

# Family institution-idea, concept and impact

Ansari ZartabJabeen

## Abstract

Families have long been endorsed as a basic building block of a strong and vital society. The importance of family will likely never change. The family of Today varies from house to house; it is very complicated to define a family of today. The role of family is important in every society because it is the main foundation and structure of society itself. With modernization the concept of family institution has undergone transformation and the impact is witnessed in many spheres. The present research aims to analyse the changing concept of family institution and its impact on society. The research focuses on understanding the importance of families its functions and types and impact of transformation of the concept in modern times. The research is explanatory in nature and non empirical method is adopted and data presented will be based on secondary sources such as: scholarly articles, blogs, news paper reports, books, magazines and websites.

*Key words:* **Family Types functions Contemporary issues**

“Family is a universal concept, the sexual urge of men and women, the desire of a woman to bear a child, of a man to perpetuate his line and of the both to look after their procreation, coupled with the desire of economic security for leisure and for pleasure on the basis of division of labour may have contributed to the origin of the family”.

**J.L. Rachroo**

## Introduction :

The word family is said to have been derived from the Roman word ‘famulus’ meaning servant and from the Latin word ‘familia’ meaning household<sup>1</sup>. The modern era has witnessed numerous transformations of prevailing concepts of family in Western society. Family systems theory is one that suggests that individuals are best understood in relation to their family system, that families are systems of interdependent people, none of whom can be fully understood in isolation from the system or from one another.<sup>2</sup> Family has been recognized as a basic unit of society and is a link between individual and community. A number of changes have been observed in the patterns of marriage such as age at marriage, inter-caste marriage, etc. A relative increase is noticed in divorce cases in urban areas. It was quite common in the past but at that time families were more stable and provided adequate security in terms of physical, social and emotional needs. Current trends indicate that there is a definite change in the basic system of family, especially the role of elders and disharmony in husband-wife relationship. Divorce rates are testimony to the increasing fragility of husband-wife relationship.<sup>3</sup>

## Definitions of family

MacIver defined family as “a group defined by sex relationship sufficiently precise, and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children.”<sup>4</sup>

Eliot says” Family is the biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children.”<sup>5</sup>

Nimkoff says “Family is a more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without child, or of a man or woman alone, with children.”<sup>6</sup>

According to the Bureau of Census (U.S.A.), "Family is a group of two or more persons related by blood, marriage or adoption and residing together".<sup>7</sup>

The Vanier Institute of the Family defines "family" as, "Any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for variant combinations"<sup>8</sup>

### **Functions of family**

MacIver has classified the functions of family into two types: (1) Essential or primary and (2) non-essential or secondary.<sup>9</sup>

The essential primary functions include:

- (1) Stable Satisfaction of Sex need<sup>10</sup>
- (2) Reproduction or procreation<sup>11</sup>
- (3) Protection and care of the young<sup>12</sup>
- (4) Socializing Functions<sup>13</sup>
- (5) Provision of a home<sup>14</sup>

### **The non-essential functions of family are:**

- (1) Economic function<sup>15</sup>
- (2) Educational function<sup>16</sup>
- (3) Religious function<sup>17</sup>
- (4) Recreational functions<sup>18</sup>
- (5) Protective function<sup>19</sup>

### **Types of Family in India**

#### **Traditional Indian Family**

The traditional pattern of the family in India is that of the joint family. The traditional Indian joint family consists of a number of married couples and their children who live together in the same household. All the men are related by blood—as a man and his sons and his grandsons, or a set of brothers and their sons and grandsons; the women of the household as their wives, unmarried daughters and perhaps the widow of a deceased kinsman<sup>20</sup>.

#### **Matriarchal Family**

The matriarchal family known as mother centered 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 matrilocal in residence. After the marriage the wife stays back in her mother's home. The husband pays occasional visits to the wife's home. Few families in Kerala are examples of this type of family<sup>21</sup>.

#### **Patriarchal Family**

The patriarchal family is also known as father (male) centered family. The father is the head of the family and exercises authority. 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. Majority of families in India are patriarchal in nature

#### **Nuclear Family**

Modernization has given rise to nuclear families in India which 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 comprises a cohabiting man and woman who maintain a socially approved sexual relationship and have at

least one child. A major factor in maintaining the nuclear family is economic cooperation based upon the division of labor between the sexes. The structure of the nuclear family is not same everywhere.

### **Contemporary issues and impact on family institution**

Modernization has given rise to nuclear families and in India too is witnessing these types of families. Modern families varies from house to house, it is very complicated to define a family of today, it has different biological parents due to remarriages after divorce or death of first spouse, due to system of adoption children and sometimes both parents don't have any biological connections with the children but still are live as family. Inter-caste and inter religious marriages are posing challenges to personal laws as there are different family laws based on religious rights guaranteed as per constitution of India; which covers matters of personal relations and family practices such as marriage and divorce, adoption, maintenance, guardianship and custody of children, and inheritance and succession. As these laws draw from the respective religious norms, they often perpetuate traditional patriarchal norms, and slow down the process of reforms<sup>22</sup>.

Changing needs of contemporary Indian Families has affected change in family structures<sup>23</sup>. Family institutions are important for overall well being of members of family as they provide economic as well as emotional support. Families in India are undergoing vast transformation like increasing number of divorce and separation rates, domestic violence, inter-generational conflicts, social problems of drug abuse, juvenile delinquency etc. These changes indicate that modern families are incapable to deal with with the stress of the modern life.<sup>24</sup>

Children's upbringing depends upon the moral values of the family. The changing patterns of families in India are adversely affecting the family bonds. Children and adolescents are not getting adequate moral and emotional support leading them to depression and other social evils<sup>25</sup>. Children's mental health is getting affected<sup>26</sup>. Number of elderly people is getting neglected and their numbers are increasing in old age homes, they are vulnerable to economic crimes due to increasing number of nuclear families<sup>27</sup>. The 2011 census also revealed that 15 million elderly people live alone and three-fourths of them are women<sup>28</sup>. The NCRB report demonstrated that crimes against senior citizens rose by 10 percent in 2015 as compared to the previous year. A total of 20,532 cases of crimes committed against senior citizens were reported in 2015 as compared to 18,714 in 2014<sup>29</sup>.

### **Conclusions and suggestions**

Family is a universal institution, though its structure or form varies from one society to another. The traditional concept of "family" in India has transformed to a considerable extent. Families have long been considered as a basic edifice for healthy society. When the family foundation is strong the impact is positive and members are more likely to become mentally strong. Sharing of responsibilities in family inculcate values. No matter which type of family institution individual is living in what is important is emotional bonding and support. The contemporary issues discussed above reflect that the more we are getting modernized more we are degrading in morals. Hence in order to overcome the adverse affects of transformation of family institution we must not give up our values and not break the bond of kinship.

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## **Ansari Zartab Jabeen**

Faculty Maulana Azad College of Arts, Science and Commerce, Dr. Rafiq Zakaria campus-I