

## DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

### II SEMESTER GENERIC

#### SOC GE 202

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### THE MODERN FAIMILY

In the early historical period of which there is any record, family system was mainly patriarchal in which the father or any other oldest male member dominated the whole life of the family. The so- called matriarchal system meaning mother rule was not a common feature. As told above under matriarchal system what prevailed was recognition of mother right and not of mother-rule. The patriarchal system remained unchanged in Europe till feudal times. Under feudal rule the position of women was more subordinated whereas that of the male members was further strengthened. This was a necessary corollary of the authoritarian mores of feudalism.

#### **Cause of the Decay of Patriarchal Family**

After the Renaissance and Reformation came a new age of science and democracy which began to undermine the foundations of the patriarchal family. On the one hand, there were economic factors involving industrialism, urbanism and mobility which broke down the self- sufficiency of the patriarchal family. On the other hand, there were cultural factors, the growth of democratic ideals and the decline of religious orthodoxy, which were in less harmony with the prerogatives and attitudes of the patriarchal family. These factors combined to challenge what Reuben-Hill called the 'formalistic-patriarchal' type of family and to usher in what he referred to as the 'person-centred-democratic' type. Let us consider those factors separately.

(i) **Economic factors:** The Industrial Revolution substituted the power machine for the manual tool. As new techniques of production advanced they shelved the old family of its economic functions. New factories with heavy machines were set up which too both the work and the workers out of the family. Now cloth was produced not on the family handloom but in the textile mill. Thousands of workers were

required to work in the factory who were drawn out of home. Not only males but females also began to go to the factory for work. The work of women became specialized like that of men and instead of being busy with the multifarious tasks of the family they went to workshops and factories for work. Women and daughter became as good earning member of the household as the men and sons. This earning power of women made them feel independent of their dependence upon males. In 1952 the number of women gainfully employed was about 26.8 percent of the total working population in U.S.A. 20 which has now increased manifold. Of these more than one-third were married women. Thus the economic and technological changes affected profoundly the character of the patriarchal family. "The family" as Maclver says, "changed from a production to consumption unit." 21

The technological discovery affected the patriarchal family in other ways too. It not only drew out larger numbers of women into workshops and substituted readymade commodities for home workshops and substituted readymade commodities for home-made commodities but also introduced labor saving devices in the performance of family tasks. Various appliances were used in cooking, baking, washing, and rearing up of the children which saved much energy and time of the housewife. She could now engage herself more on essential functions.

An inevitable result of industrialization has been the growth of urbanism. Urbanism has materially affected not merely the size of the home but also the essentials of the family life. It has substituted legal controls for informal controls and brought the family into competition with specialized agencies pursuing particular interests in a rational manner and entailing not long-run obligations. Social mobility has cut still deeper into the family organization.

**(ii) Cultural factors:** The emergence of democratic institutions in political field undermined the authoritarian mores of feudalism. The democratic state curbed the domination of the patriarch over the family member and set its own courts to determine issues over which he at one time had been supreme. The right to vote, which was given to a man by virtue of his being a property holder, became gradually, an individual right. The religious functions of the family diminished. The view that

family was a divinely created and that the patriarch was the symbol of God in the family became less accepted. The choice of the mate was no longer made by parents but by the individual himself. Woman attained a new political and legal status and a high degree of economic independence. "The husband", wrote Earnest R. Mowrer, "is no longer the head of the household in many families in spite of the fact that he still provides the family name..... In fact he is lucky if his children look upon him other than as a meddling outsider." Marriage is no longer a devotion of woman to man but contracting to live together on equal terms.

All this wrought the deathknell of the patriarchal family and brought into existence the modern family which is very much different in structure and function from the traditional family.

Presenting a contrast between patriarchal family and modern family, E. W. Burgess and H.J. Locke write: "The patriarchal family is authoritarian and autocratic with power vested in the head of the family and with the subordination of this wife, sons, and their wives and children and his unmarried daughter and his between husband and wife, with consensus in making decision and with increasing participation by children as they grow older. Marriage is arranged by parents in the patriarchal family with emphasis upon social and economic status, and upon adjustment of the son-in-law or daughter –in –law to the family group. In the modern family, marriage is in the hand of young people and selection on the basis of romance, affection and personality adjustment to each other. Compliance with duty and the following of tradition are guiding principles of the patriarchal family. The achievement of personal happiness and desire for innovation are watch words of the modern family. The chief historical function of the family i.e., economic, educational, recreational, health, productive and religious are found in the fullest development in the extended patriarchal family. These historic functions have departed from the modern family."

## **Feature of Modern Family**

Above we have described the factors that have substituted the modern family in place of the traditional patriarchal family. Now we may examine some of the salient features of modern family.

**(i) *Decreased control of marriage contract:*** Marriage is the basis of family. In traditional family the marriage was contracted by the parents. The marriage ceremony was based on the principle of male dominance and female obedience. In modern family people are less subject to the parental control concerning whom and when they shall marry. The marriage is now settled by the partners themselves. It is choice of mate by mate usually preceded by courtship or falling in love.

**(ii) *Change in the relationship of man and woman:*** In modern family the woman is not the devotee of man but an equal partner in life with equal rights. The husband now does not dictate but only requests the wife to do a task for him. She is now emancipated of the man's slavery. She is no longer the drudge and slave of olden days. She can divorce her husband as the husband can divorce her. She can sue the husband for her rights and likewise be sued.

**(iii) *Laxity in sex relationships:*** The rigidity traditionally associated with sexual relationships no longer characterizes the modern family, cases of illegitimate sex relationship of the husband and wife too can be seen in modern family.

**(iv) *Economic independence:*** Women in modern family have attained an increasing degree of economic independence. It is not only the husband who leaves the home for work but it is also the wife who goes out of doors for work. The percentage of women employed outside the home is continually of the increase. In India the number of women going out for employment is steadily increasing. In upper classes women are property owners and in lower classes they are wage earners or professional workers. This economic independence has largely affected the attitude of modern woman. Formerly she had not no choice but to find a male partner who could marry her and support her economically. She now does not feel helpless before man but settles matters with him in terms of her own. She is not slave of the man who

provides her with food, clothing and shelter but she can now earn her own living. Such a feature did not mark the traditional family. According to Maclver and Page, “Not only the economic and the religious changes but the whole process of modern civilization within which they fall has worked towards giving woman a new position in society and specially in relation to man.” In short, woman in the modern family has come as near achieving equality with men and children emancipation from parents.

(v) ***Smaller family***: The modern family is a smaller family. It is no longer a joint family. Moreover the tendency is to have a smaller family and the contraceptives help in checking the birth.

(vi) ***Decline of religious control***: The modern family is secular in attitude. The religious rites of the traditional family such as early prayer, yajna etc. are no longer performed in modern family. Marriage also has become a civil contract rather than a religious sacrament. It can be broken at any hour. The authority of religion over the conditions of marriage and divorce has markedly declined. Divorce is a frequent occurrence in modern family. In traditional family it was a rare phenomenon.

(vii) ***Filo centric family***: In the modern family the trend is towards the filo centric family. A filo centric family is one wherein the children tend to dominate the scene and their wishes determine the policy of the family. In modern family physical punishment is rarely awarded to the children. The Children now decide which school they will study in, what clothes they will wear, what food will be cooked and which movie they will go to enjoy.

Thus, the family has been subjected to profound modifications of an economic, social and biological nature. The modern family is no longer the economic and self-sufficient unit. The women are no longer subordinated to the male dominance and are no longer confined to the drudgery of incessant toil in addition to the continual bearing of children. The use of contraception has reduced the number of children born during marriage. Ceremony and religion have lost almost all connection with the home as an entity. The individuation of family members has reached a point beyond which it cannot go. The size and functions of the family have been deduced. It has suffered a change in regard to both its structure and functions. It now consists of the

married couple and two or three children. Even this smallest family unit has shown a tendency towards instability. Its functions have been taken over by several specialized agencies. The functions of the present day family tend to revolve around personality. Burgess referred to the modern family as “a unity of interacting personalities.” The modern family is more individualized and democratic where women enjoy a high prestige and position. From an institution. It has moved towards companionship.

### **Instability of Modern Family**

The striking problem that confronts the modern family is its instability. The traditional family was a stable type of family whose dissolution was rarely thought of and was not very easy. It faced the world as a unit. Women outside the family had no refuge. The Profession of the family was fixed which was continued by succeeding generations. Social mobility was slight. But today it is all changed. The control of the family over its members has decreased. The younger generation does not like any interference by their elders. There is lack of unity among the family members. Faith in one another is decreasing. There are separate ‘Chulhas’ within one house. The problems of working woman have hindered the development of the children and increased conflicts between husband and wife. There is lack of mutual trust. The marriage bonds have weakened. The ancient ideal of fidelity in sex-relationship has been adversely affected. Pre-marital and extra-marital relationships have increased. There is sexual disharmony between husband and wife. There is no longer any family craft or profession. The members of the same family are engaged in different pursuits, one in service, the other in business, a third in politics. The increase of specialized agencies have greatly diminished common participation which was the backbone of traditional family. Members of the modern family take more interest outside the family. They take meals in hotels and pass their nights in clubs and return home for a very short period. To woman marriage is not the only career open. They work in factories and offices and earn and independent living. The modern family has shrunk both structurally and functionally and is gradually losing its primary character. The state has undertaken to provide prenatal attention and infant schools; expensive medical facilities are available; the factory and office provide the place of work and

women clubs and bars provide for recreation. If people find their education, their work and their recreation outside the family and if women can get jobs which make them independent, surely the charge of broken home can be laid at the door of modern family.

Never were so many marriages being legally dissolved by divorce as now: never were there so many discretions. The United States hold unamiable position in the number of divorces granted. 22 The divorce rate in that country is reported more than one divorce for every five marriages. 23 In India, though the divorce rate is not so alarming, yet the influence of individualism and the impact of western culture have adversely affected the stability of Indian family system. It may also be noted that the divorce rates provide only a very indirect measure of family instability because they do not include cases of broken families which have not secured divorce for nor reason or the other. If we take into account also the domestic discords, discretion and separation without followed by divorce it will be revealed that family instability is on the increase.

### **Future of the Family**

From the above discussion it is thus clear that there has been a great change in the functions of the family. Whereas about a hundred years back the family was more of a community, it has become today more of an association. It has completed the transition from "Institution to companionship." The very importance of the family has been loosened. It is no longer a home for recreation of the 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 numerous home of the West and also in some of the East. A number of external agencies such as maternity hospitals, baby clinics, crèches, baby sitters, hotels, clubs and cinemas have taken over the functions once performed in the family. The function of a modern family are much limited. Even the task of procreation has suffered a setback. Of course the task of 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, the family is not going to perish. The task of procreation of children, the most essential social functions, is only performed through the family. This function is incapable of being shifted to any other institution without a radical change in society. If marriage is not for the purpose in having it at all, because companionship and sexual gratification can be had without the formalities of wedlock. More people are being married than ever before. In addition more people are being married than ever before. In addition more women are having children.

The family satisfies not only the physiological needs of the male and female but it also satisfies their psychological needs, the desire to love and to be loved. Mutual affection among family members provides solace against many of the mental difficulties of a complicated society. Despite its structural and functional changes the family still plays a significant role in social strength and social solidarity. It is the foundation of all social life. It is an inseparable part of man's nature. Burgess and Locke write, "It seems safe to predict that the family will survive, both because of its long history of adaptability to changing conditions and because of the importance of its functions of affection – giving and receiving in personal satisfaction and in personality development.