

A Sociological Study of Changes in Joint Family

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ABSTRACT

The joint family system was best suited to an agrarian society where mobility was limited; specialization was simple and custom immutable. But following a process of change due to modernisation the traditional joint family in India has shown remarkable changes in its structure and functions. Whether jointness is considered in terms of residence, mutual obligations and property; whether joint family system is being replaced by nuclear family system; whether joint family as an institution is dying put is a matter of dispute and the future of Indian family system has been debated.

Various empirical studies point to the new trends of the Indian family system. It is a fact that the joint family system is disintegrating. This disintegration is more evident in cities and industrial centers than in rural areas.

KEYWORDS: joint family, nuclear, changes, structure, dispute, property, system, individuals

INTRODUCTION

Changes in structural and functional aspects of joint family are discussed below.

1. Small Family Size:

The size of the traditional family has become smaller. Socio- Economic changes have stimulated individualism and brought about changes in the attitude of individuals towards joint family.

Urbanisation has emphasised individuality and privacy which gives another incentive for being independent of large family group. Hence, joint families are breaking up and in their place small families are coming to existence.[1,2]

2. Neo-Local Residence:

As a result of industrialization and urbanisation more and more young married couples set up their residence in the place of their work. Neo- local residence is therefore, coming to existence more and more.

3. Functional Jointness:

The married sons who have set independent household continue to maintain their connection with their joint families in their native places. Some of

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them continue to fulfill their obligations to their parents and siblings. But the ties between the neo-local residence and distant kin are very weak.

4. Equality of Individual:

It is generally recognized that families has been the dominant mode of value orientation in traditional societies and individualism had no place in it. Individual aspirations are secondary to family goals. Now the members of joint family are more conscious of individuality and freedom.

The patriarchs or parents in the family no longer try to impose their authority on the children but give them more freedom to determine their goals and the means to achieve them. The individual's status is evaluated not by his age or relationship but by his own accomplishments.

5. Equal Status for Women:

In the developed patriarchal system of the past, the patriarch had unlimited and undisputed authority over his wife, sons and daughters. Women were allotted subordinate position to men. In traditional Indian home, the woman knows that she cannot have a say in family matters.

However, it should be noted that in joint family system, there is gradual change in the status and role of women. The relationship between husband and wife has undergone major changes.

Women are not willing to accept the older concept of their subordinate position. A woman now plays the role of a consultant in the family. She shares the responsibility of making the major family decisions with her husband or father. Now authority is vested not only in eldest males but also in females.[3,4]

The traditional attitude of both males and females towards the status of women is tending to change. In such families where women have taken up jobs, men have come to treat them in terms of equality.

6. Freedom in Mate Selection:

In the traditional joint family parents were morally obliged to find mates for their children and the children were expected to accept their choice. The boys or the girls had neither any say in the decision about their marriage, nor did they have the liberty to meet each other before marriage. But Indian family system is experiencing changes slowly, yielding its rigidity to flexibility.

It is exhibiting a loss of grip over the traditional patterns of mate selection and demonstrating the adaptive strategy of allowing freedom to the young to certain extent. Now modifications in arranged marriages are observed in urban areas and to some extent in rural areas. The boys and girls are given opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of mate selection. Further, love marriage has been the basis of free choice of mates.

7. Growth of Individualism:

On the basis of research literature it can be mentioned that women have developed a negative attitude towards joint family living in joint family is harder for them than men. They are more conscious of individuality and freedom rather than other difficulties they apprehend. There is a growing tendency among women either to live far away from their families or to set up separate households for themselves after marriage.

In a traditional Indian home and more so if it is a joint family, the woman knows that she cannot have a say in family matters. But it should be noted that even in a joint family system there is gradual change in the relations of power between the husband and the wife.

On the whole the traditional outlook towards the pattern of roles is tending to change. There is no doubt that the power structure of the joint family is changing.[5,6]

Discussion

In the past, the insistence of religious institutes on the family discipline, its conception of nature and purpose of marriage, the doctrine of subordination of women, all worked to make the patriarchal family a close knit corporate body. But new cultural conditions that have arisen on the wake of individualism have led to the decline of these authoritarian modes of the feudal patriarchal family. The father is no longer considered to be the patriarch, the father or husband is becoming more and more constitutional monarch, not an absolute one in the family situation.

A D Ross has mentioned that her study did not show that grandparents were as influential in the life of the joint family as expected. Margaret Cormack also found in her study that children enjoy more freedom.

She maintains that children today not only discuss their problems with their parents but they even oppose them when their wishes and ideologies clash with the formalized restraint of their parents.

Today the relations between husband and wife have definitely undergone changes. Under modern conditions, the roles of men and women, particularly in urban areas have changed so much that husbands and wives are potential equals. We also find some degree of companionship in urban educated families.

As regards power allocation, there is a shift from one-sided male authority to the sharing of power by husband and wife.

The change in the relations between husband and wife is also evident. In the traditional family, husband and wife never used to go together for walks or social visits. But now they are found together particularly in urban areas. Previously both husbands and wives never ate together. Today women are seen taking food with their husbands.

The traditional relations between daughter-in-law and parents-in-law have undergone change. Traditionally mother-in-law's power over the bride was nearly absolute. But now-a-days the brides, particularly educated brides reject the dominance of mother-in-laws. In order to avoid tension mother-in-laws try to make adjustments and compromise.[7,8]

It may be concluded that the structure of relationships in Indian family is undergoing change.

It is a fact that instances of old members of three or more generations residing under one roof and sharing food cooked at the same hearth are rare. But these two criteria have been repudiated by some sociologists. For example, I.P. Desai and K.M. Kapadia point out that jointness should be looked in functional terms.

Desai has laid emphasis on social relationship and construed joint family as a functioning unit.

It is important to mention that familism has been the dominant mode of value orientation in traditional societies and individualism, the opposite of familism, is the basic value system' in modern urban and industrial societies.

No doubt the joint family that functions today in urban settings is different in many ways from the joint family of pre-independent India. For instance, many of the co-residential, commercial joint families in urban areas remain joint because it is the norm or due to some compulsions like the shortage of accommodation. Yet there may be considerable separation in the management of household expenses on entertainment, education of children etc.

The family in India has shown remarkable changes in its structure and functions. Changes have also been observed in the internal structure of families in India which Ross describes as the sub-structures of rights and duties, of power and authority and, of sentiment and work. In fine, the traditional joint family in India has undergone both structural and functional changes.

Today there are varied patterns of family living in India. In urban areas both male and female members of the family may go for gainful employment outside the home. In some families the parents of the husband may live with his wife and children. While in some others, members of the wife's family may be living with the couple and their children.[9,10]

In case of gainful employment of both husband and wife and in absence of limited availability of child care facilities, kin members look after the home and children for smooth functioning of the household.

Those working couples who prefer to live in nuclear families and who fear or resist interference from kin members, try to organise their household with professional help from outside the family like cooks, maid servants, creches etc.

Aged parents, who formerly used to look towards their eldest son or other son for support in old age, are now adjusting themselves to the new demands of the family life by making financial provisions for their old age.

Even within the same city parents and married sons may reside separately. Another trend in family life in India is that girls are prepared to support their parent or parents in old age. It is not impossible to find a widow mother or parents staying with a married daughter. Bilateral kinship relations are more and more recognized and accepted today in many nuclear households in the cities and large towns.

Results

Families have both structure and function. Like the skeleton and muscles in a body, the structure is what gives a family its size and shape. Also, like organs within the body that perform necessary functions to keep the body working, there are certain necessary functions that keep families healthy. It sees society as a complex system whose parts work together to promote solidarity and stability. It asserts that our lives are guided by social structures, which are relatively stable patterns of social behaviour. Social structures give shape to our lives – for example, in families, the community, and through religious organizations and certain rituals, or complex religious ceremonies, give structure to our everyday lives. Each social structure has social functions or consequences for the operation of society as a whole.

Social structures consist of social relationships, as well as any social institutions within a society. One example of a social structure is a social class (upper-class, middle-class, and poor). Another example of a social structure is the different levels of government. Family, religion, law, economy, and class are all social structures.

India and its family structure

India has a rich family structure with a patrilineal background, which help the family members to sustain a life with kinship groupings. Earlier, mostly joint families were found where family members live together under one roof. They all mutually work, eat, worship and co-operate each other in one or the other way. This also helps the family to get strong mentally, physically and economically, the children also get to know about the values and traditions of the society from their grandparents and elders. The family system has given a lot of importance in India and has worked more often to make the bonding among families stronger. The family system has given a lot of importance in India and has worked more often to make the bonding among families stronger. Meanwhile, urbanization and westernization had its influence on the basic structure of the Indian family structure. The division of the joint family into smaller units is not the symbol of people rejecting this traditional structure. The circumstances and conditions also made the need for people to split the family.[11,12]

The family as a social institution has been undergoing change. Both in its structure and functions changes have taken place. In India, as in many traditional societies, the family has been not only the centre of social and economic life but also the primary source of support for the family members. 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 in the 20th century. Especially, the last few decades have witnessed important alterations in family life.

India's fertility rate has fallen, and couples have begun to bear children at a later age. At the same time, life expectancy has increased, resulting in more elderly people who need care. All of these changes are taking place in the context of increased urbanization, which is separating children from elders and contributing disintegration of family-based support systems.

Factors affecting family structures

Change in Fertility: An inevitable outcome of declining fertility rates and increasing age at first birth in most of the countries in the world, including India, is a reduction in family size. Fertility declined due to the combined effect of substantial socio-economic development achieved during the last two decades and the effective implementation of family planning programmes.

Hence, it has become irrational for many people to have large families as the cost of children is increasing. In traditional societies, where human labour was a source of strength to the family, more children were preferred to fewer. But as the economic contribution from the children in a family decreased, because of a move away from agriculture, the need for large numbers of children decreased. Improvements in health care and child survival also contributed. The emphasis was on the quality of life rather than the number of children, a new concept added to the family.

Change in Age of marriage: In many countries in the world where significant declines in fertility are being experienced, reductions in the proportion of people never married have often coincided with or preceded declines in marital fertility. A substantial increase in the proportions never married, among both males and females, at young ages, has been noted in many countries. A consequence of the increase in the proportion of never-married young adults is the gradual upward trend of the average age at marriage. Postponement of marriage among females resulted in the postponement of childbearing with a reduction in family size.

Change in Mortality: Mortality declines, particularly infant mortality, everywhere preceded the decline of fertility. Improved survival rates of children mean that when women reached the age of 30 they increasingly had achieved the completed family size they desired. Earlier, much larger numbers of births

were required to achieve the desired completed family size. In the last three decades, infant mortality has declined significantly in every country and this trend undoubtedly influenced the fertility decline. Mortality decline, followed by fertility decline, altered the age structure of the population and also the structure within individual families.

Marriage Dissolution: It is no longer the case that all marital unions, whether formal or informal reach final dissolution through death. A considerable proportion of unions are disrupted suddenly for reasons such as desertion, separation or divorce. An obvious failure in a family relationship is where husband and wife cease to live together. Those women who are divorced at latter ages mostly remain single for the rest of their lives and live with their dependents. The idea that when a couple has children it will be less likely to divorce is widely accepted in most societies. However, it is believed that in the last couple of years even in most of the Asian cultures, including India, a growing proportion of divorces involve couples with young children (Goode 1993).[13,14]

Participation of Women in Economic development: The commercialization process which opened markets in many developing countries has succeeded in replacing the traditional co-operation in the economic relationship, with that of competition. In this process, the social institutions in these countries found themselves in conflict with the key aspects of the new economic systems. The economics of the family and the sexual division of labour within the family is very much determined by opportunities in the labour market. The developing economies of system India have facilitated the freeing of women from household chores and their entrance to the labour market. The declining ability of men to earn a 'family wage' along with the growing need for cash for family maintenance has resulted in an increasing number of female members (particularly the wife) in the family engaging in economic activities (Lloyd and Duffy 1995).

Conclusions

Talcott Parsons, theoretical insights on the family have attracted widest attention and deliberation. Parsons (1954, 1956) argues that modern industrial society has led to the growth of what he calls "isolated nuclear family". This family is structurally isolated as it does not form an integral part of the wider kinship group.[15,16]

Family is a very fluid social institution and in the process of constant change. The modern family or, rather the post-modern family is also witnessing several new forms of it cropping up. Modernity is witnessing the emergence of same-sex couples

(LGBT relationship), cohabitation or live-in relations, single-parent households, a large chunk of divorced living alone or with their children.[17,18]

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