

"The family is a unique institution in that it is at one and the same time both a private and a visibly public institution . It oscillates between the most intimate to the most public in its various contexts ."

In common english parlance the word 'family' is used in several different senses. Firstly, it is considered as the "household ,the body of persons who love in one house or under one head ,including parents, children, servants etc." ,secondly as "The group consisting of parents and their children ,whether living together or not ." Thirdly " In wider senses ,all those who are nearly related by blood and affinity ." Lastly , "Those descended or claiming descent from a common ancestor, a house, kindred, lineage." The four social institutions are clearly related to each other, but they should be clearly distinguished from each other. Tulsi Patel notes that it was then the terms "domestic group" and "household " were introduced as they provided a processual view of the family .

The 'elementary family' is "a group composed of a man,his wife and their children' .It is assumed by many writers on indian family ,as well as by many writers on family in general,that the members of an elementary family always live together in the same household group such as a joint or extended family. Modern anthropologists have , however shown that this need not always be the case.For example , in India itself ,among the Nayars and a few other castes of kerala , the husband resided with the matrilinear kin but not with his own wife and children and would visit them only occasionally.

Moreover,the elementary family is a genealogical model and an ideal type.This is because we find households each composed of a complete elementary family as well as households each composed of an incomplete elementary family .A.M Shah establishes its strong agency by citing an example of a Gujarat village where he finds six major types of incomplete elementary family.The household of these six types forms no less than 23.5% of the total number of households in the village , and a household of each of these types has a distinctive pattern of life,having important consequences for further development of each of the members.Only a few writings on Indian family refer to incomplete elementary families such as that of Cohn ,Nicholas etc .

On the other hand, "Joint Family" means 'two or more elementary families joined together.' It is called patrilinear family when based on the principle of descent, and matrilinear joint family when based on the principle of matrilinear descent . Frequently the term 'extended family' is used in the place of 'joint family .' In detail the patrilineal extended family is based on an extension of father-son relationship , and the matrilineal extended family on an extension of mother-daughter relationship . Today the problem that arises is that what is the limit of extension of patrilineal descent in the formation of joint or extended family? To which some like J.D Mayne has answered "there can be no limit to the number of persons of whom a hindu joint family consists..." whereas in many writings the term 'generation ' is used to define the limit of extension.

Similarly, Professor Mandelbaum defines 'Joint Family ' as a household group having three types of compositions. Firstly, a man and his sons and grandsons or secondly a set of brother's ,their sons and grandsons and lastly those households where four generations can be found living together even now. This reminds us of Dr. Jyotirmoyee Sarma who too defines the composition of the household in terms of the classical three-or four-generation formula. Professor Irawati Karve too uses the same definition and maintains at the same time 'ten or twelve houses, each sheltering a joint family, all together acknowledging common descent and capable of showing through one line .'

Today,various changes have come in the Indian Family. A.M Shah uses a simple sentence to summaries this – 'From joint family to elementary (or nuclear or individual) in India. Recently ,some sociologists have pointed out that the changes implied by the slogan are not taking place, rather what is emerging is not the elementary family but a new form of the joint family.In the same manner in the west

especially in the united states notes M. F Nimkoff the extended family has been replaced during the past two centuries by the small , independent family mainly revolving around the marital pair and their offspring . Coming back to A.M Shah ,he then attempts to examine these beliefs about the traditional Indian family because a proper understanding of the social change requires a proper understanding of the past.

However, Kapadia (1956) has interestingly, called attention to a possible change in the type of joint family. The traditional joint family he points out, consists of the head , his brothers and grandsons whereas the modern joint family comprises the head, his sons and grandsons .The reason for this shift is mainly due to the pace with which industrialization is taking place even though its not as fast as the west. But there are some like Henry Orenstein who has used the census to contradict it. He presents figures to show that the average size of the household rather than decreasing has very slightly increasing. Thus, maintaining that the modern processes of westernization, industrialization have not brought about the so-called disintegration of large and joint families.

SOURCES: The family in India: structure and practice

By Tulsi Patel

The family in India: critical essays

By A. M. Shah