and this became an ideal for other castes to emulate, in the process of their Sanskritisation, to use Srinivas' concept. The ideological amalgam was further complicated by the British legal reinterpretation of liturgical concepts. "The hereditary literati had their own traditions, attitudes, biases, and interests which influenced their comments and interpretations. As if this was not sufficiently complicated, during the British rule certain ideas and myths regarding the Indian family organisation obtained wide currency through the British law courts and judges, and the new class of lawyers" (Srinivas's Foreword in Shah 1973: vii).

Historians as well as sociologists had used textual (literary, sacerdotal and legal) sources to comment on social institutions, including the family (see

Unit 12 of this block). Karve (1953) in her extensive survey of the Indian kinship system with kinship vocabularies had identified four main types of kinship organisation in India. Karve's study brought out the Dravidian kinship system and its family form as distinct from the form in most parts of India. It is through the Indological approach that the Hindu joint family came to be considered as the ideal and often the real family in India (See Uberoi 2000 for an elaboration of the Indological approach to family studies).

Whether it is the Ramayana family or the upper caste and class Hindu family, the large joint family is not the universal form of family in India, both at present and in the recorded past. It may be reiterated that the joint and the nuclear types of the family are Indological constructs. The family as obtained in the field through empirical social anthropological and sociological studies is much more varied rather than the ideal joint family.

#### b) The Field View

Goody's (1962) influence took some time to show itself in Indian family studies. However, empirical study of the family was still under the strong influence of the basic difference between the oriental and the occidental family types, and this type-cast remained a given fact as though the empirical reality had to be pigeonholed into either of the compartments. Of course, the terms 'domestic group' as well as 'household' provided a processual view of the family, which brought to attention the lived reality of family closer to sociological scrutiny. Though Rivers (1906) had given the lead for providing empirical cases and actual figures through the genealogical method, the jural and textual influence continued its preponderance for nearly half a century, in the family studies in India. The discourse on the native category of the family was influenced by colonial administration and Anthropology.

#### **Box 9.1 : Nuclear and Joint Family**

Although for at least three decades since the 1950s, Sociology and Social Anthropology both in the West and in India have provided a great deal of rigorous research on the family and its various dimensions and aspects, it is a sad state that many social science research students in India today have to ask their respondents if theirs is a nuclear or a joint family. People's terms may vary. Their terms range from being together to being separated, with reference to the ego's (male's in patrilineal society) residence in relation to other members of the family and the household. While the sociologist's categorisation deals with the structure of residence derived from its composition, people's categorisation is based on the context of the ego's residence vis-a-vis other household and/or family members. A household in itself is neither joint nor nuclear, but becomes either of these by virtue of its being under progression and regression in a developmental process. For example, a married son's moving out of his father's house in patrilineal society makes the son's house a nuclear one, or rather a separate one. This act may or may not simultaneously make his father's household a nuclear one. This dimension of behaviour projecting the residents as living together or as separate (in joint or nuclear households) has to be investigated further. It is here that the family is seen not just as a noun but as an adjective constituting actors and agents.

The family received a great deal of interest during the first few decades of the emergence of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India. In her comprehensive survey Dube (1974) describes the overwhelming interest in

family studies as being next only to those in caste. It is an interesting coincidence and a case for comparative study that with India's political independence and following the formation of the Indian Sociological Society, the sociological study of the family experienced a watershed from, what Srinivas calls, the book view to the field view. Almost simultaneously came up the Western field-based anthropological and sociological studies (Goody 1958, Goode 1963).

These studies provided a break from the studies of the Indological school based on legal and liturgical arguments. A shift occurred from the textual Indology to the contextual in the study of the family in India. Sociologists and social anthropologists began to study the various extant forms and structures of the family as they existed in reality rather than the erstwhile text-based dimension of the family as a property-holding and *shradha*-performing unit. The effect of liturgical and legal texts continued to linger in studies of the joint family and the changes therein. The overlap of the ideal, normative and behavioural with that of value and fact in family studies continued until the concept of the household as a heuristic device seemed to rescue family sociology from the confusion (Shah 1973). The overwhelming influence of the Hindu, upper caste, North Indian ideal of the family was assumed, somewhat erroneously, as the all India Hindu and Indian family, notwithstanding the fairly early studies among non-Hindu South Indian communities in India by Kapadia (1958) and Dube (1969).

### c) Process View: Phases of Household Development

We have earlier mentioned the continuum between nuclear and joint family as one changes into another over time. In this way of studying the family, it is clear that the family is not a static institution. It goes through a developmental cycle. This cycle interrelates the nuclear and the joint families with each other. The structure of a family changes over time with changes in its size, composition and the status and roles of its members. Thus a family is not likely to always remain nuclear, nor does a family always remain joint. Similarly, not all nuclear families are identical nor are all joint families so. At any given point in time, a nuclear family may have one or more persons. When it turns into a joint one it may have at least two and usually many more members. You have already seen the 12 classes Kolenda (1998) found in the 26 studies she analysed. This process of the developmental cycle has been improvised by Shah's (1973) study of the household and its developmental phases. A household may experience progression and/or regression or both on the basis of birth, adoption and in- and out-marriage, and death, divorce and separation of members over a period of time. A household in itself is neither joint nor nuclear, but becomes either of these by virtue of its being under progression and regression in the process of its developmental phases. For example, a married son's moving out of his father's house in a patrilineal society makes the son's house a nuclear one, or rather a separate one. This act may or may not simultaneously make his father's household a nuclear one. Thus at any given time the family forms in a society are likely to vary from a single member to a large group residing together. Thus the term household is used for the residential grouping and family for the group related through kinship, emotional, ritual and legal dimensions. Thus Shah (1973) uses the terms simple and complex for the household rather than joint or nuclear.

Each person in a household is involved in a complex pattern of behaviour with every other member. Life in a household is marked by proper code of

conduct for each member. To analyse a household in its entirety, all the relatives in a household need to be taken into account. 'The compositional types are not discrete and haphazard but are interrelated in a developmental process. The pattern of the developmental process in each society is affected by three major factors. The first is the demographic factor, which not only includes the phenomena of birth, adulthood and death but also the sex and number of members. While these phenomena are demographic in origin, they are social in operation. The second factor is the series of explicitly stated norms regarding the residence of various relatives in a household. The third is the pattern of interpersonal relations in a household, largely dependent on the norms or codes of proper conduct attached to kinship relationships in the household' (Shah 1973: 81-81). When a simple household becomes a complex one through addition of other family members (by birth or marriage) the process is called fusion. Contrariwise, when members are lost (by birth, out-marriage, migration) the household is said to undergo fission. A household goes through the process of fusion and fission and accretion and attrition and in its wake turning itself into simple and complex one. Each attrition may or may not change the household and the family into a nuclear or a joint one.

### Reflection and Action 9.2

We have seen above that a family does not remain static in its size, composition and structure. In fact, it goes through phases of development which may be progressive as well as regressive. The concept of household and its developmental phases, therefore, is of heuristic value in research.

Prepare a chart of a your family tree with the help of your parents and/or grand parents for upto at least four generations. I may refer you to units 8 and 9 of ESO-12 of IGNOU's B.A. Sociology Programme and Unit 12 of this Block to make the chart. Mark the time when your family was nuclear and when it became a joint one over the entire period you have covered in the chart. Point out if some members/sections of the family reside/d in separate houses but remained joint in property, rituals, pollution, sentiments etc.

Discuss at your study centre, how different households of your family were set up, and how these were composed of varying forms of family class types at different periods. This exercise should enable you to see that classifying households simply as nuclear and joint families hide the actual developmental phases that families go through over time. Families experience fission and fusion and this is visible through the households in which the family members reside. This should enable an understanding of the significance of kinship ties and principles in family and household organisation. Discuss the usefulness of the concept of household in empirical research on the family with your Academic Counsellor at your Study Centre.

The period in Indian Sociology that marked a shift from the book-view to the field-view coincided with the influence of the idea of modernisation and development. Bombay was assumed, as it were, to be the pinnacle of industrialisation and modernisation, and the teaching community the leading light. Therefore, the family in Bombay, might have been assumed to provide evidence of the influence of modernisation and industrialisation on the family. As will be evident from the essays in Patel (2005), the Indian family received maximum attention in Maharashtra and Gujarat and much less in other parts of India, especially South India by Sociologists in India.



## 9.5 The Myth of Disintegration of the Joint Family

Sociology shared with Social Anthropology the unilinear evolutionary path that the family was to take over time. Maine's evolutionary path in his *Ancient Law* (1861) on the origin and nature of human society was summed up in the famous shift from status to contract. For Maine, the movement from status to contract might be visualised through the movement in the institution of marriage centred on family and kin (i.e. status orientation) to individual choice (i.e. contract orientation). The ensuing family eventually became a nuclear one with a strong conjugal orientation like the Christian nuclear family. He found in the Indian joint family the earliest form of the patriarchal family. Bachofen and Engels disagreed with Maine's views in a certain way as their ancient family was matriarchal. Engels was influenced by Morgan's (1877) conjecture of the latter day patriarchal family formation. He is well-known for attributing the woman's historic fall from grace with the formation of the institution of private property and the patriarchal monogamous family. Yet they all remained evolutionary in their perspective regarding the institution of the family (for related elaboration, see Zimmerman's essay in Patel (2005)).

Even though the charge of assumed evolutionist perspective was to be dismissed, there is another analytical trend that strengthens the thesis of the disintegration of the joint family. The empirical data on post-independent India were being unquestioningly contrasted with the ideal and textual image of the three or four-generational patrilineal Hindu joint family. A historical analysis of the family can provide interpretations of the contemporary family both of its own gradual transformation and the all round transformation experienced by the society as a whole.

Serious empirical studies of the family dealt with conceptual and analytical categories more carefully and raised issues like jointness and its meaning and variations in its various contexts. The question of the meaning of jointness and its implications was put under critical scrutiny. Two major contemporary influences made a significant impact not only on the field view of the family but also on how family studies in India were to unfold over the following decades. First, by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, population censuses were administered in many western countries and their colonies. The Indian census data on the household size revealed that the Indian household was decreasing in size compared to the textual Indological image of the family. It was much smaller than the three-generational joint residential unit it was understood to be. Secondly, this datum along with the data on the disintegrating European family was interpreted with the evolutionary perspective on social institutions including that of the family. The view was further substantiated with the census data obtained in India. To the evolutionists and Euro-centrists, the census data and inferences on the Indian family were evidence of all roads leading to Rome, i.e. monogamy and the nuclear family were the final destination. The assumed evolutionary path of the gradual reduction in the size of the family is an erroneous one. Laslett and Wall (1972) highlight the small size of the European family in the past substantiated by historical demographers. Historical studies both of the European and the Asian family have challenged the unilinear assumption of the reducing size and the changing structure and content of the family (See Wilk and Netting 1984 and Yanagisako 1979). The well known Parsonian thesis of the fit between the nuclear family and the American industrial society which other societies would eventually follow was not only an evolutionary thesis but was also delegitimising of

other family patterns. See Uberoi's (2000: 7-13) perceptive appraisal of the modernisation thesis in this regard.

But historical analysis in a comparative framework is also possible without following the evolutionary perspective. Weber's (1975) *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* focussed centrally on the origins of modern society and conditions of its emergence rather than with a whole series of types of societies of which the modern was seen as but the latest. Closely related in some way, though not reiterating the unilinear evolutionary model of family change, was the assumption that the conjugal unity of the couple and their children with ever fewer kin ties provided the structural keystone of the system. Its intense concentration on the socialisation of children was associated with the advanced industrial society. This family was particularly compatible with the demands of the dominant economic order of the industrial society. The developing countries would also behave in ways compatible. This over-simplistic assumption was visible in the thesis of the joint family's disintegration. It was devoid of serious historical data and insightful analysis (see Desai's essays 2005). Even the large sized family with a set of kinsmen (though in reality servants were more common) that existed among the more affluent upper class in Europe was found to be erroneously assumed. The cosy family of mum-dad and the kids assumed by planners and policy makers had long been declared stereotypical than real. Laslett and Wall (1972) revealed it for the European family, especially in British society, on the basis of historical data. Anderson (1980) studies recent times (1961-71) in England and states that 40 per cent of the people at any given point of time lived in households that did not conform to this pattern. There is a danger in viewing quantitative data too superficially, i.e. to look at time series for a misleadingly short period of time or to contrast quantitative data against an ideal or normative practice as was done after the initial censuses in India regarding the household size and composition. Several sociologists, Desai (2005) and Shah (1973) in particular, had picked up debates with the census data and pointed out the flaws in the interpretation of concepts and data. Nevertheless, Shah (1999) finds a potential in census data despite its limitations.

Fitting in the nuclear family with industrialisation was not a straightforward thesis in terms of Indian data. Despite the family-household conceptual distinction, other dimensions remained to be understood. Singer's work (1968) on the adaptation to western values and ways in a neatly compartmentalised manner to suit the public domain without being allowed to permeate into and affect the private domain of industrialists in South India revealed the resilience of traditional family values and norms. Adapting to Western ways and yet supporting joint family and caste values was characteristic of Singer's Indian industrial family. Though Singer's work is not a direct response to the Parsonian fit between industrial society and the nuclear family, it makes a strong case for an Indian family's way of adaptation. On the other hand, the issue of jointness was delinked from the sole criterion of joint residence. Thus retaining the jointness of the family is possible without living jointly. Though nuclear residence is on the rise in what Beteille (1993) calls the service class in urban India, Sharma's (1986) and Vatuk's (1972) field studies in North India suggest a different picture. They find a branch of the joint family residing separately in the city and acting as a buffer for members of the joint family to join them for studies and urban jobs. The articles by Kaldate (1962), and Kapadia, Morrison, and the

deliberations at the symposium on caste and the joint family (2005) deal with the transition from the joint to the nuclear family.

The conceptual distinction between the kinship oriented family and the residence oriented household led to a great deal of analytical clarity in the understanding of the family both as a social ideal and a social fact. Shah (1998) has shown that the proportion of joint families has remained the same if not increased over the past several decades. Kolenda (1970) too reiterated the popularity of the prevalence of the joint family. To Shah (1973) the kinship dimension of the household pattern is important to make meaningful analysis of quantitative data. Norms and interpersonal relations are not to be left behind.

## 9.6 Types of Family Structure

We have already discussed the nuclear and joint types of families. From the empirical field studies in India (Shah 1973, Kolenda 1987 and essays in Patel 2005), we have learnt that families assume different class types of simple and nuclear households. Family structures based on the principle of descent distinguish between different types of families. Let us see the two main structural types of families.

### i) The Patrilineal Family

The genealogical and sibblingship links of kinship among a group of relatives in a family signals its structural formation. When the central kinship link in the organisation of a family is between father and son/s, the family is patrilineal. We have seen above that such a family could be nuclear and/or joint. A joint patrilineal family may be lineally or laterally joint. We have also seen how the patrilineal joint family has been assumed to be the typical Indian family. Most of the studies cited above in this Unit are studies of the patrilineal family.

### ii) The Matrilineal Family

Now we shall see alternative family types which are not patrilineal in structure. A family composed of genealogical and sibling relations of kinship with primary focus on the mother-daughter bond and descent principle, is a matrilineal family. A matrilineal family too could be nuclear or joint and have varying household forms over its members' life-cycle.

The joint family in South India, particularly among the matrilineal Nayers, did not resemble the textual and scriptural family of the Indian liturgical texts. Not the whole of South India is matrilineal. Unlike the village, *gotra*, and *sapinda* exogamy in North India, the south Indian family formation is influenced by cross-cousin and uncle-neice marriages. Unlike the joint family of the Nambudiris (*illam*) based on patriliney, the Nayar family (*tarawad*) was based on matriliney. The patrilineal family in South India is different from that in North India in some respects. There are variations in family formation among the Nayers within Kerala, for instance, between South-West Kerala and Central and North Kerala. Malabar and Travancore differed in their practice of polyandry. Yet the institution of *tarawad* was strong. Dube's (1974) review gives an extensive coverage of the studies of matrilineal systems and families therein, both by Indian and non-Indian scholars. Sardamoni's recent book (1999) deals with Travancore, an area taken up by Puthenkalam (2005). Both have dealt with the *tarawad* as an intimately linked manifestation of the

central feature of matriliney which gives women certain entitlements, such as permanent rights to maintenance by and residence in their natal home (*tarawad*). The relatively greater autonomy of women in the *tarawad* is a reflection of both the principle of matriliney and the consequent *tarawad* formation. Polyandrous unions, visiting husbands, and ritually sanctioned Nambudiri husbands and children from these husbands, were typical features of the *tarawad*. The members of the *tarawad* ranged from 20 to 30 and more. This family system was rather complex and posed a certain difficulty in fitting with the family in patrilineal society.

Matriliney is not the mirror opposite of patriliney and thus the difficulty. Levi-Strauss (1971) considers the South Indian Nayar family as family at times, and does not view this grouping as the family at others. The matter is resolved when he sums up that the family is the emanation, on the social level, of those natural requirements without which there could be no society. Another difficulty is posed by the variation in the Indian family forms which did not easily match with the nuclear family of the industrial West. However, Puthenkalam (2005) gives a peep into the matrilineal joint family (*tarawad*), among the Nayars in Kerala. Nevertheless, the institution of *tarawad* gradually weakened, as Puthenkalam describes, during the colonial rule (for more on this transformation, see Saradamoni 1999). Whether the decline of the *tarawad* is a reflection of the disintegration of the matrilineal joint family is difficult to claim. It is not that the *illam* has replaced the *tarawad*. Nevertheless, in the process of disintegration of the *tarawad*, women's autonomy has been curtailed. The erosion of Nayar women's autonomy and entitlements raises a research question on the importance of materiality in kinship structures.

### iii) Caste, Community and Family Structure

We have learnt earlier that the Indological approach had posited the patrilineal joint family prevalent among the higher castes as the ideal Indian family. This bias had generated a problem with regard to the family among the non-patrilineal as well as the non-Hindu communities in Indian society.

Chakravarty and Singh (1991) found a slightly higher proportion of nuclear over joint families for India as a whole. Of course, joint families are larger in size, the proportion of population residing in them is also larger. Based on the census data, Shah (1998) shows that the proportion of joint over nuclear households has not decreased over the decades. He suggests that increased life expectancy and pressures on urban living space are likely to increase joint living, while Visaria and Visaria (2003) estimate increased nuclear family living for similar reasons. However, it is clear that urbanization has not led to nuclearization of the family.

The evolutionary and Euro-centric bias was so strong that despite a lack of any conclusive evidence that the family in the past was a large joint one, Goode (1963) claimed so, and predicted that the family was moving forward to assume the form of the western family (see Uberoi 2000: 10-13 for a detailed discussion on Goode's analysis).

We are now clear that the patrilineal Hindu joint family is considered an ideal by most Hindus. But geographical mobility, among other factors, has increased various forms of household composition, and not necessarily just nuclear family households. Shah (1973) describes migrants and their residential

arrangements. Sharma (1986) and Vatuk (1972) respectively discuss the strategy of rural families in Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh where a part of the rural family moves to an urban area to access urban resources for the family's upward mobility through jobs, education etc. The rural families in both the studies make residential arrangements in urban areas to maximise the family's advantages through both rural and urban households and yet do not deviate from the joint family norm. By practising the dual residence pattern (rural and urban household), such a family enhances its economic, social, cultural as well as symbolic capital.

Lower caste Hindus are found (Cohn 1955, CSWI 1974, Shah 1998, Kolenda 1987) not following the norm of joint family. This should not mean that they do not consider the joint family as an ideal. Cohn (1955) delineates the factors responsible for the absence of joint families among the Chamars of Senapur. You are referred to unit 6 of ESO-12 of IGNOU's B.A. Sociology Programme for the details. It is not sure if the lower castes also do not consider joint family as the ideal family. Careful research is needed to explore the family among the lower castes. Similarly, the family among tribals, the ideal, the norm and the actual, needs to be studied for better information. Though there is at least some research on the Muslim family (Ahmad 1976), there is a paucity of data on the family in the non-Hindu communities in India.

### Action and reflection 9.3

Take five households of lower caste and five of upper caste in your locality. Make a chart of the household composition. See 6.4 of unit 6 of ESO-12 of IGNOU's B.A. Sociology Programme and ask if there is joint property, cooperation and sentiments and ritual bonds of jointness among the members of the household with other collaterals who may not be residing in the (your selected) households.

Discuss the comparative findings at your Study Center.

## 9.7 Changes in Family Structure

Research involving the application of the modernisation thesis on the Indian joint family discussed earlier (see also Patel 2005) viewed the changes in the size, structure and composition of the family over time. Patel (2005) views the family as the workshop of kinship and marriage norms and practices. Studies on changes in the family in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century have been scarce. Societal and structural changes have influenced the family size and structure (see unit 6 of ESO-12 of IGNOU's B.A. Sociology Programme for the factors influencing the changes in the joint family).

Since the second wave of feminism in the 1960's, the family has been viewed with some amount of skepticism at least by feminist scholars. Increased female labour force participation, legislation impacting gender, personal law and international migration, advances in science and technology including new reproductive technologies among others, have interacted with the family. How has the family dealt with change? Whether it moved in the 'cultural lag' thesis direction or the resilience one, is yet to be explored. The past two decades have seen a decline in total fertility rate on the one hand and increased life expectancy on the other. This is bound to impact family living. Simultaneously, emigration to foreign countries is on the rise leading to the

phenomenon of the emptiness. Also the marital breakdown i.e. divorce is on the rise, and so is remarriage of widows and divorced women even among upper castes where it was earlier prohibited. It is not unheard of for a female to remain unmarried today. How the family deals with these changes is not yet studied seriously in Sociology. What is happening in the family in matrilineal communities? See Jain (1996) and Shardamoni (1999) for family, kinship and marriage and changes in matrilineal communities in India. What happens to families and households in the following contexts: a) intercaste marriage, b) inter-religious marriage, c) economic liberalization, and d) religious conversion? The way in which these contexts impact family formations in India is not yet studied.

## 9.8 Perspectives on the Family

After having studied the concepts of the household, its privileging over the family and the studies in this respect, we shall study the theoretical perspectives on the family.

### 1) Functionalist Perspective

On the basis of the institution of the family in 250 societies varying from small hunting bands to large industrial societies, Murdock (1949) drew two conclusions: that the nuclear family is a universal institution and it is a functional group indispensable to society. In the post-War transition period, the eminent sociologist and social theorist Talcott Parsons's (1959) structural, functional and comparative theory of society and social change predicted an isolation, differentiation and specialisation of the nuclear family as a bounded sub-system of the American society, while denying the growing post-War perception that the declining sexual morality and the marital breakdown portended the eminent breakdown of the American family. Two basic and irreducible functions, common to the family in all societies, Parsons said, would be performed by the American family. These are the primary socialisation of children and stabilisation of adult personalities of the population. It is in this context that the fit between nuclear family and the industrial society was forwarded. The functions performed by the wider kin group, Parsons' said would be taken over by formal institutions in the industrial society and be shared with the conjugally bounded nuclear family. This way the two essential functions of the family continued to be performed and the American family would remain stable. To Parsons the genealogical and sibship links in the family were retained in their basic elementary form. Power and authority of parents over children and both instrumental and expressive functions between spouses and generations enabled the nuclear family to continue to perform its basic functions.

Typical of the integrated and harmonious view of the functionalist perspective, Parsons saw the generational hierarchy and division of labour in the American family as functional. Secondly, the ideal middle class American nuclear family, to him, had reached the ultimate level in the evolutionary process. Parsons's evolutionary perspective was adopted by Goode (1963) in his study of world revolution in family patterns.

The functionalist perspective has been out of favour for sometime now. Parsons was criticized for assuming the white middle class American families as the ideal nuclear families. Morgan (1975) finds no class, regional or religious variation in Parsons' family. Like Murdock, Parsons assumed the family to be universal. Besides, there was no exploration of alternatives to the family.

Besides, as stated earlier, the parent-child hierarchy and gender roles in the family were in harmony, but it was only partially true. Family tensions and conflicts (Vogel and Bell) and exploitative relations (Laing 1971) do exist in families. Leach (1967) has found that members of nuclear families take immense emotional toll on each other.

## 2) Conflict Perspective

Engels' famous work on the state, family and private property (first published in 1884) was the first Marxian attempt to analyse the family. Like Parsons, Engels too took an evolutionary approach alongside the materialist interpretation of history. Restrictions on sexuality and sexual relations and control over women's reproduction were linked with the emergence of the state and the emergence of private property. Control over sexuality and the monogamous family came to be closely related in Engels's work drawn from different historical epochs, conjectures, and the work of Morgan (1871). The monogamous family was based on the supremacy of man for undisputed paternity to enable certainty of a natural heir to the family inheritance.

The marriage between Marxian ideas and feminism during the second feminist wave in the 1960s and 1970s employed Marxian concepts in critiquing the family. Women as producers of one of the basic forces of capitalism, the labour force, were tied down with reproduction and the domestic space without any payment for their contribution. Rowbothom (1973) elaborates through other research how reproduction functions as a hidden subsidy to the capitalist and hidden tax on the proletariat. Raising children discourages workers from bargaining (by withdrawing/holding back) in the wage market. Women's oppression and their acceptance of male aggression is viewed as an expression of workers' legitimate anger at their powerlessness in the public domain.

David Copper (1972) in "The death of the family" extends reproduction to incorporate ideological conditioning for an obedient and submissive labour force. Thus parental authority is also viewed in Marxian terms as a means to reproduce human beings who would accept the hierarchical order of the capitalist society. The family works as the facilitating institution for capitalism. Feminists found reproduction as the main source of women's oppression which essentialises and oppresses the woman. Property rights, rights over children and such other entitlements follow from gender relations in the family (Agarwal 1994, 1997). Motherhood had to be overcome if women were to be liberated and achieve equality with man. Everingham (1994) analyses the shifts in feminist positions since the 1970s with respect to women's autonomy, (as form of subjectivity). The 'domestic mode of production' is Delphy's (1970) thesis on the domestic unit's and thereby women's oppression in the capitalist society. The capitalist state works in a manner exploits women and families through family ideology and sentiments. The sentimentality veils the exploitative character of capitalist relations of production through the domestic mode of production.

## 3) Cultural Perspective

Family studies achieved a conceptual advancement in privileging the 'household' over the 'family' that enabled more rigorous cross-cultural comparative research in the field. The stress of numerical composition somehow came into limelight through perhaps the popularity of the term 'household' in the census, while the principles of relationship and family

organisation got lesser attention. Of late, other aspects of family have attracted academic attention.

Attempts at understanding the ideology of the family and particularly the joint family has thrown up a few interesting studies. Research on emotions in the family has found some favour. Shah (1998) comments on norms and values held by different members of a family and their comportment and behaviour in relation to others for commensality in the family. (See Lynch 1990 for more on other societies)

Theories of procreation are related with differential power, rights and entitlements by age and sex in the family in India (Dube 1986, 1997). The ubiquitous procreation metaphor of seed and earth, assume the male as the active principle, while the female as the passive one. She is a vessel, a passive principle in the unequal contribution of reproductive resources for the family (see del Valle 1993 for a somewhat differential contribution of genders in reproduction in Nepal). The Nepali mother is not simply a passive field but is believed to contribute in forming some parts of the foetus, while the father is the important one. Dube (1997) also acknowledges the significance of the mother in forming the child's identity, since the caste of both parents goes in placing the child in the caste hierarchy. Hypergamy and hypogamy practices are linked to this conception about parental contribution as are rules of sapinda exogamy. In matrilineal communities such as the Khasi, the perception about the contribution of different sexes in reproduction is quite contrary to that in patrilineal societies (see Nongbri 1993).

The cognitive character acknowledged in the descent principle translates into social, symbolic, reproductive and material rights and entitlements at most stages in a person's life in the family, both in matrilineal as well as patrilineal societies (see Agarwal 1994, Gray 1995, Uberoi 1996, Dube 1997, and Patel 1994) The impact of this on reproduction is studied by Dyson and Moore (1981), Basu (1992). For related dimensions of autonomy through the life cycle approach, see Patel (1994 and 1999). A somewhat different understanding of the contribution of genders is found in communities operating the alliance principle (see unit 12 of this block for details and Dumont 1966).

The household as a structure of consciousness (see Gray 1995 for the Nepali householders' views), its priority over individual interests (Patel 1994) translates into everyday life forms. Love (Anpu in Tamil) as a holistic emotion in society, not merely erotic or conjugal in Trawick (1990) is a fresh insight into family relationships [see the restraint on expressive affection for one's infant over other family members' children in Patel (1994)].

Dube (1998), Chodorow (1978) and Gilligan (1982) provide a different voice regarding the social reproduction of gendered beings in the context of socialisation in the family. The ideology of care lends itself into a heavier burden of care on women in the family (Dalley 1988). At the state legislation level welfare programmes are critiqued (Rissew and Parliwala 1996).

#### 4) Cooperative – Conflict Perspective

We have seen above that the 1960s was a watershed in the history of family studies. It was discovered that Love, conjugality and oppression co-exist in



the family alongside unequal gender relations. The post War development project came under critical scrutiny when feminist economists pointed out the futility of some of the assumptions of economic theory applied on the family as a unit of the analysis in state policies and development programmes. The dialectical relationships at family level rather than viewing the family as a safe haven in the unkind world or as an institution on the verge of breakdown need to be seriously explored. We shall see the cooperative conflict perspective in unit 11 in greater detail.

## 9.9 Conclusion

In this unit you have learnt about the institution of family. It is a unique institution since it has both a private as well as a visibly public characteristic at one and the same time. The family is more or less a universal institution since most of us, all over the world belong to a family. The very visible and commonplace presence of the family gives the impression that it can be understood by anyone and is rather a soft subject in Sociology or vice-versa. Research on family therefore is full of constraints as it also deals with sensitive details. However, traditionally, the family has been considered to be significant and social philosophers throughout history have attempted to understand its nature.

You learnt about the meaning of the terms ‘family’ and ‘household’ and their interlinkage with marriage and kinship. Family has been broadly described as the primary group comprising husband-wife unit (parents) and their children. Household is the residence shared by a family or a part of the family. The family is based on the principles of kinship, and its members usually share a common residence, which is called a household.

A brief description about the large joint families, as described in the Hindu epics like the ‘Ramayan’ and ‘Mahabharat’ has been given. The ideal type of joint family as described by these epics is greatly admired by most Hindus in India. Notions of filial piety i.e. the relationship between father and son is held in high estimation. ‘Ramayan’ is the ideal for people to emulate as filial ties are underscored over conjugal ties. You learnt that the two kinship links between (i) parent-child and (ii) siblings are found to exist in reality in various permutations and combinations. It is in this manner that one can distinguish between nuclear/elementary and joint/extended families.

Research on the family in India has adopted different approaches. Like any knowledge of a cultural reality, family research has also been conducted from different points of view. In this unit you have learnt about the textual view of family as well as the field view. The research on family has a history of nearly three decades from 1950s onwards in Sociology and Social Anthropology both in the West and in India. Goody’s (1962) influence on family studies took some time to influence studies of the family in India, but empirical studies of the family continued to be under the influence of the basic difference between the oriental and the occidental types of family. This type cast remained a given fact. However the notion of the ‘domestic group’ as well as the developmental cycle of ‘the household’ provided a processual view of the family, which brought the lived reality of family structure and composition closer to sociological scrutiny.

You learnt about the contributions of Indian sociologists and social anthropologists in the field of family and kinship studies. There has been an

over-whelming interest in family studies (Dube 1974). It was only next to caste in significance at the time of the emergence of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India. The effect of liturgical and legal texts continued to linger in studies of the joint family and the changes therein. The overlap of the ideal, normative and behavioral with that of value and fact in family studies continued until the concept of the household as a heuristic device rescued the sociology of family.

In this unit the in-depth description of 'household' and its development providing the processual aspect of a 'domestic group' has been critically analysed. The pattern of the developmental cycle in each society is affected by three major factors, such as, demographic factor, series of explicitly stated norms regarding residence of different relatives in a household and the interpersonal relations of the members. The processes of 'fusion' and 'fission' have been explained.

The myth of the disintegration of the joint family is related to the evolutionary thesis that the nuclear family characterised industrial societies while joint families were characteristic of feudal Asiatic societies. Most sociologists have studied the 'patrilineal' forms of family. However, some studies for example, of the 'Nayars' of Kerala have focused on the 'matrilineal' family. The joint family in South India, particularly among the Nayars who were matrilineal, did not resemble the textual and scriptural family of the Indian liturgical texts. Both the matrilineal, as well as, patrilineal families of South India differed from those of the patrilineal joint families of North India.

In this unit the changes in the family structure have been described. Family has been viewed as the workshop of kinship and marriage norms and practices. Societal and structural changes have influenced the family size and structures. You read about the feminist scholars' skeptical views on family after the second wave of feminism in the 1960s.

Finally, the brief outline of different sociological perspectives has been provided to you in this unit. These are the functionalist perspective, the conflict perspective which included the feminist views of the family, the cultural perspective and the cooperative conflict perspective. In the next unit you will learn further about the household as a cooperative-conflicting unit.

## 9.10 Further Reading

Anderson, M. (ed.) 1980 [1971]. *Sociology of the Family*. Penguin Books: Harmondsworth.

Chakravorty, C., and A.K. Singh. 1991. *Household Structures in India*. Census of India, Occasional Paper 1. Census of India: New Delhi.

Dube, L. 1974. *Sociology of Kinship*. Popular Prakashan: Bombay.

Karve, Irawati. 1953. *Kinship Organization in India*. Deccan College Monograph Series: Poona.