



LESSON 26 INSTITUTION OF FAMILY

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26. INSTITUTION OF FAMILY

26.0 Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to understand and learn about:

- Concept of Family
- Forms of Family
- Functions and Importance of Family

26.1 Introduction

The family is the most important primary group in society. It is the simplest and the most elementary form of society. It is the most basic of all social groupings. It is the first and the most immediate social environment to which a child is exposed. It is an outstanding primary group, cause; it is in the family that the child develops its basic attitudes.

Further, of all the groups that affect the lives of individuals in society none touches them so intimately or as continuously as does the family. From the moment of birth to the moment of death the family exerts a constant influence. The family is the first group in which we find ourselves. It provides for the most enduring relationship in one form or other. Every one of us grows up in a family and every one of us too will be a member of one family or other.

"The family, almost without question, is the most important of any of the groups that human experience offers. Other groups we join for longer or shorter periods of time for the satisfaction of this interest or that. The family, on the contrary, is with us always. Or rather more precisely, we are with it." -Robert Bierstedt.

The family is a universal institution. It is the most permanent and the most pervasive of all social institutions, all societies large and small, primitive and civilized, ancient and modern, have some form of family or the other. No one knows or can know how or when the family began. It is safe to surmise that the family in some form always be with us, with regards to the future as the mind can imagine, the family will continue to be a central and indeed a nuclear component



of society. "There may be no families in Utopia, and none in paradise, but the planet we know best will probably always contain them -Robert Bierstedt.

It may be noted that our purpose here, is not to give counsels on family relations but to acquire sociological knowledge regarding family. The family is a small group consisting ordinarily of father, mother, one or more children and sometimes near or distant relatives. It should be noted that it is not our purpose here to offer advice on the age at which people should marry, on how to choose a husband or a wife, how to get along with a difficult mate, how many children to beget, what to do about a mother-in-law problem, how to avoid divorce, and so on. Our study is confined to the family as a social phenomenon and sociological approach.

26.2 Meaning and Definition of Family

The word 'Family' has been taken over from 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. The meaning of family can be explained better by the following definitions:

- **M.F. Nimkoff** says that "Family is a more or less durable association of husband and wife with or without child, or of a man or woman alone, with children".
- **Burgess and Locke** "Family is a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption constituting a single household interacting and intercommunicating with each other in their respective social roles of husband and wife, father and mother, son and daughter, brother and sister, creating a common culture".
- **Eliot and Merrill**: Family is "The biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children".
- **MacIver**: Family is "a group defined by sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children "

26.3 General Characteristics of the Family

i. A Mating Relationship

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

ii. Selection of Mates

Wife or husband may be selected by parents or by the 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.

26.4 DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE FAMILY

The family is an organisation par excellence. Of all the social organizations, large or small, family is of the greatest sociological significance. It occupies the central position in our social structure. The family, unlike other institutions, enjoys a unique position in society. Its distinctive features may be noted here.

- (i) **Universality-** After having made an analysis of more than 250 societies, Murdock concludes that the family is universal. There is no human society in which some form of the family does not appear nor has there ever been such a society. B. Malinowski writes: "The typical family, a group consisting of mother, father, and their progeny, is found in all communities, savage, barbarians, and civilized". The irresistible sex need, the urge for reproduction and the common economic needs have contributed to this universality.
- (ii) **Emotional Basis-** The family is grounded in emotions and sentiments. It is based on our impulses of mating, procreation, maternal devotion, fraternal love and parental care. It is built upon sentiments of love, affection, sympathy, co-operation and friendship.
- (iii) **Limited Size-** The family is smaller in size. As a primary group its size is necessarily limited. It seems to be the smallest social unit. The biological conditions have also contributed to its small size.



- (iv) **Formative Influence-** The family is the earliest social environment which surrounds trains and educates the child. It shapes the personality and moulds the character of its members. It emotionally conditions the child. It is the 'nursery of human nature' and the 'breeding ground of our mores and the nurse of our loyalties'.
- (v) **Nuclear Position in the Social Structure-** The family is the nucleus of all other social organizations. The whole social structure is built of family units. It influences the whole life of society.
- (vi) **Responsibility of the Members-** The member of the family has certain responsibilities, duties and obligations. The smooth running of family depends on how best the members discharge their responsibilities in co-ordination with the other individuals of the family. As Maclver points out, "In times of crisis men may work and fight and die for their country, but they toil for their families all their lives".
- (vii) **Social Regulation-** The family peculiarly guarded both by social taboos and by legal regulations. The society takes precaution to safeguard this organisation from any possible breakdown: by divorce desertion or separation.
- (viii) **The Permanent and Temporary Nature of the Family-** The family as an institution is permanent Since It is based on the organic and emotional nature of man, it continues to exist. But family as an association may be temporary in character. These characteristics indeed reveal the sociological significance of the family.

26.5 Functions of Family

The family as a social institution performs several functions. Various opinions have been expressed regarding the functions of family.

- **Kingsley Davis** speaks of four main functions of the family:
 - (i) Reproduction
 - (ii) Maintenance
 - (iii) Placement, and
 - (iv) Socialization
- Ogburn and Nimkoff have mentioned six major functions of family:
 - (i) Affection
 - (ii) Economic
 - (iii) Recreational
 - (iv) Protective
 - (v) Religious
 - (vi) Educational
- Reed has described four functions of the family:



- (i) Race perpetuation
 - (ii) Socialization
 - (iii) Regulation and satisfaction of sex needs, and
 - (iv) Economic functions.
- Maclver classifies the functions of family into two types: Essential and Non-essential functions. According to him, the essential functions include (i) the stable satisfaction of sex need, (ii) production and rearing of children, and (iii) provision of a home. Under the non-essential functions he includes, religious, educational, economic, health and other functions.
- **The Primary Functions**
- Some of the functions of family are basic to its continued existence. They are referred to as essential functions by Maclver. They may also be regarded as Primary functions of family. They are explained below.
- (i) **Stable Satisfaction of Sex Need-** Sex drive is powerful in human beings. Man is susceptible to sexual stimulation throughout his life. The sex need is irresistible also. It motivates man to seek an established basis of its satisfaction. Family regulates the sexual behavior of man by its agent, the marriage. Thus it provides for the satisfaction of the sex need for man. Even Manu, the Hindu Law giver and Vatsyayana, the author of Kamasutra, have stated that sexual satisfaction is one of the main aims of family life.
 - (ii) **Reproduction or Procreation-** Reproductive activity is carried on by all lower and higher animals. But it is an activity that needs control or regulation. The result of sexual satisfaction is reproduction'. The process of reproduction is institutionalized in the family. Hence it assumes regularity and a stability that all societies recognize as desirable. Thus family introduces legitimacy into the act of reproduction. All societies surround this function with norms and support then with, strong sanctions. By fulfilling its reproductive function family has made it possible to have the propagation of species and the perpetuation of the human race.
 - (iii) **Production and rearing of the Child-** The family gives the individual his life and a chance to survive. We owe our life to the family. The human infancy is a prolonged one. The child which is helpless at the time of birth is given the needed protection of the family. Further, family is an institution par excellence, for the production and rearing of children. No other institution can as efficiently bring up the child as can the family. This can be referred to as the function of 'maintenance' also,
 - (iv) **Provision of home-** Family provides the home for its members. The desire for home is strongly felt in men and women. Children are born and brought up in homes only. Though, often children are born in hospitals, clinics, maternity homes, etc., they are nursed and nourished in the homes only. Even the parents who work outside are dependent on home for comfort, protection and peace. Home remains still the 'sweet' home.



- (v) Family—An Instrument of Culture Transmission and An Agent of Socialization- The family serves as an instrument of culture transmission. The family guarantees not only 'the biological continuity of the human race but also the cultural continuity of the society of which it is a part. It transmits ideas and ideologies, folkways and mores, customs and traditions, beliefs and values from one generation to the next.
- (vi) The family is an agent of socialization also. Socialization is its service to the individual. Socialization is the process whereby one internalizes the norms of 'one's groups so that a distinct 'self emerges unique to the individual. The family indoctrinates the child with the values, the morals, beliefs, and ideals of the society. It prepares its children for participation in larger world and acquaints them with a larger culture. It is a chief agency which prepares the new generation for life in community. It emotionally conditions the child. It lays down the basic plan of the personality. Indeed, it shapes the personality of the child. Family is a mechanism for disciplining the child in terms of cultural goals. In short, it transforms the infant barbarian into the civilized adult.
- (vii) Status Ascribing Function. The family also performs a pair of function- (i) status ascription for the individual (ii) societal identification for the individual. Statuses are of two kinds: Ascribed and achieved. The family provides the ascribed statuses. Two of these, age and sex are biological ascriptions. Others, however, are social ascriptions. It is the family that serves almost exclusively as the conferring agency or institution.
- (viii) People recognize us by our names, and our names are given to us by our family. Here, the family is the source of our societal identification. Various statuses are initially ascribed by our families. Our ethnic status, our nationality status, our religious status, or residential status, or class Status—sometimes our political status and our educational status as well—are all conferred upon us by our families. Of course, these may be changed later. Wherever statuses are inherited as in the case of royalty and nobility it is the family that serves as the controlling mechanism. Status ascription and societal identification are two faces of the same process. The importance of family in this regard can hardly be exaggerated.
- (ix) Affectional Function. Man has his physical, as well as mental needs. He requires the fulfillment of both of these needs. Family is an institution which provides the mental or the emotional satisfaction and security to its individual members. It is the family which provides the most intimate and the dearest relationship for all its members. The individual first experiences affection in his parental family as parents and siblings offer him love, sympathy and affection. Lack of affection actually damages an infant's ability to thrive. A person who has never been loved is seldom happy.

➤ **Secondary Functions of Family**



In addition to the above described essential or primary functions the family performs some secondary or non-essential functions in some way or the other. Of these, the following may be noted.

- (i) **Economic Functions.** The family fulfils the economic needs of its members. This has been the traditional function of family. Previously, the family was an economic unit. Goods were produced in the family. Men used to work in family or in farms for the production of goods. Family members used to work together for this purpose. It was to a great extent self-sufficient. A clear cut division of labour between sexes, that is, between men and women, was evident. But today, the situation has changed. The family members do not work together at home. They are engaged in different economic activities outside the home. They are no longer held together by division of labour.

The economic role of modern family is considerably modified. The process of industrialization has affected family. The centre of production has moved from home to the factory. The factory is giving job only to the individual worker and not to the entire family. The factory is producing goods which are consumed within the family. Thus, family has become more a consuming unit than a producing one. Its members are busy with "earning wages" rather than with "making a living". Family is thus slowly transferring its economic functions to the external agencies. Still, the institution of property is embedded with the family.

- (ii) **Educational Functions.** The family provides the basis for the child's formal learning. In spite of great changes, the family still gives the child his basic training in the social attitudes and habits important to adult participation in social life. "The manner in which he learns how to get along with his family will be carried over to his interactions with school authorities, religious leaders, the police and other agents of social control". When the child grows up, he learns to manage situations outside the home and family. He extends his interests to other groups. With all this his intelligence, his emotions, and his social habits develop until he weans himself from the original dependence on the mother, father and other family members.

- (iii) **Religious Functions.** The family is a centre for the religious training of the children. The children learn from their parents various religious virtues. Previously, the homes were also centers of religious quest. The family used to teach the children the religious values, moral precepts, way to worshipping God, etc. Even today, it is in the family that the foundations are laid down for the moral standards that are to guide the children throughout their life. The family meets the spiritual needs of its members. It is through the family that the religious inheritance is passed on to the next generation.

- (iv) **The Recreational Functions-** This is secondary function of family. Sometime family members organized parties and play. It works as like creative activities to tie together all family members.



26.6 Types or Forms of the Family

Sociologists have spoken of different forms or types of family. They have taken into consideration different factors as the basis for the classification of the family. A few classifications can be mentioned.

- On the basis of marriage family has been classified into three major types:
 - (i) Polygamous or Polygynous Family
 - (ii) Polyandrous Family
 - (iii) Monogamous Family.
- On the basis of the nature of residence family can be classified into three main forms:
 - (i) Family of Matrilocal Residence
 - (ii) Family of Patrilocal Residence
 - (iii) Family of Changing Residence
- On the basis of ancestry or descent family can be classified into two main types :
 - (i) Matrilineal Family
 - (ii) Patrilineal Family
- On the basis of the nature of authority family can be classified into two main types.
 - (i) Matriarchal Family
 - (ii) Patriarchal Family
- On the basis of size or structure and the depth of generations family can be classified into two main types :
 - (i) The Nuclear or the Single Unit Family
 - (ii) The Joint or the Undivided Family
- On the basis of the Nature of Relations among the family members the family can be classified into two main types:



- (i) The Conjugal Family which consists of adult members among whom there exists sex relationship, and
- (ii) Consanguine Family which consists of members among whom there exists what is known as "blood relationship"—brother and sister, father and son, etc.

26.7 Conclusion

Marriage leads to the formation of family. The family is a universal institution and has existed throughout the history of society. With the passage of time, family has undergone changes gaining and losing various shapes and characteristics. The present stages of economic development and cultural changes have posed some new challenges to the institution of family leading to radical changes in the structures and functions of family. In the Western societies, the very existence of family appears to be threatened. However the institution of family is surviving and will survive for the survival of the society itself.

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