

Family and kinship in india

Family



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India offers astounding variety in virtually every aspect of social life. Diversities of ethnic, linguistic, regional, economic, religious, class, and caste groups crosscut Indian society, which is also permeated with immense urban-rural differences and gender distinctions. Differences between north India and south India are particularly significant, especially in systems of kinship and marriage. Indian society is multifaceted to an extent perhaps unknown in any other of the world's great civilizations—it is more like an area as varied as Europe than any other single nation-state.

Adding further variety to contemporary Indian culture are rapidly occurring changes affecting various regions and socioeconomic groups in disparate ways. Yet, amid the complexities of Indian life, widely accepted cultural themes enhance social harmony and order. Many Indian societies were organized around principles of kinship. Kinship ties based on bloodlines or marriage formed the basis of the political, economic, and religious system. Succession to political office and religious positions, ownership and inheritance of property, and even whom one could or could not marry were determined on the basis of membership in a kin group.

Social bonds with relatives must be reinforced at family events or at rites crucial to the religious community. Indian Society Hierarchy India is a hierarchical society. Whether in north India or south India, Hindu or Muslim, urban or village, virtually all things, people, and social groups are ranked according to various essential qualities. Although India is a political democracy, notions of complete equality are seldom evident in daily life. Societal hierarchy is evident in caste groups, amongst individuals, and in family and kinship groups.

Castes are primarily associated with Hinduism, but caste-like groups also exist among Muslims, Indian, Christians, and other religious communities. Within most villages or towns, everyone knows the relative rankings of each locally represented caste, and behavior is constantly shaped by this knowledge. Individuals are also ranked according to their wealth and power. For example, some powerful people, or “big men,” sit confidently on chairs, while “little men” come before them to make requests, either standing or squatting not presuming to sit beside a man of high status as an equal.

Hierarchy plays an important role within families and kinship groupings also, where men outrank women of similar age, and senior relatives outrank junior relatives. Formal respect is accorded family members—for example, in northern India, a daughter-in-law shows deference to her husband, to all senior in-laws, and to all daughters of the household. Siblings, too, recognize age differences, with younger siblings addressing older siblings by respectful terms rather than by name. Social Interdependence One of the great themes pervading Indian life is social interdependence.

People are born into groups--families, clans, sub castes, castes, and religious communities--and live with a constant sense of being part of and inseparable from these groups. A corollary is the notion that everything a person does properly involves interaction with other people. A person's greatest dread, perhaps, is the possibility of being left alone, without social support, to face the necessary challenges of life. This sense of interdependence is extended into the theological realm: the very shape of a person's life is seen as being greatly influenced by divine beings with whom an ongoing relationship must be maintained.

Psychologically, family members typically experience intense emotional interdependence. Economic activities, too, are deeply imbedded in a social nexus. Through a multitude of kinship ties, each person is linked with kin in villages and towns near and far. Almost everywhere a person goes; he can find a relative from whom he can expect moral and practical support. In every activity, social ties can help a person and the absence of them can bring failure. Seldom do people carry out even the simplest tasks on their own. When a small child eats, his mother puts the food into his mouth with her own hand.

When a girl brings water home from the well in pots on her head, someone helps her unload the pots. A student hopes that an influential relative or friend can facilitate his college admission. A young person anticipates that parents will arrange his or her marriage. Finally, a person facing death expects that relatives will conduct the proper funeral rites ensuring his own smooth passage to the next stage of existence and reaffirming social ties among mourners. This sense of interdependence extends into the theological realm.

From birth onward, a child learns that his “ fate” has been “ written” by divine forces and that his life is shaped by powerful deities with whom an ongoing relationship must be maintained. Social interaction is regarded as being of the highest priority, and social bonds are expected to be long lasting. Even economic activities that might in Western culture involve impersonal interactions are in India deeply imbedded in a social nexus. All social interaction involves constant attention to hierarchy, respect, honor,

the feelings of others, rights and obligations, hospitality, and gifts of food, clothing, and other desirable items.

Finely tuned rules of etiquette help facilitate each individual's many social relationships. . Indian Family structure . Indian family structure is believed to be the unit that teaches the values and worth of an honest living that have been carried down across generations. Since the puranic ages, Indian family structure was that of a joint family indicating every person of the same clan living together. However, this idea of elaborate living had been disintegrated in smaller family units. The essential themes of Indian cultural life are learned within the bosom of a family.

The joint family is highly valued, ideally consisting of several generations residing, working, eating, and worshiping together. Such families include men related through the male line, along with their wives, children, and unmarried daughters. A wife usually lives with her husband's relatives, although she retains important bonds with her natal family. Even in rapidly modernizing India, the traditional joint household remains for most Indians the primary social force, in both ideal and practice. Large families tend to be flexible and well suited to modern Indian life, especially for the more than two-thirds of Indians who are involved in agriculture.

As in most primarily agricultural societies, cooperating kin help provide mutual economic security. The joint family is also common in cities, where kinship ties are often crucial to obtaining employment or financial assistance. Many prominent families, such as the Tatas, Birlas, and Sarabhais, retain joint family arrangements as they cooperate in controlling major financial empires The ancient ideal of the joint family retains its power, but today

actual living arrangements vary widely. Many Indians live in nuclear families—a couple with their unmarried children—but belong to strong networks of beneficial kinship ties.

Often, clusters of relatives live as neighbors, responding readily to their kinship obligations. As they expand, joint families typically divide into smaller units, which gradually grow into new joint families, continuing a perpetual cycle. Today, some family members may move about to take advantage of job opportunities, typically sending money home to the larger family.

FAMILY TRANSFORMATION An Analytical look on various studies: by different sociologist point of views

The Study of family in India centers on the debate of joint family versus nuclear family.

The first authentic study on family comes from the writings of Sir Henry Maine, who was law adviser to the colonial government of India. He developed intellectual interest in family studies. He indicated that joint family is characterized by:

- Common property holding.
- Absolute authority of 'Karta'.

He considered that joint family is corporate unit where people make contribution differently but share rewards on the basis of their needs. He said that joint family sustains in India because it is considered as moral institution with the members are obliged to perform rituals for common dead ancestors

GS Ghurye considered that 'joint family is a product of Indian culture that glorified classical values. There is universal presence of joint family cutting across caste, religion which promoted unity among people in Indian society.

PN Prabhu in his analysis of family and kinship in India considers that individual association with joint family is driven by moralist, therefore when

morals is replaced by individualism (when tradition is replaced by modernity) then joint family is transformed into nuclear family.

Irawati Karve offered an exhaustive definition of joint family. She writes that joint family refers to a social group where people belonging to 3 - 4 generations organically related to each other, hold property in common, share common residence, eat food prepared in common kitchen, participate in common rituals and ceremonies and they have, obligations towards the head of the family known as 'Karta'. She considers that joint family is a product of culture and therefore despite economic transformation joint family system persists in India.

It sustains itself as it is driven by cultural ideology rather than driven by economic interest. During 1960s two group of sociologist took considerable interest in the field of family study. One group conforming to modern theory looked into complete integration of joint family system whereas the other group went for empirical studies to examine regional variations in family transformation under the various process of modernity. These two theories cannot be considered as qualitatively different because their position stand vary only on the question of the degree of changes in family.

MN Srinivas, SC Dubay find out that there is a strong linkage between caste and joint family. Empirical study indicates that higher castes go for joint family system and lower castes go for nuclear family. Therefore joint family is driven by economic logic rather than cultural moralist. It is also noticed that joint family is not breaking down completely under the influence of urban living. Alan Rose in a study of Bangalore finds out that around 70% of

families manifest either structural joint ness or functional joint ness or a mixture of both.

MS Gore in his study of Agarwals of Delhi finds out that how mother – son relationship precedes over husband – wife relationship and family operates as a strong support base to its members in matters related to selection of occupation, financial assistance and selection of mates. TN Madan indicates how residential separation has not given way to break down of joint family. In his theory of “ money order economy” he indicates that family joint ness has always been enduring in case of India. Thus these scholars concluded by saying that family transformation in India is not a replica of family transformation in the West.

Therefore social change in India is Indian in character and so Western theories and models cannot explain family transformation in Indian society Household dimensions of the Family Family transformation in India has puts a fundamental question that, whether in India joint household is disintegrating or joint family is disintegrating. He finds out that proportion of joint household is more today in comparison to past. He points out the reasons for the same i. e. due to rising population; construction of house has become costly, migration in search of employment etc. Bigger joint households are now splitting into smaller households.

People living in different households have strong emotional ties therefore joint household is disintegrating but not joint family and so family should be studied from household perspective and changes in household and family patterns must be investigated to examine actual nature of family transformation in India. Classical sociologists were greatly committed to

family study either by considering family as cornerstone of human society or by looking into changing nature of society. With the advent of modernity it was perceived that household is a residential space but family is a social institution.

However, with the rise of feminism both as an ideology and as social movement, women's approach towards marriage has gone through a series of transformation. AM Shah in his book "household dimension of the family in India" indicate that even in traditional context, household and family do not mean similar things. Citing the case of India he considers that family and household were absolutely different but family studies in India immensely focused attention on the transformation of joint family into nuclear family. Household refers to residential space where people living together may or may not constitute family.

Looking at household pattern one could effectively study nature and form of transformation taking place in Indian society. In recent analysis of global migration and family pattern, it has been found out that in countries like Philippines and India a large chunk of women in search of employment go out to advanced countries of the world. Though most of them are married they don't stay with their family. As a result they constitute independent household. These households may constitute many friends living together or a person living with working partner to whom he/she is not married or a person living all alone.

It is generally perceived in case of India that household is less durable an alternative to family system, which gives more importance to friendship than kinship. Household offer immense individual liberty, sexual freedom, limited

or no liability towards the other members of the household. Thus it can be concluded that household is evolving into a replacement for family in many developing countries including India. Therefore sociology of kinship is shifting its focus from the study of marriage and family to the study of friendship and household.

Sexual Division of Labour Feminist sociologists are of the opinion that whether it's joint family or nuclear family, in no way family transformation is affecting to the status of women in India. Therefore reproduction, sexuality, division of labour are all determined by the values of patriarchy than by principles of equality. Talcott Parson indicates that industrialisation, urbanization, migration have contributed for occupational mobility, empowerment of women and gender gap within and outside family has sufficiently been reduced.

The modernist theory also indicates that in case of India relationship between husband and wife is now proceeding over parent-child relationship. Conjugal relationship is considered as more important than obligation towards kinship. Irrespective of gender every child inherits the property from parents, selection of mates is no longer family's responsibility and childbirth is greatly a matter of economics and mutual agreement between spouse. Therefore modernity has broken down traditional form of marriage, hierarchical form of relationship.

Traditionally, males have controlled key family resources, such as land or businesses, especially in high-status groups. Following traditional Hindu law, women did not inherit real estate and were thus beholden to their male kin who controlled land and buildings. Under Muslim customary law, women can

—and do—inherit real estate, but their shares have typically been smaller than those of males. Modern legislation allows all Indian women to inherit real estate. Traditionally, for those families who could afford it, women have controlled some wealth in the form of precious jewelry.

In the Indian household, lines of hierarchy and authority are clearly drawn, and ideals of conduct help maintain family harmony. [i] All family members are socialized to accept the authority of those above them in the hierarchy. The eldest male acts as family head, and his wife supervises her daughters-in-law, among whom the youngest has the least authority. Reciprocally, those in authority accept responsibility for meeting the needs of other family members. Systems of Kinship in India Kinship is considered as the heart and soul of Indian social life. Despite

India's exposure to technological and industrial modernity, descent plays a significant role in the life of people. GS Ghurye writes in detail about various descent groups living together in different regions of the country carrying different names and identities. These different lineage groups bringing together a multi-civilization thereby making India a land of pluralism. However, all these descent groups imbibe common rules of marriage, common food behavior, common cultural, religious ideology radiating from Hinduism and that made Indian society a land of diversity.

Indologists look into the role of descent in defining marriage, family and kinship in India. The people belonging to similar descent group are located in a given region where they worship to their common ancestors, follow common way of life and when the size of descent group expands, they migrate to different areas but still carry their identity. Therefore caste is

nothing but an expanded descent system that maintains its boundary, distinguishing itself from the other caste.

Andre Beteille indicates association of man and kinship is so strong in India that voting behavior is driven by kinship rather than on the basis of merit. In all the political parties of India kinship is the primary source of political recruitment. Thus democratic polity in India is engaged in social and cultural reproduction. In case of India family/kinship offers ideological, economic, infrastructural support to individual to determine the nature of occupation.

In conclusion it can be said that the role of descent and kinship not only determines the private sphere of an individual's life like marriage, family, household, gender role, rituals but also has great influence over his public life like occupational selection, political participation and identity formation. Therefore the role of descent and kinship has changed very little under the influence of modernity in India and so while studying social transformation one cannot afford to ignore the same.

Lineage system can be divided into two parts in India i. e. • Unilineal systems: a system of determining descent groups in which one belongs to one's father's or mother's lineage. Both patrilineality and matrilineality are types of unilineal descent. • Non-Unilineal systems: a system where there exists multiple forms of relationship. Classical anthropologists divide descent groups into two fundamental types such as: • Patrilineal : inheriting or determining descent through the male line. • Matrilineal : inheriting or determining descent through the female line. Types of kinship systems

Kinship is a relationship between any entity that share a genealogical origin (related to family, lineage, history), through either biological, cultural, or historical descent. The first sociologist to study kinship systems in India is Irawati Karve, she divided India into four different kinship zones such as:

- North Indian kinship systems.
- South Indian kinship systems.
- Central Indian kinship systems.
- Eastern Indian kinship systems.

North Indian kinship systems This kinship system is present in Hindi speaking belt and also in areas where Aryan culture influence is substantive.

It includes West Bengal, Orissa and Bihar. In North India kinship systems, the rules of marriage is highly exhaustive because a large body of people are excluded from alliance relationship. One cannot receive women from his mother's group or mother's mother group, father's mother group and from within his own village. Hence exogamy is quite exhaustive and marriage involves not intra-family ties but inter-village ties. Residential system is very Virilocal (bride lives with husband's father's group) type . In North Indian kinship father – son relationship precedes over husband – wife relationship.

South Indian kinship systems This type of relationship system is largely present in all southern states and some of its influence is also largely noticed in pockets of Maharashtra and Orissa. In southern India kinship systems, no distinction is made between patrilineal or matrilineal. In case of South India cross cousins marriage take place and so exogamy is not exhaustive like in North India. The relationship between husband and wife is not subdued to father – son relationship as in case of North India. Hostility of relationship between the in laws driven by suspicion is also weak in South India.

Central Indian kinship systems This system is practised in case of Gujarat, Maharashtra, MP which is a mixture of elements of North and South India. In case of Rajputs marriage is greatly determined on the basis of family status of girl. Rajputs are permitted to marry any girl on the basis of their choice rather than simply follow the rules of caste. Marathas are divided into 32 clans which are put into primary, secondary and tertiary divisions and so the rules of marriage are determined accordingly between various divisions.

In case of “ Kumbi” of Gujarat one is not supposed to marry women belonging to first-generation from father's side and three generations from mother's side. In case of Rajasthan on the auspicious day of Akshaya Tritiyamassive marriages take place involving people belonging to different age groups and their rules of marriage is sufficiently relaxed. Eastern India kinship systems It largely includes kinship patterns followed by different tribal groups like Munda of Orissa, Manipuri of Manipur, Nagas, Kukis and Khasi. These kinship systems don't follow specific patterns .

A daughter carries the name of patrilineal grandmother and son carries the name of patrilineal grandfather, divorce is common among them In conclusion these regional variations in kinship largely speaks about differential residential patterns, entitlement on the basis of gender, social status of men, women and children bringing the point back home that Indian culture is largely pluralistic in character. Therefore unity in India should not be seen as destruction of the process of diversity but rather it should respect the process of diversity.

CONCLUSION

Gradual changes have been ushered in by religious, social, and cultural reforms. Industrialization, urbanization, and technological advances have been instrumental in changing family structures, values, and lifestyles. Ganeswar Misra (1995) emphasized that middle- and upper-class families in urban areas were undergoing a dramatic transformation because the younger generation is questioning power issues, traditional roles, hierarchical relationships, obligations, loyalty, and deference for kinsmen and elderly.

With changing times, Indian family structure, functions, traditional division of labor, and authority patterns have altered, favoring more egalitarian relations between the husband and the wife and also a move toward more shared decision-making patterns between parents and children. Despite these changes, the fact remains that most individuals continue to value and give top priority to the family, and families continue to maintain strong kinship bonds and ties.