

Changing Family Structure in India

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Abstract

The traditional family structure of Indian society was undergoing a rapid transformation. The older structure of the joint family is being replaced by simpler nuclear structures. From the cultural point of view, the area which comprises South Asia reflects much diversity. There are Kinship system which bind people together and finds Patrilineal and Matrilineal modes of descent in some areas. But in a country like India, the family as a unit cannot be studied in isolation from other social Institutions and its relation with wider kinship network which further related to other important units like property and Inheritance. India exhibits a strong family bound sharing close ties to the wider network of kinship and affinity but with the changing scenario, this strong bound weakened and take shape in the form of nuclear family than to a single parent or childless families are visible. In the past few years, the effect of globalization has further intensified the change in social and family structures in the world and India is also one of them. And there are many factors for the disintegration of the joint family like economic, educational, legal, urbanization which contributes in separating the children from the elders. From this background, the present study highlights the various factors which contribute to the disintegration of Indian family structure.

Keywords: Family Structure, Nuclear Family, Joint Family, Globalization and Urbanization.

INTRODUCTION

I.P. Desai, in his famous work, *Some Aspects of Family in Mahuva* (1964), He defines the structure of a family in terms of one's orientation to action. When the action is oriented towards the husband, wife, and children, the family can be categorized as a nuclear unit; and when the action is oriented towards a wider group, it is defined as a joint family.

The family is the basic and important unit of society because of the role it plays in a generation of human capital resources and the power that is vested in it to influence individual, household, and community behavior. It is, therefore, a basic unit of study in most social sciences disciplines. The increasing commercialization of the economy and the development of the infrastructure of the modern state have introduced a significant change in the family structure in India. Especially, the last few decades have witnessed important alterations in family life. This paper critically examines the impact of various contributing factors on Indian family structure. We must cherish the role played by our joint family system for nurturing and preserving our cultural and social values.

SOCIAL PROCESSES AFFECTING FAMILY STRUCTURE

A number of inter-related factors, viz., economic, educational, legal and demographic like population growth, migration, and urbanization, etc., have been affecting the structure of the family in India. But here the present study discusses the broad processes of industrialization, and modernization as factors affecting the family structure.

The main factors responsible for the change in the joint family system are industrialization, and modernization, which is inter-linked. With industrialization, there is a growth of urban centers and consequent movement of people from villages to cities. This process brings in a new pattern of urban-living characterized by dense population, diversification, and specialization of

occupation, a division of labor, anonymous and isolated surroundings. It also increases competition for resources and struggles for a better living. Educational opportunities also give people chance and choices to move from agriculture-based occupations to non-agricultural, industrial or service-based occupations. Besides, the growth of individualism and breakdown of traditional value systems are also important factors leading to nuclear families. In fact, the process of change in family organization started with the advent the British who brought in the ideas of liberalism and individualism.

MODERNISATION

Both industrialization and urbanization are considered as the major contributing factors toward modernization. With the passage of time, through exposures to the forces of modernization, family structure underwent multiple changes almost leading to an endless variety. There are instances too, where family structure has become simpler due to its impact. There are also contrary instances indicating consequent complexity in family structure.

IMPACT OF THE BREAKDOWN OF THE JOINT FAMILY

A change in the rural family structure has impacted on the status and role of the family members. The patriarch is losing ground with the changing scenario in the joint family. Traditionally the authority vested in the male elders of the family. Once the family divides into smaller units, new authority centers emerge there, with the respective eldest male member as the head of each nuclear unit. Patriarch authority is also challenged by the educated and the individualistic young generations. Young men exposed to modern ideas of freedom and individualism show resentment to the traditional authority.

After the split in a joint family, many young women also challenge the dominating attitudes of the mothers-in-law. Similarly, many of the traditional mothers-in-law also face an uneasy situation due to growing disproportionate individualism among the daughters-in-law. With the breakdown of the joint family system, the aged, widow, widower and other dependents in the family face severe problems. Many widows, widowers, children, and the even old couple become beggars. Many leave for old people centers around pilgrim centers as the last resort of their social security and mental peace.

ADVANTAGES OF JOINT FAMILY

The joint family system creates a strong bond among the siblings and other members of the family and provided with a sense of security to the children. An old saying, that children who grow up in an extended family with grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins showing the qualities of sharing, caring, empathy and understanding. Care and giving respect to the elders are central principles in the Indian family system. It is saddening to know that the trend of the elderly being admitted into old age homes is increasing. There could be many reasons, including lack of adequate residential space in nuclear families, or in a globalized world, the overseas location of children, for such a situation.

Families play an important role in preserving and promoting the cultural and social values in a society, the UN General Assembly resolution of 1993, has decided that May 15 of every year should be considered as 'The International Day of Families'. This day, according to the UN, provides an opportunity to promote awareness of issues relating to families and to increase the knowledge of the social, economic and demographic processes affecting families.

Adopting our age-old philosophy of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which embodies the spirit of humanism, compassion, magnanimity and tolerance, family, becomes the basic building block of a harmonious, inclusive society. Family can shape the worldview, foster and reinforce the value system of the individuals and therefore, consequently, be the warp and weft of a sustainable, peaceful, inclusive, prosperous world.

CONCLUSION

A family is one of the most important social institutions and where members have reciprocal rights and duties towards each other and we can say a family is the agent of Socialization. All these aspects make this institution different from the other units of social structure. The family, in Indian society, is an institution by itself and a typical symbol of the collectivist culture of India right from the ancient times. With the continuous impact of urbanization and westernization, the traditional joint household has undergone several changes. With the emergence of nuclear families, a lot of things changed in the way these families operated. Now, an individual has to fight for himself and secure the future of the nuclear family. The family members are reduced to three or four persons. Although, a sudden increase of nuclear families is resulting in more and more number of individuals becoming owners of huge assets. Such families started facing different types of risks. Planning for family security, providing education and shelter for kids, old age and retirement plans and medical emergencies became a priority and are some of the key reasons why nuclear families should plan their estate. Sudden deaths, separations or legal issues cannot be foreseen. Estate planning for nuclear families will not only bring the impetus of having a planned succession but also lays focus on engaging the right kind of expertise for the desired succession. Therefore it becomes crucial for the government and policy-makers to pay attention to the impact of this societal change in family structures and its possible consequences.

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