**UNIT: 1 WHAT IS FAMILY? DEFINITION, MEANING**

**CHARACTERISTICS, TYPES AND FUNCTIONS**

**UNIT STRUCTURE**

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**1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After going through unit, you will be able to:

* elaborate the meaning and definition of family
* discuss the characteristics of family
* identify the different types of family
* explain the functions of family

**1.2 INTRODUCTION**

Family is a group of people related either by consanguinity or affinity. The word family has been taken from the Roman word *famulus*, meaning a servant and a Latin word *familia* meaning household.The purpose of families is to maintain the well-being of its members and of society. Ideally, families would offer predictability, structure, and safety as members mature and participate in the community. In most societies, it is within families that children acquire socialization for life outside the family. Additionally, as the basic unit for meeting the basic needs of its members, it provides a sense of boundaries for performing tasks in a safe environment, ideally builds a person into a functional adult, transmits culture, and ensures continuity of humankind with precedents of knowledge.

**1.2.1 WHAT IS FAMILY?**

The family in India is often understood as an ideal homogenous unit with strong coping mechanisms. It is a basic, cohesive, and integral unit of the larger social systems. Moreover, families in a large and culturally diverse country such as India have plurality of forms that vary with class, ethnicity, and individual choices. Its members are bound by interpersonal relationships in a wider network of role and social relations. It is considered a link between community and change. The family is the basic and important unit of society because of the role it plays in generation of human capital resources and the power that is vested in it to influence individual, household, and community behavior. It is, therefore, a basic unit of study in most social sciences disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, economics, anthropology, social psychiatry, social work or human development.

In Sociology, family is not only a husband, a wife, and two children. Generally family is a socially recognized group usually joined by blood, marriage, cohabitation, or adoption that forms an emotional connection and serves as an economic unit of society. In other words family is an intimate domestic group made up of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating, or legal ties.

**1.2.2 DEFINITIONS OF FAMILY**

Different Sociologist defines family differently. According to **E. W. Burgess and H.I. Locke** ‘Family is a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption, constituting a single household interacting or intercommunicating with each other in their respective social roles of husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter, brother and sister creating and maintaining a common culture.’

**MacIver and Page** ‘Family is a group defined by a sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children.’

**Kingsley Davis** ‘Family is a group of persons whose relation to one another are based upon consanguinity and who are therefore kin to one another.’

**Elliott and Merrill** ‘Family is a biological social unit composed of husband, wife and children.’

**Murdock** ‘Family is a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction.’

**Clare** ‘Family is a system of relationships existing between parents and children.’

**Biesaz** ‘The Family may be described as a women with a child and a man to look after them.’

**Mack and Young** ‘The family is the basic primary group and the natural matrix of personality.’

**Bureau of Census (USA)** ‘The family is a group of two or more persons related to blood, marriage or adoption and residing together.’

**A.R Desai** ‘Family may be broadly defined as a unit of two or more persons united by marriage, blood, adoption, or consensual union, in general consulting a single household, interacting and communicating with each other.’

**1.2.3 MEANING**

The two sociological paradigms i.e. symbolic interactionism and functionalism also indicate that families are groups in which participants view themselves as family members and act accordingly. In other words, families are groups in which people come together to form a strong primary group connection and maintain emotional ties to one another over a long period of time. The functionalist perspective views families as groups that perform vital roles for society—both internally and externally. Families provide for one another’s physical, emotional, and social well-being. While interactionism helps us understand the subjective experience of belonging to a family, functionalism illuminates the many purposes of families and their roles in the maintenance of a balanced society.

**1.3 CHARACTERISTICS**

Most of the demographic characteristics, socio-religious beliefs and practices influence the nature of the Indian family system and also reflect the changes taking place in it. The Indian family is by and large patriarchal in structure. In a patriarchal family set up, all male members, that is, husband, elder brother and father, perform duties like decision making for the rest of the family, and their physical and moral protection. This patriarchal set up is changing slowly towards equalitarian interaction among the educated, urban middle classes, and also among some rural set ups. Even in matrilineal and matrilocal cultures patriarchy seems to be prevalent in the form of power held by the brother and not by the women herself. However, Each and every family has some certain characteristics which are discussed below:

1. **Universal**: Family has existed in any society. Every individual is a member of one family.
2. **Limited Size**: The family is limited in size. It is considered to be the smallest kinship group.
3. **Emotional Basis**: The integration bonds in a family are mutual affection and blood ties. The members of family share pleasures and pains with one another.
4. **Financial provision**: In a family, head of the family is supposed to meet economic needs of the members.
5. **Responsibility among members**: Every member of the family bears some responsibility towards other members. Family also provides security to all the members.
6. **Social regulations**: the family regulates the behaviours of its members. It regulates sex relationship and defines legitimacy and illegitimacy, morals and manners. All members obey customs and social conduct.
7. **Closed group**: Family is not open to all individual. Its membership is open only to few selected blood relatives.
8. **Permanency and temporarisness:** The nature of family is both permanent and temporary. It is permanent as an institution but its organizational aspect is relatively transitory.
9. **Educative role:** The earliest period of every individual’s life is spent in family. It is here that the child gets the earliest and the most fundamental lessons in socializations.
10. **Fixed habitation:** Every family has a fixed place of habitation and a home to perform various functions.
    1. **TYPES OF FAMILY**

There are various types or forms of family in our society. These are discussed below:

* + 1. **BASED ON STRUCTURE**

1. **Nuclear Family:** This type of family is what people refer to as the normal type of family. It includes a mother and a father living together with their child or children. The child or children can be born to the couple or adopted.
2. **Extended Family**: This family type includes several generations; grandparents, parents, along with aunts and/or uncles, siblings and other relatives. They share accommodation, chores, meals and finances.
3. **Joint Family:** Joint family is a group[ of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred. Joint families are composed of sets of siblings, their spouses, and their dependent children.
   * 1. **BASED ON AUTHORITY**
4. **Matriarchal Family**: The matriarchal family is the family in which authority lies with the eldest female member. The authority may also exercise by the eldest brother of the female who looks after her children needs.
5. **Patriarchal Family**: Father is the main source of authority. All the authority is exercise by the eldest male.
   * 1. **BASED ON DESCENT**
6. **Patrilineal Family:** In the patrilineal family, descent or ancestry is traced to the paternal line.
7. **Matrilineal Family:** When descent or ancestry is traced through the mother it is known as matrilineal family.
   * 1. **BASED ON RESIDENCE**
8. **Patrilocal Family:** In the partilocal residence family the wife goes and lives in the house of her husband.
9. **Matrilocal Family:** Here, husband goes and lives in the house of wife.
10. **Bilocal Family:** The married couple may choose between establishing their residence with the bridegroom’s parents or with the bride’s parents.
11. **Avunculocal Family**: The bride and bridegroom go to live with the bridegroom’s maternal uncle, i.e. the brother of the bridegroom’s mother.
12. **Neo-local Family**: if both the bride and bridegroom live in separate residence at their work place, it is called neo-local Family.
    * 1. **BASED ON RELATIONSHIP**
13. **Consanguine Family:** It is a nucleus of blood relatives surrounded by a fringe of spouses, i.e., sisters, brothers, etc. living along with husband and wife.
14. **Conjugal Family:** It is a nucleus family of spouses and their offsprings surrounded by a fringe of relatives. Here, only husband and wife live together with their unmarried children.
    * 1. **BASED ON MARRIAGE**
15. **Monogamous Family:** It is the type of family in which one man is allowed to have only one woman and neither one of them is allowed to have more than one at any stage.
16. **Polygynous Family:** If the family consists of one man and several wives, it may be called a polygynous family.
17. **Polyandrous Family:** If the family consists of one woman and several husbands, it may be called a polyandrous family.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q.1: A. what is the meaning of Roman word *famulus*?

…………………………………………

B. Who said ‘Family is a system of relationships existing between parents and children?’

…………………………………………….

**1.5 FUNCTIONS OF FAMILY**

The primary function of the family is to perpetuate society, both biologically through procreation, and socially through socialization. Different Sociologists have classified function of family differently. **Ogburn and Nimkoff** divided them into six categories: i. affectional function; ii. economic function; iii. protective function; iv. recreational function; v. religious function; and vi. educational function.

**Reed** has given the four functions of the family: i. race perpetuation; ii. socialization; iii. regulation and satisfactions of sex needs; and iv. economic function.

**MacIver and Page** divided the functions of family into two broad categories: i. essential and non-essential.

* + 1. **ESSENTIAL OR PRIMARY FUNCTIONS**

**1. Stable Satisfaction of Sex need:**

This is the Primary and essential function of family. Sex instinct is the natural urge of human being. The satisfaction of this need requires that both male and female should live together as life partners. It is the family where the husband and wife can satisfy their sex instincts easily and comfortably. Without family the satisfaction of sex need is almost socially quite impossible. A family not only satisfies but also provides the appropriate mechanism through marriage to regulate sexual behavior of husband and wife.

2. **Reproduction or procreation:**

Reproduction or procreation is another essential function of family. The family along with regulating the sexual behavior in relation to the satisfaction of sexual needs secures a legitimate basis for procreation. Since the inception of family, it has been performing this fundamental function. This function of family contributes to the continuity of family and ultimately perpetuates the human race as a whole.

3. **Protection and care of the young:**

Protection and care of the children is another essential function of family. It is regarded as an institution par excellence for the production and rearing of children. It is true that no other institution can take required care of the child like family. The child at birth is complete helpless and cannot survive at all without the help of the family. It is the family which provides care, protection, security (Physical, mental) and fulfills all other needs to make him fit in the society.

4. **Socializing Functions:**

Family is one of the primary agents of socialization. Family members teach the child the norms, value morals, beliefs and ideals of society. In the family the children first learn what is good and bad, what is right and wrong. They develop specific habits, traits of character, attitudes and values. The senior members of the family pass the family culture to the new generation thought socialization process. Thus, family acts an instrument of culture transmission.

5. **Provision of a home**:

Family makes a provision of a home or a common habitation for its members. Here both husband and if live together for procreation, protection and care of the children. It is a place of multifarious activities. All the members of the family depend on home for comfort, protection and peace. It is that institution which provides the mental or the emotional satisfaction. Members of the family exchange their love, sympathy and affection among themselves.

**1.5.2 NON-ESSENTIAL / SECONDARY FUNCTIONS**

1. **Economic function:**

The family fulfils the economic needs of its members. This has been traditional function of family. Family fulfils all the economic needs of its members such as food, clothing, shelter etc. The goods required by its members are produced at home.

2**. Educational function:**

Mazzin says, "The first lesson of child is learnt between mother's kiss and father's care". Family is regarded as the first school of children. The family provides the basis for the child's formal learning and gives the child his basic training in the social attitudes and habits.

3**. Religious function:**

The family is a centre for the religious training of the children. The family used to teach the children the religious values, moral precepts etc. It is through the family the religious inheritance is passed on to the next generation.

4. **Recreational functions:**

Family is the centre of recreation. It serves as a centre of all recreational activities like singing, dancing, playing indoor games etc. The small children are the source of recreation for the elders.

5. **Protective functions:**

Family always looks after the health of its members both young and old. It takes up the responsibility of its members and maintains sound and good health.

6. **Cultural Functions:**

The family is responsible for preserving culture. The culture is transmitted from one generation to other through the institution of family. Culture constitutes the total integrated behaviour pattern of a society.

**CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Q.2: A. who divided the functions of family as essential and non-essential?

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B. How many types of family functions mentioned by Ogburn and Nimkoff?

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**1.6 LET US SUM UP**

* Family is a group of people related either by consanguinity or affinity.
* The word family has been taken from the Roman word *famulus*, meaning a servant and a Latin word *familia* meaning household.
* In Sociology, family is a socially recognized group usually joined by blood, marriage, cohabitation, or adoption that forms an emotional connection and serves as an economic unit of society.
* Symbolic interactionism families are groups in which participants view themselves as family members and act accordingly.
* The functionalist perspective views families as groups that perform vital roles for society—both internally and externally. Families provide for one another’s physical, emotional, and social well-being.
* Interactionism helps us understand the subjective experience of belonging to a family.
* Functionalism illuminates the many purposes of families and their roles in the maintenance of a balanced society.
* There are various types or forms of family based on structure, authority, descent, residence, relationship, marriage,
* Ogburn and Nimkoff divided functions of family into six categories.
* Reed has given the four functions of the family.
* MacIver and Page divided the functions of family into two broad categories: i. essential and non-essential.

**1.7 FURTHER READING**

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**1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

Ans. to Q. No. 1: **A**. The meaning of the word *famulus* is servant.

**B.** Clare said ‘family is a system of relationships existing between parents and children.’

**2. A**. MacIver and Page divided the functions of family as essential and non-essential.

**B**. Six types of family functions mentioned by Ogburn and Nimkoff.

**1.9 MODEL QUESTIONS**

**A. Short Questions: (Answer each question in about 1 or 2 words)**

Q.1: What do you mean by Family?

Q.2: What is the meaning of the Latin word Familia?

**B. Write Short Notes: (Answer each question in about 150 words)**

Q.1: Mention the functions of family as explain by Ogburn and Nimkoff.

Q.2: What are the four functions of family mentioned by Reed?

Q.3: Difference between nuclear and joint family.

**C) Long Question: (Answer each question in about 300-500 word)**

Q.1: What are the essential functions mentioned by MacIver and Page?

Q.2: Discuss the various types of family.