

NATURE OF FAMILY

- 1. Universality:** Family is the most universal group. It is the first institution in the history of men. It has existed in every society and is found in all parts of the world. No culture or society has ever existed without some form of a family organisation. No other group is so universal as the family is.
- 2. Emotional basis:** The family is a fundamental unit of human society. It is based on our impulses of mating, procreation and parental care. It is a close knit group which fortifies these emotions.
- 3. Limited size:** The size of the family is of necessity limited for it is defined by biological conditions which it cannot transcend. Other groups may be smaller than a family but they are not so because of biological conditions.
- 4. Formative influence:** The family exercises the most profound influence over its members. It moulds the character of the individuals. Its influence in infancy determines the personality structure of the individual. Psychologists have proved that a child exhibits the same character, and mental tendencies in adult age which he acquires in the family.
- 5. Nuclear position:** The family is the nucleus of all other social groups. The distinctive characteristics of marriage, parental obligations and sibling relations make family the primary institutional cell of a society. The whole social structure is built of family units.
- 6. Responsibility of the members:** In the family, the child learns the meaning of social responsibility and the necessity for co-operation. As **Maciver** aptly describes-
- "In times of crisis, men may work and fight and die for their country but they toil for their families all their lives."

In it the child develops his basic attitudes and ideals. It is a great agency of socialization of the child.

7. Social Regulations: The family is peculiarly guarded by local customs and legal regulations. It is not easy to violate them. Family is the group in which the consenting parties may freely enter from which they cannot easily leave or dissolve. Marriages are not trivially taken.

8. Permanent: Family as an institution is permanent and universal. While as an association it is temporary and transitional. When the son marries he goes out of the family and starts another family which again may give rise to more families.

FUNCTIONS OF THE FAMILY

The family shares some of its functions with other social structures. For example, socialization is a consequence of the structure of family relations but it is function which is also fulfilled by religious structures through Sunday school classes, by formal educational organizations, by economic structures through job training programmes, by informal neighbourhood, play groups, and so on. Conversely, the family participates in the maintenance of a sense of purpose, in the production and distribution of goods and services, and in the other functions even though it may not be the structure to which primary responsibility for these activities is assigned."

Different sociologists have classified the functions of family differently.

Ogburn and **Nimkoff** divides them into six categories:

(1) Affectional Function, (2) Economic Function, (3) Recreational Function, (4) Protective Function, (5) Religious Function, (6) Educational Function.

Reed has given the following functions of the family :

(1) Race perpetuation, (2) Socialization, (3) Regulation and satisfaction of sex needs, (4) Economic function.

Maclver divides the functions of the family into two categories: Essential and Non-essential.

Essential functions

1. Satisfaction of sex need : This is the first essential function which the family performs. Satisfaction of sex instinct brings the desire for life-long partnership among male and female. The modern family satisfies this instinct in a greater degree than the traditional family, in the old family the sexual act was combined with reproduction and the fear of pregnancy as a result of intercourse prevented the couple to satisfy their sex urge. But in the modern family the task of sexual satisfaction has been eased by the invention of contraceptives and other methods of birth control. The present wife is in a better position to satisfy sex instinct without any fear of conception.

2. Production and rearing of children: The inevitable result of sexual satisfaction is procreation. The task of race perpetuation has always been an important function of the family. It is an institution par excellence for the production and rearing of children. The function of child rearing is better performed today than in the past because now more skill and knowledge are devoted to the care of the unborn and the new born child.

3. Provision of a home: The desire for a home is a powerful incentive for men as well as women to marriage. Man after the hard toil of the day returns home where in the midst of his wife and children he sheds off his fatigue. Though in modern times there are hotels and clubs, which also provide recreation to the man but the joy that a man feels within the congenial circle of woman, parents and children stands far above the monetary pleasure which is provided by clubs and hotels. In spite of these other recreative agencies the home is still the heaven and sanctuary where its members find comfort and affection.

Non-essential Functions

The non-essential functions of a family can be the following ones:

1. Economic : Family serves as an economic unit. In the traditional family most of the goods for consumption were made at home. The members of the family were all engaged in the family industry. Today the importance of family as an economic unit has been lessened as most of the goods for consumption including even the food are purchased readymade from the market. The members of the modern family do not work together as they did in the old family system.

2. Religious : Family is a centre for the religious training of the children who learn from their parents various religious virtues. In the old family different religious practices like idol worship, Yagya, religious discourses and sermons by pandits were carried on which made the outlook of the children religious. The modern family, however, does not observe religious practices. The religious and moral training of children has always been bound up with the home; and though formal religious education is no more provided in a modern family informative years of children, the family still furnishes the matrix of religious ideas, attitudes, and practice. In the family the basic notion of God, of salvation, and of morality are acquired during childhood.

3. Educative : "As to education, the family provides the base for child's later formal learning. The interaction of parents and children is the foundation upon which most of the intellectual and emotional conditioning of the child takes place." Another function performed in the family is the education of children. The child learns the first letters under the guidance of parents. The traditional family was the centre of vocational education because the children from the early childhood were associated with the family task. The modern family has delegated the task of vocational education to technical institutes and colleges.

Similarly, the functions relating to health, which were performed in the old family, have now been transferred to hospitals and clinics. Formerly a sick man was cared for in the family, by his own kith and kin, today he got admitted to a hospital and looked after by nurses. The child is born today not in the comforting fragrance of a home but in the maternity wards of a well equipped but loveless hospital.

4. Social : The family is an important unit of society. It imparts learning to the individual on all those subjects whereby he can become an ideal member of Society. As it has been observed by **Mack and Young:** “ *The basic socialization of the child takes place in the family. All the fundamental ideas, muscular skills, and norms are acquired in the home. The child also learns a great deal non-deliberately that is unconsciously. This is especially true of basic attitude and values.*” It carries out the socialization of the individual. It also keeps the social heritage intact and hands it over to the generations to come. It is also an agency of social control. The family norms control the conduct of the individual.

5. Recreational : The old family provided recreation to its members. They used to sing and dance together and visit the family relations. Recreation is now available in clubs or hotels rather than at home.

6. Civic : Family is the school of civic virtues. The child learns the first lesson of citizenship in the family. The virtues of love, co-operation, toleration, sacrifice, obedience and discipline are first learnt by the child in the family. These qualities enable him to grow into a good citizen. That is why family has been called the cradle of civil virtues.

From the above discussion it is thus clear that there has been a great change in the functions of the family. The very importance of the family has been reduced. It is no longer a home for recreation of its members, a school of education for children or a centre for their religious training. Many family duties which were discharged formerly by the parents have now been transferred to external agencies. Cooking, washing and caring for the children are hardly performed in homes of West and also in some of the East. Even the task of procreation has suffered a setback. Of course the satisfaction of sex need is better performed without any fear of pregnancy by modern family. In short, the family has lost some of its former functions. It is to be however remembered that though there is a loss of functions, family is not going to perish. The task of procreation of children, the most essential function, is only performed through the family. Despite structural and functional changes the family still plays a significant role in social strength and social solidarity.