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# UNIT 4 FAMILY

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## Learning Objectives

After reading this unit the students should be able to:

- define the different forms of family;
- outline the various functions of a family; and
- discuss changing aspects of family in the contemporary time.

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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When a child is born, he/ she is born into a family which is known as the smallest social unit. Family is the social unit which endows the child with social norms, values, rules and regulations through the process of **enculturation**. This unit would help the students understand the social institution of family, how it emerged, its concepts, definitions and functions as a social unit. The focus would also be on the changing dimensions that have taken place in the family structure.

A family is established through marriage which is known as the **nuclear family**; the unit of one set of parents and children, is often embedded in larger groupings like joint families, lineages, clans and domestic groups of various kinds. The relatives connected through the father or the patriline are called as **agnates** and those connected through the mother or matriline are called as **uterine**, a combination of these or all relatives from side of both parents are called as **cognates**. The basic family also presupposes a monogamous marriage while in actuality there can be a polygamous marriage by virtue of which even the basic unit may be differently constituted. Since the incest taboo makes the family discontinuous over generations, every adult belongs to two families, one in which he/she is born and another that is established through marriage; these are known respectively as the family of orientation and the family of procreation. Let us now consider each of these aspects in details.

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## 4.2 CONCEPTS, MEANINGS AND DEFINITIONS

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How has the concept of family emerged? Was family always a part of society? These are certain questions which would be taken up in this section alongwith the various definitions of family postulated by anthropologists. The word family has its origin in the Latin word *familia* derived from *famulus* meaning servant. Familia

must have been used to refer to all the slaves and servants living under one roof, including the entire household that is the master, on the one hand, and the wife, children and servants living under his control. Today when we use the term family it covers all the various groups of relatives representing a *household* (all the individuals living under one roof), *gens* (all those descended from a common ancestor), *agnatic* (relatives on the father's side) and *cognatic* (relatives on the mother's side, and then by extension all blood relatives).

The family though considered universal in nature found in all types and levels of societies and cultures, yet it is difficult to trace the origin. In the early years of the anthropological history the origin of family, how it emerged in society was much discussed and debated. Followers of the evolutionary theory were of the opinion that family as an institution has evolved just like the society. Lewis Henry Morgan in his work *Ancient Society* (1877) stated that in the early societies the concept of family was not prevalent. Such societies were nomads and promiscuous where free sex relations were prevalent thus, the role of the father was not important and the mother-sib was the earliest form of grouping. He stated, 'The principal institutions of mankind originated in savagery, were developed in barbarism, and are maturing in civilization. In like manner, the family has passed through successive forms, and created great systems of consanguinity and affinity which have remained to the present time. These systems, which record the relationships existing in the family of the period, when each system respectively was formed, contain an instructive record of the experience of mankind while the family was advancing from the consanguine, through intermediate forms, to the monogamian' (1877:18). Though today, Morgan's evolutionary scheme is not followed, his work is important as he gave the first classification of five forms of family based on five different types of marriage.

- 1) The *Consanguine* family was founded upon the intermarriage of brothers and sisters in a group. Evidence still remains in the oldest of existing systems of Consanguinity, the Malayan, tending to show that this, the first form of the family, was anciently as universal as this system of consanguinity which it created.
- 2) The *Punaluan family* its name is derived from the Hawaiian relationship of *Punalua*. It was founded upon the intermarriage of several brothers to each other's wives in a group; and of several sisters to each other's husbands in a group. But the term brother, as here used, included the first, second, third, and even more remote male cousins, all of whom were considered brothers to each other, as we consider own brothers; and the term sister included the first, second, third, and even more remote female cousins, all of whom were sisters to each other, the same as own sisters. This form of the family supervened upon the consanguine. It created the Turanian and Ganowanian systems of consanguinity. Both this and the previous form belong to the period of savagery.
- 3) The *Syndyasmian* or pairing of family founded upon the marriage of single pairs, without giving the right of exclusive cohabitation to any person over the other. The term Syndyasmian is derived from *syndyazo*, meaning to pair. It was the germ of the Monogamian Family. Divorce or separation was at the option of both husband and wife. This form of the family failed to create a system of consanguinity.

- 4) The *Patriarchal* family comprising of marriage of one man to several wives, each wife being secluded from every other. The term is here used in a restricted sense to define the special family of the Hebrew pastoral tribes, the chiefs and principal men of which practised polygamy. It exercised but little influence upon human affairs for want of universality.
- 5) The *Monogamian* family was founded upon marriage between single pairs, with the married couple having exclusive cohabitation with one another the latter constituting the essential of the institution. It is pre-eminently the family of civilized society, and was therefore essentially modern. This form of the family also created an independent system of consanguinity (Morgan, 1877: 40-41).

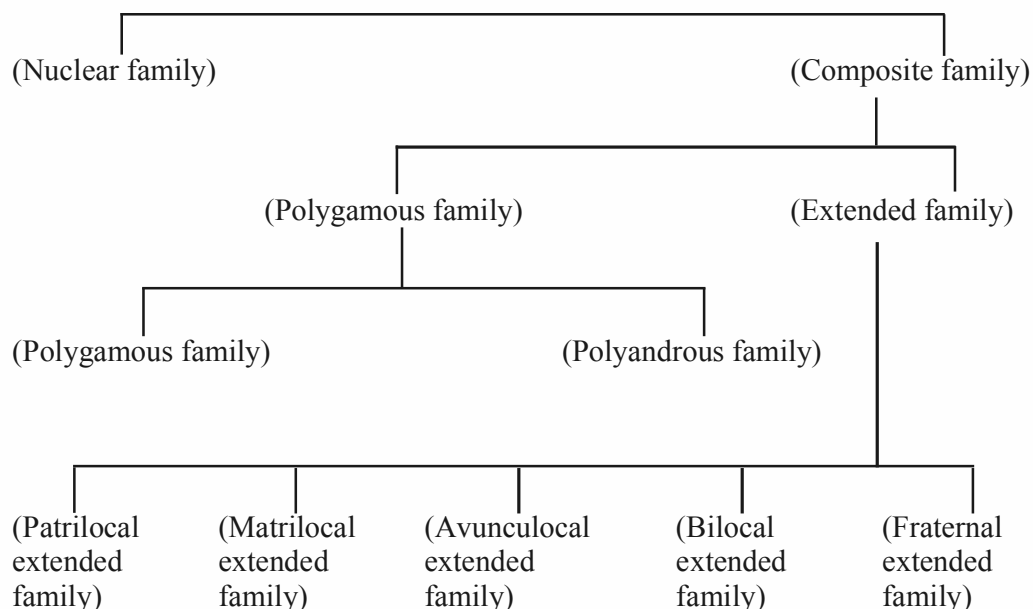
Westermarck (1853-1936) who had done a detailed study of the institution of marriage concluded that the family emerged due to male possessiveness and jealousy. In his work *The History of Human Marriage* (1922) he asserted that with the growing concept of property, males started the institution of family to protect and safeguard their property. This theory was a direct criticism of Morgan's theory wherein the origin of family was ascribed to the bonding of mother-sib. Westermarck though an adherent follower of evolutionism went a bit too far while postulating the origin of monogamy as he traced it to the mammals and the birds.

#### Activity

Before we move on to define a family let us start with a simple task. Please list down the names of the persons you would like to include in your family. Now if you have listed the names of your family members, I am sure there would be many variations to the list. Some of you might have included the names of your parents and siblings only, while others might have also added grandparents adopted brothers/sisters or cousins who stay with you. Likewise, the definition of family has variations as there are different types and forms of families. There has always been a universal problem in defining a family, so herein we would discuss some of the definitions which has tried to encompass the meaning of family in totality.

During the early 19<sup>th</sup> century evolutionary anthropologists had described family as a group based on marriage, common residence, emotional bonds and stipulation of domestic services. While in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century R.H. Lowie defined family as a group based on material relations, rights and duties of parenthood, common habitation and reciprocal relations between parents and children. Ralph Linton similarly defined family as a group that involves marriage, rights and duties of parents and children. George Peter Murdock, (1949) examined 192 societies and formulated a definition of family as 'the family is a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation, and reproduction. It includes both sexes, atleast two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted'. The chart presented below shows the different types of families as constructed by George Peter Murdock.

## FAMILY



Adapted from Makhan Jha, *An Introduction to Social Anthropology* 1995 (reprint) pp 74.

*Nuclear Family* consists of a married couple (man and woman) with their children own or adopted. In certain cases one or more additional persons may also reside with them. This type of family is prevalent in almost all societies. Compact in nature this type is very popular in the present day world where there is a continuous struggle for economic subsistence.

*Composite family* is composed of two or more nuclear families which can be divided into *polygamous family* and the *extended family*. The polygamous family includes three variants based on marriage polyandry, polygyny and polyandrous (refer to Unit- 3 of the same block for details). An extended family consists of two or more nuclear families affiliated through extension of the parent-child relationship. Based on the post-marital residence, an extended family can be of the following types.

- *Patrilocal family* is composed of two or more nuclear families residing at the same house, it is an extension of the father son relationship. Such a family comprises of a man and his wife and their sons and the sons' wives and childrens.
- A *matrilocal family* is founded with two or more nuclear families affiliated through an extension of mother daughter relationship. It consists of a family comprising of a woman her daughters and the daughters' husbands and children.
- The *bilocal extended family* is a combination of patrilocal extended family and matrilocal extended family. The extended family consists of two or more lineally related kinfolk of the same sex and their spouses and offspring occupying a single household and under the authority of a household head.
- The *Avunculocal extended family* consists of two or more nuclear families affiliated through an extension of maternal-uncle and sisters son relationship. Such a family includes a nuclear family formed by a man his wife and daughters and the nuclear family formed by his sister's son and wife and children.

- The Fraternal Joint Family is a family system, like a patrilineal extended family wherein the family comprises of a man and his wife and their sons and the sons' wives and children. We can say that in such a family three generations of kins live together. At times, such a family can be traced upto ten or so generations living in the same residence and sharing common hearth.

In the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century anthropologists tried to define family in terms of certain criteria important from the society's point of view. According to Edmund Leach a group to be called a family should comprise either one or several of the following criteria: marriage, legal paternity and maternity, monopoly of the couple over each other's sexuality, rights of the spouses to each others labour services, rights of both the spouses over property to establish a joint fund of property for the benefit of the children, and a socially significant relationship of affinity between each spouse and the relatives of the other. Evans-Pritchard also gave a classification of types of family based on his study of *The Nuers* (1940) of Sudan. His classification is more suited for the patrilineal society.

- The *simple legal* family comprising of a married couple and their children. This type of family is commonly known as a natural family.
- The *complex legal* family or the polygamous family where a number of separate families are linked by their relationship to a common father.
- The *ghost family* which consists of the ghost (pater), his wife, their children and the kinsmen who became their genitor in virtue of his duty towards the ghost. The ghost family is conceived when a young man dies who has not married yet. So a young man from the dead man's lineage marries a woman on behalf of the dead man and generates a family for the dead man. The children born out of such a marriage are known as the ghost's children and bear his name.

### Variations in a Family System

From the above discussion we can describe the family as a domestic group in which a couple (parents) and children own or adopted live together. Yet there are societies where the same norms are not applicable. Meyer Fortes (1945) in his study of Ashanti of Ghana has described a society where the husband and wife after marriage continues to live with their respective family of orientation, a reason why the people of Ashanti like to find spouses in their own village. Lucy Mair (1997) discussing Fortes work reflects on the description of how an Ashanti village at sunset is full of young children carrying steaming dishes on their heads from mother to father- sometimes it also becomes an exchange between two houses. Thus, in such a family system the husband is a visiting husband and his role as a father is limited to procreation alone. The upbringing of his children lies with the kins of the wife's family whereas he is responsible for the upbringing of his sister's children. Likewise, among the Nayars of South India also, the same system of visiting husband is seen as discussed in Unit-3 of the same block and herein like the Ashanti of Ghana the responsibility of the child rests with the mother's lineage. The Khasis of Meghalaya and the Garos of Garo Hills of Meghalaya are two matrilineal societies where, in the first society the husband comes to live with the wife's family, while in the latter the husband is a visiting husband. While among the Hopi's of Southwest America a man after marriage moves on to live with his wife's family in which he has important economic responsibilities but few ritual obligations. In Hopi society also like the other matrilineal societies the man is

responsible and retains authority and leadership for his sister's son and is not responsible for his own children.

On the other hand among the matrilineal Trobriand islanders a practice is prevalent wherein a boy grows up in his father's family and after marriage when he sets up house he is expected to live in the village of his mother's brother. Herein, this system the domestic authority which lies with the father is fulfilled and also the *jurat* authority that is authority in matters of distribution of property etc. that lies with the mother's brother is also successfully fulfilled. The Trobrianders also practice the marriage of mother's brother's daughter and as such when a boy sets up house in his mother's brother's village the bride is not removed from the vicinity of her kin. Likewise, among the Yao and Cewa of Malawi a man immediately after marriage has to live in his wife's home and later he can setup house at the village of his own matrilineal kin. In such a case by the time his daughters are of marriageable age he becomes the head of the family to which the daughters' husbands come (Mair, 1977).

The ghost marriage as described by Evans- Pritchard in his study of the Nuers is also a variation in the family system as it is not found in all societies. Then there is also the practice of a woman usually a barren woman paying bridewealth and establishing the right to count another woman's children as her own. In such a case the barren woman is usually a diviner who thus, attains wealth to pay for the bride price. The woman-husband in this case can select a man to co-habitat with her 'wife' and produce children who would be than known as her own (Mair, 1997). Such a practice is seen among the Nuers, Zulus and the Yoruba societies.

### **Family types based on Residence**

Family types can be categorized based on the type of residence also. In North American society it is customary for the newly wedded couple to take up residence in a place of their own, apart from the relatives of either spouse. This is known as *neolocal residence* (that is a new place). Thus, a new family basically known as nuclear family is formed with only husband and wife and later on their children, own or adopted. When the newly married couple takes up residence in the groom's father's house in a partilocal family such a residence is known as *patrilocal* or *virilocal* residence. On the other hand a *matrilocal* or *uxorilocal* residence is created when the couple takes up residence in a matrilocal family i.e, with the bride's family. In some societies like the Ashanti of Ghana a couple after marriage resides with the groom's mother's brother's family or maternal uncles house known as *avunculocal* residence. Again in some societies a married couple has the choice of living with relatives of either spouse (the husband or the wife). A residence thus formed is known as *ambilocal or bilocal residence*.

#### **Reflection and Action**

Analyse your family using the geneological method as discussed in Unit 1 of this Block. Describe what kind of a residence and family pattern it has.

### **Is Marriage and Family Universal?**

In the earlier block also we have discussed marriage in length and we have come to the conclusion that marriage leads to a family. But there is an example from the Na society of China wherein there is no word for the term 'marriage' in their language (Blumerfield 2004, Geertz 2001, Harrell 2002). The institution in which the men and women are joined in sexual and reproductive partnerships is called *sese*. In this system a man spends the night in a lover's house and goes away in

the morning. The *sese* relationship does not hold any notion of fidelity, permanence, paternal responsibility for children born or any form of economic obligations (Shih, 2001). A child born is the responsibility of the mother and her sisters and brothers. A Na household comprises of mother and her sons and daughters, sisters and their children and the brothers.

### Household and Family

Many a times there is confusion between the term family and household. So let's first try to understand the term household and what it comprises of. Household has been defined by Haviland (2003) as the basic residential unit where economic production, consumption, inheritance, child rearing and shelter are organised and implemented. The members of a household at times share a common hearth. Let's take the example of the Mundurucu of the Amazon who organise themselves around a household. They have a unique system by which all men and boys above 13 years of age live together whereas all the women and children below 13 years of age live together (Haviland, 2003). Herein, we see that household is an extension of family, a family can be a household but a household need not be a family. To make this statement clear let's take another example from the present day situation. We see a lot of students moving out of their native place and settling in some other city or going abroad for higher education. These students usually on a shoe string budget like to share accommodation with fellow students. Thus, two to three students take up residence and start sharing space and eating together. This makes them share a hearth but they are not necessarily members of the same family but belong to different families.

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## 4.3 FUNCTIONS OF A FAMILY

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The family as a social group is universal in nature and its existence is seen at all levels of cultures. Thus, the family having a status in society also has certain responsibilities and functions. The basic functions of a family are outlined below:

- **Satisfaction of biological need**

The family as an institution regularises the satisfaction of biological needs. It serves for the institutionalisation of mating a primordial need among all humans. Family helps in channeling of sexual outlets by defining the norms with whom one can mate and who are out of bound in the terms of incest taboo. Family thus helps in establishing a legal father for a woman's children and a legal mother for a man's children.

- **Reproduction and Inbibing Social Values**

A child as we have learnt is born into a family. As soon as a child is born into a family he is entitled to certain social position, system of beliefs, language, parents and kins as per the family system that he is born into. This family nurtures the child and imbibe in him the ways of the society through the process of enculturation preparing him to accept statuses of adulthood.

- **Economic**

A family as a social group is responsible for satisfying the basic needs of its members like food, clothes and shelter. In order to achieve this objective all the members of a family cooperate and divide the work among themselves and make contribution towards the upkeep of the family. Emile Durkheim in his book *Division of labour* has brought forth this fact and laid emphasis on economic satisfaction of the need of a family. It thus, serves as the

organisation of a complementary division of labour between spouses which at the same time allocates to each member of the family certain rights in the labour of the other and in such goods or property as they may acquire through their individual or joint efforts.

- **Educational**

A family provides for the linkage of each spouse and the offspring within the wider network of kinsmen. It establishes relationships of descent and affinity. Sociological fatherhood is determined to place the responsibility for the child on a specific adult. There must be jural fatherhood to regularise transference of statuses from one generation to the next. A cooperative division of labour makes for greater efficiency and skill in the work that need to be done. Each sex can perform many skills equally well, but each sex is likely to develop those skills it uses more often. The basic functions of the family may be performed with varying degrees of effectiveness from culture to culture. The way the details of the functions are carried out can produce remarkably different individual personalities of children and adult (Madan & Majumdar 1990, Jha 1995 et.al).

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## **4.4 CHANGING DIMENSION OF FAMILY**

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Till now we have been focusing on the traditional norms and what comprises a family. We have been concerned with the classical terminology in which a family has been described and conceived but with the changing times the composition, meaning and definition of family have also undergone changes. The high divorce rate and remarriage in the present era leads to a tangled nuclear family leading to the creation of complex kinship relations also. Presently the blended family is coming up which comprises of networks which include previously divorced spouses and their new marriage partners and sometimes children from the previous marriages, as well as multiple sets of grandparents and other similar relations also. Then, again there is the surrogate motherhood as discussed in Unit 1 of the same block which also leads to a different type of family besides adoption. Divorces at times also lead to families with a single parent either the children staying with mother or at times with father. In the present day scenario single parenthood and a single parent household is fast overtaking the nuclear family due to the rise in divorces.

Society being dynamic, we see a lot of changes and such changes have occurred in the family system and the conception of the family itself. As we have learnt in the last section of the Unit 1 about lesbian and gay kinship, these new patterns have also arisen in the family structure – lesbian and gay family. In a lesbian and gay family the partners usually adopt kids of either sex. There has been a lot of debate in the recent past on whether or not a same sex couple should be allowed to parent children, whether artificially implanted or adopted. This debate has gone on for so long mainly because many religious groups believe that children can only be properly parented by a father and mother combination. As most of the religions do not sanction the union of same sex couples and also believe that the child will suffer if parented by the same sex (Nanda & Warms, 2011). While the upcoming feminist movement and many welfare agencies have strongly vouched for the competency of two people as adults regardless of gender to be allowed to adopt a child and care for the same. This fact is based on the idea that heterosexual couples often have problems raising children, too. Research has found no major differences in parenting or child development between families headed by two mothers and other fatherless families. In 2008, Judge Cindy S. Lederman overturned



a Florida state law that prevented homosexual couples from adopting children, stating no “moral or scientific reason for banning gays and lesbians from adopting”, despite the state’s arguments otherwise (CNN US website accessed on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2011). While, on the other hand Arkansas has recently banned all unwed couples from adopting; a law aimed specifically at homosexual couples.

Lesbian and gay couples apart there has also been a trend of two people sharing a live-in-relationship and begetting children without confirming to the age old tradition of marriage. In case of live-in-relationship the partners stay as a family on their personal consensus without undergoing the rituals of marriage which pronounce a man and a woman as husband and wife. As in the case of family, cases of domestic violence and rape have also come up in these live-in-relationships. Presently, in India such cases of domestic household violence and rape in a live-in-relationship have been sanctioned by law to be addressed by the family court.

### Reflection

#### Indian Law: Domestic Violence Act 2005

‘Different court judgments have discussed on different disputes pertaining to live-in relationships. Live-in relationships are now considered at par with marriage under a new Indian law pertaining to domestic violence. The provisions of the Domestic Violence Act, 2005 are now extended to those who are in live-in relationships as well. The amendments intend to protect the victims of domestic abuse in live-in relationships. Section 2 (g) of the aforementioned Act provides that a relationship between two individuals who live together or have lived together in the past is considered as a domestic relationship. A woman who is in a live-in relationship can seek legal relief against her partner in case of abuse and harassment. Further, the new law also protects Indian women who are trapped in fraudulent or invalid marriages.

<http://www.lawisgreek.com/court-judgments-live-relationships-and-related-disputes>, accessed on 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2011.

Live-in-relationships has been legalised in many countries and thus, falls under the purview of anthropological study of family. Students need to understand and evaluate the live-in-relationship pattern, how the emotional bonding takes place between parents and children, and the working of the kinship relations without a formal sanction (marriage).

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## 4.5 SUMMARY

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From the above discussion on family we can summarize that family has been a way of bringing together two people who stay with each other to continue the functions as administered by society. The question of when and how family as a social structure came into being is still debatable. Family like other institutions has also gone through many changes and we see a lot of variations in the family system in the traditional societies. But in the present era most of the traditional societies with polygamous and polyandrous family systems are turning into nuclear families. Likewise, a few changes have also come up in the developed societies. The blended families, live-in-relationships, gay and lesbian families are new entities in the developing world and though initially there were lots of resistences yet it has become an accepted norm in the present day scenario.

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### **Sample Questions**

- 1) Define family.
- 2) Delineate the categorization of family as given by Morgan.
- 3) State in brief the different types of family as listed by Murdock.
- 4) Critically discuss the matrilineal and the patrilineal type of families.
- 6) Discuss the changing dimensions in family in the contemporary society.