
UNIT 1 FORMS OF FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD IN INDIA

Sawmya Ray

Structure

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1.1 INTRODUCTION

Family is believed to be the most basic and the oldest unit of social organization. Through history and across societies and cultures, the family has been the basis that provided every individual with social identity in alliance with his/her social status, and also the basis for distribution and allocation of economic resources. With changing historical and social conditions over time, several other institutions emerged that took over some of the functions earlier performed by family. Yet, the family largely continues to remain the most relevant of primary groups, and the most important element in the socialization process (Giddens, 2010; Perry and Perry, 2012).

Decades of research in the social sciences have added to the understanding of family as a social unit, however, scholars have agreed to the proposition that there can be no standard definition of 'family'. Indeed, it is believed that creating clear, formal definitions of family would only lead to the exclusion of a majority of family units. This is because family is not of a single kind to be captured by a concrete definition (Goode, 1984). Given

the plurality of family forms, it is appropriate to use the term 'families' rather than just 'family'.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

- Understand the concepts of family and household and the difference between the two;
- Identify the various forms of family and household; and
- Analyse the patriarchal basis of family in India and the causes of waning of matrilineal family system in India.

1.3 DEFINITIONS OF 'FAMILY'

Levi Strauss (1971) has described family and its structures and functions in the following manner: 'social groups that originate in marriage, they consist of husband, wife, and children born of their union (although in some family forms other relatives are included); they bind members with legal, economic, and religious bonds as well as duties and privileges; and they provide a network of sexual privileges and prohibitions, and varying degrees of love, respect, and affection' (p. 56). Mainstream family studies explain family as that unit where: '(i) at least two adult persons of opposite sex reside together, (ii) they engage in some kind of division of labour, (iii) they engage in many types of economic and social exchanges; that is they do things for one another; (iv) they share many things in common, such as food, sex, residence, and both goods and social activities, (v) the adults have parental relations with their children, as their children have filial relations with them; the parents have some authority over their children and both share with one another, while also assuming some obligation for protection, cooperation, and nurturance. (vi) there are sibling relations among the children themselves, with, once more, a range of obligations to share, protect and help one another. When all these conditions exist, few people would deny that the unit is a family.' (Goode, 1982, p. 9).

Family is also defined as 'a group of individuals related to one another by blood ties, marriage or adoption, who form an economic unit, the adult members of which are responsible for the upbringing of children' (Giddens, 2010, p. 331). Rose (1968) defined family as 'a group of interacting persons who recognize a relationship with each other based on common parentage, marriage and/ or adoption' (p. 9). The importance of this definition is that while biological relationships are important in defining family membership, the real issue is the recognition of familial relationship. Family as a basic kinship group entails the dual significance of 'blood' and 'marriage'. That is, it involves both the *consanguineal* relationship (through 'blood') and

affinal relationship (through marriage). It also involves prohibition of sexual relationships between members of family excluding *affines*.

Robert Maclver (1937) outlined a list of characteristics of the family in his famous text book on *Sociology and Society which are as follows*: 1) a mating relationship; 2) a form of marriage or other institutional arrangement in accordance with which the mating relationship is established and maintained; 3) a system of nomenclature, involving also a mode of reckoning with descent; 4) some economic needs associated with child bearing and child rearing; and generally; and 5) a common habitation, home or household which, however, may not be exclusive to the family group. On the basis of the study of 250 societies, **George Peter Murdock in 1949** concluded that the family was a social group which performed essential functions that cannot be carried out as efficiently by other groups in a society and was based on residence, performed common economic activities which involved co-operation, and biological reproduction. The functions identified by Murdock are: (1) sex (socially approved sexual relationship), (2) reproduction, (3) education (enculturation) and (4) subsistence (sexual division of labour).

Scholars also argued that 'though the family is made up of individuals, yet it is also a social unit, and part of a larger social network. Families are not isolated, self enclosed social systems but intersect with other social institutions' (Goode, 1982, p.3). Family studies have shifted their attention from the discussions of universality of family, understanding on nuclear and extended family, importance of family, and relative merits of different family structures to other pressing and contemporary issues. Contemporary family studies are focusing on studies of the relationship between the public and private arena, the role of intimacy and affection in social relationships, the impact of reproductive technology and genetic engineering on family and marriage and the transformation of sexuality through social movements such as women's movement and queer movements or movements of the sexual and gender minorities, new forms of family - single parenthood, lesbian and homosexual marriages, surrogate parenting and voluntary childlessness.

In India, the family structure is an institution that social scientists have monitored with great attention especially after independence. It has now become commonplace in Indian sociology and social anthropology to distinguish between 'household' and 'family'.

1.4 HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY

In common English parlance the word 'family' has several different meanings, including 'household'; the common Indian word for the family, viz, *kutumb*, has likewise several different meanings. However, for the sake of technical

analysis, 'household' should be distinguished from the other referents of 'family'. For example, two brothers and their wives and children may live in two separate households, but they may be bound by relationships and obligations of many kinds and thus form a family.

'A group of persons sharing a home or living space, who aggregate and share their incomes, as evidenced by the fact that they regularly take meals together i.e. in what is described as the 'common cooking pot' is known as constituting a household (Scott and Marshall, 2005). In other words, a household is the basic residential unit where economic production, consumption, inheritance, child rearing and shelter are organized and carried out. As research on the institution of family unfolded, the existence of various forms of family and family dynamics the necessity to distinguish between 'family' and 'household' was felt. It was realized that a family does not necessarily consist of only one household. Often family is an extension of two or more households, members of which though may have separate residence yet may belong to same family and have familial bonding and responsibilities. Thus, scholars argued that family along with being a functional unit is more of an ideological and emotional unit, whereas household may be described as more of a functional unit.

Delineating the distinction between household and family and the relation between the two was one of the major engagements of family studies in India. Family studies emphasized that given the trends in family dynamics in India and the fact that household is functionally the more important group, it is more apt to take 'household' as the unit of analysis to understand Indian social structure rather than 'family'. This argument came from the school of thought which advocated the field view approach in anthropological and sociological disciplines.

The household according to field based scholars may be structurally similar or different from the family. Family according to them "...is a grouping of households of agnatically related men, their wives and unmarried sisters and daughters" (Shah, 1976, In Uberoi, 1993, p. 420). Thus, for them the proper object of study should be the household dimension of family rather than family itself (Uberoi, 2001, p.15). They held the opinion that household is much more than a mere physical and consumption unit. It 'represents a variety of things, ideas and images, and is a locus of social relationships with some of the deepest sentiments and emotions in human life' (Shah 1988, In Patel 2005; p.215). The household, scholars opined is intimately related to family and other structures of kinship and marriage. Therefore the household is not a discrete unit in an absolute sense. There are thus a multiplicity of household and family types instead of just the stereotyped ideal of joint and nuclear family types (Patel, 2003, p. 215).

Field based researchers thus proposed that for a proper understanding of the family type there is a need to understand the relationship between the members of a household among themselves and with members of other such households. They argued that even if households are compositionally and residentially nuclear, often they are actively joint with other households forming an emotional, economic and physical network of family. Based on such understanding of household and family field based scholars in India rejected the commonly prevalent notion of breakdown of joint families due to industrialization and modernization. According to the scholars in India the changes in family that are taking place is more complex than a simple move towards nuclear family and erosion of traditional values. They argued that it is the joint household and not the joint family that is disintegrating. They opined that even if there is separation of households, still often they continue to constitute a single family.

With empirical studies they brought to light that even after complete separation in property, income and residence the obligations between the members of the family continue in majority of cases. This bonding between different members comes out clearly through active fulfillment of responsibility of taking care of aging members of the family, supporting each other during financial and other crisis and times of need, participating in marriage and other ceremonies, taking decisions in consultation with other members of the family and maintaining relationships up to three or four generations deep. Thus scholars made the crucial point that decline in the size of the household cannot be inferred as breakdown of the family. Common residence, they held, was only one way of the manifestations of familial bonding which can exist without joint property and residence (Desai, 1955; Kolenda, 1987; Patel, 2003; Shah, 1973).

Family studies also pointed that the types of households based on the composition of family are not discrete and haphazard but are interrelated in a developmental process. This process may be in progression or in regression. Progressive development of a household takes place due to increase in membership, mainly by birth and marriage, while regressive development takes place due to decrease in membership, mainly by marriage, death and partition. Whatever be the maximum extent to which the principle goes in progression in a particular section of the society, it is important to note that the processes of progressive and regressive developments go on simultaneously in the society taken as a whole. One household may be undergoing progression, another may be undergoing regression. As a result, there are always households in the society which are small and simple in composition, along with households which are large and complex in composition. When a complex household, say, of two or more married brothers, is partitioned, two or more separate households come into existence, but at the same time a number of other relationships continue to operate. As mentioned earlier they would cooperate in economic pursuits,

hold and manage property jointly, help each other on many occasions, celebrate festivals, rituals and ceremonies jointly, and so on. This is also a normal process, which highlights the importance of technical distinction between 'household' and 'family'. Thus, two or more households may be separate but they may constitute one family (Shah, 1968).

Further, while the sociologists and anthropologists used the definition of members related through blood and marriage constituting a hearth group (common kitchen) as a household (family based on common residence which is different from other extended familial relationships without a common hearth), the Census of India and National Sample Survey Organisation have presently adopted a definition of household which is based on the criterion of group of members using a common hearth but not necessarily related by blood, kinship rules and marriage. For the purpose of these surveys, household is a technical economic unit/category. According to the **Census of India**, "A 'household' is usually a group of persons who normally live together and take their meals from a common kitchen unless the exigencies of work prevent any of them from doing so. Persons in a household may be related or unrelated or a mix of both. However, if a group of unrelated persons live in a house but do not take their meals from the common kitchen, then they are not constituent of a common household. Each such person was to be treated as a separate household. The important link in finding out whether it was a household or not was through the presence of common kitchen. There may be one member households, two member households or multi-member households" (Census of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India).

Check Your Progress:

Distinguish between family and household. Give one example from each of the categories.

1.5 FORMS OF FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD

Historically, the family has existed in two major forms. One is the extended, or consanguine, family (of the same blood). The other family form is the nuclear, also called conjugal, family (Perry and Perry, 2012, p.327). However, these are not the only two forms of family but there are various forms of family that existed across time and across societies in the same period of time. There are various criteria based on which families can be distinguished. Some major criteria are descent, residence, membership, number of mates, and authority.

1.5.1 Descent

Descent refers to the system by which members of a society/family trace kinship over generations. On the basis of ancestors or the descent family can be divided into two main types i.e. (i) Patrilineal family and (ii) Matrilineal family.

- i) Patrilineal family is the family wherein the members trace their kinship and lineage through the father or the male members in the family. Property is transferred through the male line from father to sons. This is one of the most common forms of family.
- ii) Matrilineal family is the family wherein the members trace their kinship and lineage through the mother or the female members in the family. Property is transferred through the female line from mother to daughters. Such communities may also be matrilineal in nature. This type of family is found in only certain pockets of the world such as amongst the **Garo and Khasi tribes of Northeast India and the Nair matrilineality in Kerala.**

The above two kinds of families though different in descent have certain commonalities in their adhering to rules of common property and income, co-residence, commensality, co-worship and performance of certain rights and obligations (Desai, 1956).

1.5.2 Residence

Families may be divided based on the adoption of location of residence by either or both of the married couples into the following types (a) **Patrilocal**, (b) **Matrilocal**, (c) **Neo-local**, and (d) **Duo-local**.

Box 1.1: Types of Families by Residence

Patrilocal Family: In this type of family, after marriage the wife goes and lives in the family of her husband. This family is also known as Virilocal family.

Matrilocal Family: In this family, after marriage the husband goes and lives in the house of his wife. This type of family is also known as Uxorilocal Family.

Neo-local Family: When the married couple after marriage resides in a new place and establishes family independent of their parents or of their relatives it is known as neo-local family.

Duo-local Family: In this type of family, after marriage the wife continues to stay with her mother's family and the husband continues to live with his mother's family. Nair matriliney and Matriliney in Lakshdweep are examples of Duo-local family.

1.5.3 Membership

Family can be classified according to the number of members found in the family or the size of the family. The depth of generations found in a family determines the form of the family. It can be of two kinds (i) Nuclear family, and (ii) Extended family.

Nuclear family: The term nuclear family refers to the unit consisting of a married couple and their dependent children, i.e., mother, father and child (ren). This family is also known as the conjugal family meaning 'based on marriage'. This kind of nuclear family was regarded as the normal family unit in North America and Europe. Presently, the definition of nuclear family refers to a group consisting of one or two parents and dependent offspring, which may include step-parent, step-siblings and adopted children. It is also used to cover the social reality of several types of small parent-child units, including single parents with children and same-sex couples with children.

Extended Family: Extended family refers to a family system wherein several generations live in one household. It includes not only husband, wife and their offspring but also a number of blood relatives (with their mates and children), who live together and are considered a family unit (Perry and Perry, 2012, p.327). According to a cross-cultural survey of family types in 192 cultures across the world by J. Stacy (1990), the extended family is most common, present in about 48 percent of those cultures, compared to the nuclear family at 25 percent, and polygamous family at 22 percent.

The term 'extended family' in anthropology usually referred to a family including three or more generations. In the Indian context, however, families

that include lineal and collateral links but may not include several generations were known and similarly referred to as “joint” families. The structure of the Indian family was predominantly of the joint family type. But surveys and the census pointed out that nuclear family arrangements have always predominated over joint family arrangements. Scholars have also attempted to provide an outline of various types of families that were observed to be found in India.

For example, **Pauline Kolenda** (1968) classified various types of families into twelve types: 1) Nuclear family, 2) Supplemented nuclear family, 3) Sub-nuclear family, 4) Single-person household, 5) Supplemented sub-nuclear family, 6) Collateral joint family, 7) Supplemented collateral joint family, 8) Lineal joint family, 9) Supplemented lineal joint family, 10) Lineal-collateral joint family, 11) Supplemented lineal-collateral joint family and 12) Other (the types that were not sufficiently defined by the studies to classify them under the above eleven types of families).

Kolenda’s classification of Indian families was based on four principles. First, a joint family must include at least two related married couples. Second, these couples may be related lineally (usually in a father-son relationship, occasionally father-daughter relationship) or collaterally (usually in a brother-brother relationship, occasionally in a brother-sister relationship). Third, the unmarried relatives (including widowed or divorced) who are not children of any of married couples in a family supplement the family whether it is a joint, nuclear or sub-nuclear family. Fourth, where there is no married couple and the relatives were formerly part of the same nuclear family, then it is a sub-nuclear household. If not, it is classified as a single-person household or “other”.

1.5.4 Number of Mates

Family can be classified according to the number of mates a man or woman has through marriage, i.e., (a) Monogamous family and (b) Polygamous family.

- a) **Monogamous family:** In this type of family the spouses have one partner each and follow monogamy as a rule for marriage.
- b) **Polygamous family:** This can be of two kinds i.e. polygyny and polyandry. In polygyny the husband is allowed to have two or more wives. In polyandry the wife is allowed to have two or more husbands. Polygyny is more commonly found as compared to polyandry. Todas of south India and Khasas of Himachal Pradesh in India followed polyandrous family system.

Today there is an increasing recognition that the term family should by no means only be understood as involving heterosexual couples and their children. Homosexual couples with or without children also form a household and family unit. There are voluntary aggregates consisting of two or more

homosexuals that homosexuals call families. Homosexual friendship networks, lesbian/gay couples, and homosexual communes are some example of homosexual families. Raising children can be as much a purpose for lesbians and gays forming families as for heterosexuals. Additionally the above relationships may be open or closed, biological or adoptive, contractual or informal. These pairs, friendship circles, sister/brotherhoods, marriages, and communes comprise what lesbians and gays call 'family'. Society's heterosexual hegemony has overshadowed studies on homosexual family and therefore there is a dearth of research on homosexual families in the existing family study scholarship (Bozett, 1989, xi-xiii). Increasingly lesbians and gay individuals and couples are exploring an ingenious array of parenting options to the extent they are permitted by law and policy, adoption and foster care.

1.5.5 Authority

This is one of the most important ways in which family can be classified. Here, the member of the family who holds the authority/power over other members of the family defines the kind of the family it is. There can be two kinds of family based on authority i.e. (a) patriarchal family and (b) matriarchal family.

Patriarchal Family: Authority lies in the hands of the 'patriarch' or the male head of the family. The word 'patriarchy' literally means the rule of the father or the 'patriarch', and originally it was used to describe a specific type of 'male dominated family' - the large household of the patriarch which included women, junior men, children, slaves and domestic servants all under the rule of this dominant male. A man is thus considered the head of the household; within the family he controls women's sexuality, labour or production, reproduction and mobility. There is a hierarchy in which the man is the superior and dominant, woman is inferior and subordinate. The extent and nature of male control may differ in different families, but is never absent in such families. This form of family is universal in nature and its opposite that is matriarchal form of family has no historical evidence of existence (Bhasin, 2009, p.9).

Patriarchal family ideology, feminists argue, is perpetuated through sex role socialization. Family plays an important role in such socialization ensuring the perpetuation of patriarchal family structure and ideology. Feminist studies argued that whatever may be the organization of the family in a society, every society has made labour divisions along age and gender lines. Different tasks become differentiated according to gender, and are seen to be 'man's work' and 'woman's work' In the family these develop into the social roles applying to the positions of husband, wife, son and daughter. These divisions are determined and supported by the concepts of femininity and masculinity, the biological nature of men and women and so on. To

regulate this division of labour, some authority structure is present in every family, which is patriarchal. The ruling patriarch holds the power over the family by virtue of his gender, social and cultural rules, ownership of property and other economic resources. Patriarchy rests on the appeal to nature and the claim, i.e., women's natural function of childbearing prescribes their domestic and subordinate place in the order of things.

Women are also kept out of economic activities (paid employment) altogether or are pushed into a few, low status area of employment. However, it needs to be noted that not all women were/are kept out of economic life. It is women from privileged class, race, caste, ethnicity and others who were restricted to the private sphere and household work. Marginalized women did perform menial and other stigmatized labour within household and outside. In India it was the upper caste women who were largely kept out of economic activities. Women belonging to the lower castes and other middle castes participated in economic life equally like that of men. **Bina Agarwal** (1994), in her book *A Field of One's Own*, elaborates on women and land rights. Discussing the nature of women's work in traditional economy, she argues that women have traditionally contributed equally and sometimes more labour and skills in agriculture compared to men. According to her, women seem to be more informed about seed varieties and other attributes of trees and grasses. However, despite contributing largely to agricultural and household economy women were often not granted land and property rights in patriarchal family structure. This kept them subordinated within family and community and perpetuated patriarchal structures.

Anupama Rao (2005), in her book *Gender and Caste*, highlights dalit women's contribution to economy and the exploitation and stigmatization of their labour by upper caste groups. She argues that it was the incessant exploitation of dalit women's labour in all spheres of work that gave upper caste women the privilege to remain out of manual and other stigmatized forms of work. According to her, patriarchy's subordination and exploitation of women and their labour should not be read in monolithic manner as women from different caste groups contributed differently to the patriarchal economy. Issues of women's work, labour and surplus need to be revisited from the perspective of caste and its sexual economies.

However, despite their contribution, the cultural and social norms do not provide them with equal ownership rights over family property and other means of production. All these factors contribute to the relegation of women to their 'natural' dependent place in the private, familial sphere and leave their labour valueless in the market. Their economically 'valueless' status makes them dependent upon males for subsistence and thus they remain relatively powerless. This powerlessness makes them susceptible to abuse and violence at the hands of those with power in the family i.e. the men. **Phyllis Schlafly** (1978) aptly describes this whole process when she writes,

“Idealization of family as an institution is universal. Contained in this idealization is a particular view of men and women’s roles. A man’s responsibility to his family is best met by his success in the market, which is the public sphere, his ability as a wage earner to support his wife and children. A woman’s worth is measured by her dedication to her role as wife and mother which is located in the private sphere. If a woman wants love, emotional, social, or financial security or the satisfaction of achievement, no career in the world can compete with motherhood. She has to be under the husband’s control within the family and cannot take major decisions with regard to her and the family. Any violation from the prescribed roles leads to violence, which is an accepted means of control. These are certain ideals, which forms the basis of a patriarchal family”(p.44). These are universally found characteristics that form the basis of a patriarchal family.

Check Your Progress:

Write characteristics of a patriarchal family structure.

1.6 BASIS OF FAMILY IN INDIA

In India family is taken as a cultural ideal and a focus of identity (Karlekar, 1998, p. 1741). It is inviolable as an institution and often becomes a tool to socialize family members according to prescribed norms of behaviour within an overall perspective of male dominance and control. The family functions on the basis of certain ideology that includes rules of marriage, residence, property ownership, roles and functions determined according to age and gender. These moral rules operate to maintain a certain gender-biased order integral to families and kinship systems. Gender inequality is

often institutionalized from the very beginning between the younger members. Who shall have access to which scarce resource of capital is determined by gender as well as of age of the family member. In this process the girl child is often discriminated against at every stage of her life.

Her identity is wholly defined by her relationships to others. The dominant psychological realities of her life can be condensed into three stages:

- She is a daughter to her parents.
- She is a wife to her husband (and daughter-in-law to his parents).
- She is the mother of her sons (and less significantly, daughters).

Late childhood marks the beginning of an Indian girl's deliberate training in how to be a good woman. She learns that the virtues of womanhood, which will take her through life, are submission and docility as well as skill and grace in the various household tasks (Kakar,* p.51). She is taught to be tolerant, chaste, self-sacrificing, to take up penance for the good of others, to build up her identity in relation to others, who invariably are male members of her natal or matrimonial home; she has to learn to stay within the domestic sphere. Over all, she has to conform to the prescriptions and expectations of those around her. She is constantly reminded of her inferior status as regards physical, moral and material aspects in comparison to her male counterpart. Further, the need of integration of Indian family and society in general necessitates woman to sacrifice her erotic impulses (but she is expected to always satisfy her husband's sexual needs as per his demand) and shun all loyalties to her natal home after marriage. For an Indian woman, family and kinship are more important than her rights and interests as an individual.

Any violation and deviation by her from the assigned roles and expectations often results in violence. Thus, violence as well as less explicit forms of aggression are used as methods to ensure obedience (Thapan, 1997). Through all these forms of violence women are controlled and subordinated throughout their lives. Violence against women is thus an important tool used for perpetuation of patriarchy.

Matriarchal family: There is no historical evidence of the existence of such families. Sometimes matrilineal and matrilocal systems of family have been confused with matriarchal form of family. Though in these families, position of women was evidently much better than that in patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal families, yet they were not matriarchal. In matriarchal family, women would be in a dominant position, in absolute control of family property, economic production, mobility, decision making and other situations of control. However, in matrilineal societies, real control of property was in the hands of brothers and uncles, whose consent in the

final decision making had an important though not absolute role in family and property matters (Bhasin, 2009, p.17).

In India the matrilineal and matrilocal families existed among the Nairs and other caste, tribes and religious groups in Kerala; Garo, Khasi and other indigenous groups in north east India and in certain tribes in Lakshadweep Island (Arunima, 2003; Bhasin, 2009; Dube, 2001; Saradmoni, 1999). Although matrilineal, they did not have a uniform pattern but differed considerably in customs and practices across castes and regions. However, these systems have been weakening and disappearing under the pressure of patriarchal ideology, caste reform movements, legal systems which have displaced customary and community diversity and the pervasiveness of modernity, which demands uniformity (Bhasin, 2009, p.17).

A matrilineal exogamous unit consists of one or more production and consumption units. The oldest male of each group is usually the manager and legal guardian of property (Papanek, 1971). Various characteristics of matrilineality as it existed in different parts of India include strong matrilineal descent groups, property groups as residential and commensal households constituted of matrilineal kin, matrilocal and duolocal residence with visiting marriage, the absence of the institutionalized conjugal family, inter-caste hypergamy, and some non-fraternal polyandry. Flexible marriage norms, easy divorce, absence of stigma attached to the remarriage of widows and divorcees; women, single, married, divorced or widowed with young children managing their affairs with confidence and, though helped by their brother, taking most major decisions themselves were the norm. Children and adult women had strong ties with their matrilineal kin, while at the same time were also in some groups cared for by the children's close paternal kin i.e., the women's affines. Identity with their natal home throughout life and the right to residence and maintenance in their matrilineal unit gave women security and independence. Sometimes, even though they stayed with their husbands, women could and did go back to their natal places with their children when widowed or estranged (Dube, 2001, p.3145).

In Malabar region of Kerala, the traditional Nair 'taravad' was a property group consisting of a matrilineal lineage headed and represented by the senior male member called 'karnavan' (Dube, 2001, p. 3145). Taravad estates were held in trust for the support of the women and their descendants in the female line, with no individual partition. Control and management of the property was performed by the karnavan. In respect of Nair marriage, women entered into 'sambandham' with men of their own caste or castes above. It was a simple affair. Children belonged to the mother's taravad and had rights of maintenance there. Dissolution of sambandham was easy. Widows were not considered inauspicious, nor were they subjected to inhuman treatment as often happened among the upper castes in patrilineal

India. Women continued to be members of their natal taravads throughout life, with rights of residence and maintenance there. A man was not considered legally responsible for protecting or maintaining his wife and children, although cases of men doing that were not lacking.

However, major state interventions in independent India had a bearing on matrilineal groups (Dube, 2001, p.3144). Drastic changes in the matrilineal set up in Kerala was initiated in the 19th century and finally materialized through legislation in the early decades of the 20th century. The changes were brought forth both from factors internal and external to Nair matrilineal communities. One the one hand new education and exposure to new ideas, the generation of new opportunities, the creation of paid and transferable employment, changes in land ownership and land use, the development of trade and communications including roads and the railways, reconfigured equations within the Nair families. On the other the establishment of the legislative council and modern law courts, all played an important role in the demands for reform in matrilineality.

The entirely different character of marriage within the matrilineal groups was responsible for a derogatory attitude among others - both high caste patrilineal Hindus and people of other religions - towards Nair sambandham. These groups equated the sambandham with concubinage. Nair men were criticized for not taking up the appropriate responsibilities towards their women, wives and children. All these caused embarrassment to Nair men who were now looking at the matrilineal system through the exposure that western ideas and values provided them. They were made to feel inferior and uncivilized and it hurt their masculinity. Changes were thus not only forced from outside but also sought from within and these changes were generally looked upon as progressive measures (Arunima, 2003; Dube, 2001; Saradamoni, 1999).

The establishment of the legislative council gave a voice to demands from these sections of Nair men exposed to western thought and ways of living for reforms in institutions. As the reform movement gained momentum, a memorandum was submitted to the government. The outcome in the long run of the reform movement and the imposition of patrilineal-patriarchal ideology was legal recognition of sambandham as marriage, recognition of succession, duties and powers of the karnavan and junior members, and feasibility of partition of taravad property. Sambandham unions were made valid marriages and marriage was a civil contract. The husband was made responsible for the maintenance of the wife and minor children, for this were considered in keeping with the practices of the 'civilized' world. Marriage and its dissolution, maintenance and guardianship, and intestate succession did contribute to large scale divisions and alienation in taravads. Thus, major legislative enactments brought about radical changes in marriage,

inheritance and property relations leading to replacement of matriliney with patrilineal set up (Arunima, 2003).

In the legislative council matriliney was presented as a family system where women were protected by the maternal uncle and the brother, and what the legislators were doing was to end that and place women under the protection of their husbands, which was the common practice in the 'civilized' world. The changes in the system and attempts to put the husband-wife and father-children relations on a firm basis were supported by arguing that they were progressive and took the society to a modern age. Contrary to such claims of progressive outcome of reforms, the changes brought in regressive results for women and pushed them to a less than equal position (Saradmoni, 1999).

In a matrilineal system all the members in a taravad were equal, at least in theory. In the new arrangements the husband became a master who could dictate conditions for maintenance. Women's status was not the same under patriliney and matriliney, and changes in matriliney gave a new legitimacy to female subordination and male superiority (Dube, 2001, p.3147).

Check Your Progress:

Give an example of matrilineal family structure in India.

1.7 LET US SUM UP

The unit discussed the concept of family as a social institution and it is universal in nature. Further, the unit explained the various forms of families which are classified according to the lineage, residence pattern, number of members in the household, number of mates, authority and others. As you have read, in India majority of the families are patrilineal, patrifocal and patrilocal in nature. Though, matrilineal families are/were present in certain parts of India, largely due to the wake of modernization and the civilization of the mainstream societies the institution has given way to patrilineal-patrilocal families. Largely, patriarchal families are the norm of families in India and elsewhere.

1.8 GLOSSARY

Civilized : The world of the colonizers, the Western societies, which was wrongly argued as higher in form and order in the process of evolution of societies as compared to India, which as the British would argue was in a primitive stage of social evolution. Even within Indian society, given the largely patriarchal nature of society and national movement, matrilineal communities were looked down upon and considered uncivilized to the ways of brahminical patriarchy.

1.9 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Define family and explain the different types of families in India.
- 2) What is the difference between the family and the household? Discuss it from a feminist perspective.
- 3) Examine the circumstances that had led to changes in matrilineal families in India? Discuss with the help of examples.

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