

Discussing Family In India Through Popular Sociological Work



By

Dr. Sweta, Assistant Professor

Dept. of Sociology

**Mahatma Gandhi central University,
Bihar**

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Objective

- The presentation discusses the basic tenants of sociological understanding of Family in India. It discusses the field view and the book view involved in development of sociological understanding of family in India. At the end of the presentation every student will be equipped with fair understanding of
- Concepts of family system,
- Important work of sociologists like A.M. Shah, I.P.Desai, K.M. Kapadia, Iravati Karve and the like,
- Debates in defining family, household and joint family.

***The power point must be substituted with readings material from following sources

- <http://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/18841/1/Unit-6.pdf>
- https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/1965_17/30/the_durable_joint_family.pdf
- https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/59969/7/07_chapter%201.pdf
- <http://wgsforum.ignouonline.ac.in/wgforum/mawgsforum/mwg009watermarkd/MWG-009B2E.pdf>

Understanding Family in India

- The sociological understanding of Indian family system was largely based on Indological literature and Hindu law; believed to be depicting pre-colonial state of Indian family (Kapadia 1955, Shah 1973).
- The Indological approach was rejected by empirical studies being done on family.
- Two strong points of discussion with regard to study of Indian family have been: the family versus household and the status of joint family in India,

Indological Approach to Indian Family System

- Largely based on sacred scriptures.
- In order to understand Indian family system, the colonial government engaged in understanding kinship and marriage in India using Hindu scriptures and Shariat for Muslims.
- They established that a traditional joint family set up was typical to Indian family system.
- One of the key proponents of Indological approach was Henry Sumner Maine, who proposed that a typical characteristic of Indian family was joint family, also living example of ancient family system

Indological Approach to Indian Family System

- The joint family was seen as center of preserving the values and traditions , individuality was sacrificed over joint-ness of the family members.
- A part of 1940s and 1950s was involved in studying the impact of cities on Indian joint family.
- There was an absence of understanding the realities of Indian family system and much of the writings were based on secondary data.

Field view of Indian Family System

- The field studies rejected and called the Indological approach misleading.
- They proposed new way to study Indian family system i.e. by differentiating family from household and also by giving up on Ideal yet redundant definition of nuclear and joint family.
- The focus shifted on studying the household dimension of family.
- Indian family system was considered a large group of three or more generations.
- Studies on family in Indian context has always been a description and distinction between nuclear and joint family

Understanding Family System In India

- Both sociologists and anthropologists have equally been interested in understanding the family structure in India.
- A range of ethnographic study has revolved around understanding the function, structure and significance of family.
- They were reconstruction of the “folk” culture and “primitive” pictures of the relationship between members sharing a household.
- A.M. Shah rightly says that the term family is polysemic emanating many meanings and there is a tendency to use them without making any distinction.

Understanding Family System In India

- Also, the writings were very segmental or general description, passive account of types of family, and their nomenclature stereotyping one group after another.
- There has been lack of methodological advancement in understanding family.
- For example, A.M. Shah brings in the fact that at times, the term household and family are used interchangeably
- When the term family is assumed to be a household unit, “elementary family is the antithesis of the joint family” (Shah 1998:3).

UNDERSTANDING FAMILY SYSTEM IN INDIA

- In India, the family is an important unit of social organization. There can not be any one way to depict family systems in India (Mandelbaum ,1948).
- Iravati Karve rightly says that to understand the cultural setting of India every researcher should understand the institution of family organization apart from the linguistics and caste dimensions.

Understanding Family System In India

- Family in India has been distinctly patrilineal joint family with few exceptions like Khasis and Garos of Meghalaya and Nayars of Kerala.
- A common understanding about family systems in India is that every male is born into a joint family.
- Iravati Karve posits that, “The third important factor in Indian life is the family and by family is meant here the joint family” (1965:8).
- K.M.Kapadia says that “The joint family system has been one of the three potent factors in the continuance of cultural traditions” (1955:233)

Joint Family: An Indian Context

- The joint family is a corporate group headed by the eldest male member, patrilineal in descent and patrilocal in residence.
- The property is collectively owned by the male members and the female members have no rights in common property except the right to maintenance.
- The members of the joint family were not “only a single consumer unit, it is typically a single producer unit as well” (Mandelbaum 1948:3).
- The members of the family cooperated each other in economic activities.

Joint Family : A classical three-or-four generation group

Mandelbaum defines joint family as “All men are related by blood as

- (i) a man and his sons and grandsons, or
- (ii) a set of brothers, their sons and grandsons. The women of the household are their wives, unmarried daughters, and perhaps the widow of a deceased kinsman.”
- (iii) There are even now households in which four generations are to be found living together under one roof” (1948:123).

Joint Family : A classical three-or-four generation group

- There are three or four generations of males related to a male ego as grand-father and his brothers, father and his brothers, (ego's) brothers and cousins, sons and nephews, and wives of all these male relatives plus the ego's own unmarried sisters and daughters" (Karve 1965: 11).
- Karve furthers her definition of joint family can be split into "smaller joint families made up of (i) a man, his wife, children, and sons' sons and daughters, or (ii) a man, his sons and daughters and couple of younger brothers (1965: 12).

Joint Family : A classical three-or-four generation group

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(Karve 1965: 11).

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- A Shorter Oxford English Dictionary 1959