

MEANING AND CHARACTERISTICS

The word 'Family' has been taken over from the Latin word 'Famulus' which means a servant. In Roman Law the word denoted a group of producers and slaves and other servants as well as members connected by common descent or marriage. Thus, originally, family consisted of a man and woman with a child or children and servants.

M.F. Nimkoff says that "Family is more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without child, or of a man or woman alone, with children."

Eliot and Merrill: Family is "The biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children".

Maclver: Family is "a group defined by sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children".

General characteristics of the Family

(i) **A Mating Relationship.**

A family comes into existence when a man and a woman establish mating relation between them.

(ii) **Selection of Mates.**

Wife or husband may be selected by parents or by elders, or the choice may be left to the wishes of the individuals concerned. Various rules govern this selection.

(iii) **A Form of Marriage.**

The mating relationship is established through the institution of marriage. Marriage is an institutional arrangement made by the society according to which the individuals establish marital relationships among themselves. Marriage may assume any one of the forms—monogamy, polygamy, polyandry or group marriage.

(iv) **A System of Nomenclature.**

Every family is known or recognized by a distinctive name.

(v) **A way of tracing the Descent**

Every family has its own mode of tracing the descent. Descent refers to the social recognition of biological relationship between individuals. Descent may be traced through the male line (Patrilineal Descent) or through the female line (Matrilineal Descent) or through both the lines (Bilateral Descent).

(vi) **A Common Residence.**

Family requires a home or a household to live in. After the marriage the wife may reside in husband's parental home (Patrilocal or Virilocal Residence) or she may stay in her parental home to which the husband pays occasional visits (Matrilocal or Uxorilocal Residence) or both of them may establish a separate home of their own (Neolocal Residence).

(vii) **An Economic Provision.**

Family provides for the satisfaction of the **economic needs** of its members.

THE JOINT FAMILY/TRADITIONAL FAMILY

The joint family is also known as '**undivided family**' and sometimes as '**extended family**'. It normally consists of members who at least belong to three generations: **husband and wife, the married and unmarried children; and their married as well as unmarried grandchildren**. The joint family system constituted the basic social institution in many traditional societies, particularly in the Eastern societies. **In India, this system prevailed among the Hindus as well as non-Hindus.**

Definition of Joint Family

(i) **The joint family** is a mode of combining **smaller families into larger family units** through the extension of three or more generations including at least grandparents, parents and children.

(ii) **The joint family** is one which consists of members related **through blood and spread over several generations living together under a common roof and work under a common head.**

(iii) **The definition given by Smt. Iravati Karve** seems to be more satisfactory. According to her, **the joint family may be defined as "a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common, and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred."**

Types of Joint Family

The joint family may assume two forms:

(i) **Patriarchal joint family**, and (ii) **Matriarchal joint family**. Both the forms are found in India. The patriarchal joint family is **father-centred** and the matriarchal joint family is **mother-dominated**.

Examples: The patriarchal joint families are found among the *Nambudaris* of Malabar, the *Mundas* of Chhotanagar and the *Angami Nagas* of Assam. The Nambudari joint family is generally descry bed as "Illom". The matriarchal joint families are found among the *Nairs* of Malabar, the *Khasis* and *Garos* living on the Garo hills of Assam. The Nair joint family is popularly known as '*Tarawad*'.

Characteristics of the Joint Family/Features of Traditional Family

1. **Depth of Generations.**

The joint family consists of people of three or more generations including at least grandparents, parents and children. Sometimes, other kith and kin such as uncles, aunts, cousins and great grandsons also live in the joint family itself.

2. **Common Roof.**

Members of the joint family normally reside together under the same house-hold. Due to the scarcity of accommodation or due to educational and employment problems, members of the joint family may reside separately.

3. **Common Kitchen.**

Members eat the food prepared jointly at the common kitchen. Normally the eldest female member of the family supervises the work at the kitchen.

4. **Common Worship.**

The Hindu joint family derives its strength from religion. Hence, it is associated with various religious rituals and practices. Every family may have its own deity of '*Kula Devata*' and its own religious tradition.

5. **Common Property.**

The members hold a common property. **As Melley writes:** the joint family "is a co-operative institution similar to a joint stock company in which there is a joint property".

6. **Exercise of Authority.**

In the patriarchal joint family, usually the eldest male member exercises authority. The superordination of the eldest member and the subordination of all the other members to him is a keynote of the joint family.

7. **Arranged Marriages.**

In the joint family, the head considers it as his privilege to arrange the marriages of the members.

8. **Procreation.**

The size of the joint family is by nature bigger. It is found to be associated **with higher rate of production**. It is so because in the past procreation was regarded as a religious duty. Members rarely practiced birth control measures.

9. **Self-sufficiency.**

There was a time when the joint family was mostly self-sufficient. It used to meet the economic,, recreational, medical, educational and other needs of the members. The rural agricultural joint families were mostly self-reliant.

THE NUCLEAR FAMILY/MODERN FAMILY

The individual nuclear family is a universal social phenomenon. It can be defined as **“a small group composed of husband and wife and immature children which constitutes a unit apart from the rest of the community.”**- (Duncan Mitchell in his “Dictionary of Sociology”).

In simple words, a nuclear family is one which consists of husband, wife and their children. Soon after their marriage, the children leave their parental home and establish their separate household. Hence, a nuclear family is an autonomous unit free from the control of the elders. Since there is physical distance between parents and their married children, there is minimum interdependence between them. **Thus, a nuclear family is mostly independent. The American family is a typical example of the modern independent nuclear family.**

The nuclear family is a characteristic of all the modern industrial societies.

According to **T.B.Bottomore**, the universality of the nuclear family can be accounted for by the important functions that it has been performing. **The nuclear family has been performing the sexual, the economic, the reproductive, and the educational functions.** According to him, the indispensability of these and a few other functions has contributed to its universality. Anthropologists too have consistently emphasized the economic functions of the family in primitive societies. **A major factor in maintaining the nuclear family is economic co-operation based upon division of labour between sexes.** **Levi Strauss** has said much about the miserable situation of unmarried individuals in most of the primitive societies.

MODERN/NUCLEAR FAMILY FEATURES:

The family has undergone **some radical changes in the past half a century.** Its structure has changed, its functions have been altered and its nature has been affected. **Various factors- social, economic, educational, legal, cultural, scientific, technological, etc.**

(i) Industrialisation.

The Industrial Revolution of the 18th century and the consequent birth of the factory system of production affected the economic functions of the family. Family transferred its economic functions to the factory and became more a *consumption unit* than a productive centre.

(ii) Urbanisation.

Industrialisation and urbanisation very often go together. Cities are growing in size and in number. Family is cut to size. Families are now the smallest, and home ties are the weakest. Trends towards disorganization are set in motion.

(iii) Democratic Ideals.

Democratic ideals and values are in currency today. Democracy assures equality and provides liberty to all, to women too! Women now play not only domestic roles but also economic and political roles.

(iv) **The Decline of the Influence of Mores and the Religious Beliefs, and the Spread of Secular Attitude.**

Morality and religion are slowly losing grounds. Family members have become more secular in outlook. The religious functions of the family have diminished. Religious sentiments, beliefs and attitudes have come to be dissociated with the family.

(v) **The Spirit of Individualism and Romantic Love.**

Today individualism and romanticism are widespread. Their very spirit has destroyed the authority of the family over the individual members. Individualism has affected love-making and marriage. Romanticism has encouraged the idea of free choice of mates on the basis of love. Marriage has become as easily dissolvable as it is entered into by a mutual consent of the partners.

(vi) **Economic Independence of Women.**

Employment opportunities are thrown open for women also. The woman has become now the earning member. She now works in offices, factories, banks, schools, colleges, hospitals, administrative offices, ministries, etc. The economic independence has increased her status, but affected her attitude. The age-old doctrine '*men for the field and women for the kitchen*'- is exploded.

(vii) **Emancipation of Women.**

Women are now liberated from the chains of traditionalism. They stand on an equal footing with men. Aggressive leaders of the *Woman's Liberation Movement* have attacked the double standard of morality.

(viii) **Decline in Birth Rate.**

The size of the family is becoming smaller. Joint family is fairly uncommon. The birth rate is adversely affected. Absence of children is a glaring feature of the western families.

(ix) **Divorce.**

Today, more stress is laid on romantic love. "Love is no more sacramental" now. In the West, *Love at first sight and divorce at next* is quite common. Instances of divorce, desertion and separation are mounting in the West. Marriage has become a civil contract only.

(x) **Parent-Youth Conflict.**

Inter-personal conflicts in the family are increasing.