
UNIT 6 FAMILY LIFE

Structure

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6.0 INTRODUCTION

In Unit-5, you have learnt about the concepts such as demography, population dynamics, population studies, population education, family life education, sex education, family planning (education) and their interrelationship. Now, in Unit-6, we will focus our discussion on family life touching upon the concept, types, roles, needs, shared rights and responsibilities of family in general, and the role of parents in promoting gender equity and equality in caring the children and the aged, and in deciding the family size for better quality of life in particular.

6.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through the Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the concept of family, its structure, types and roles;
- Recognise the importance of basic needs, shared rights and responsibilities of family;

- Appreciate the significance of responsible parenthood, gender equality, caring the children and the aged in family; and
- Analyse interrelationship between the small family norm and the quality of life.

6.2 CONCEPT, CHARACTERISTICS AND TYPES OF FAMILY

As an adult, you must be having your own concepts and meaning of “Family” and “Family Life”. But, your concept of family will be clearer to you after going through this unit. To begin with, we all know that human beings are social animals and wish to live in groups and family is one such group in our society. We all need family for lot many reasons – mutual love, care, support and warmth and also to procreate and continue the human species/race. A family is the unit, which builds up a person’s personality. The way we behave, what we become in life, etc depend very much on our family life and also the influence of the neighbourhood families on our family and vice-versa, among many other things. A child learns the most first from his or her family (life). Family is an important part of our life compared to (m)any other part(s) of our life, as it gives us not only basic strength that a person requires but also exert significant influence on our life as a whole.

6.2.1 Concept of Family

Family is the unit of a society. Family is the simplest and the most elementary form of any society. It is a universal social institution and an inevitable and inseparable part of the human life. Of all the social groups, family touches the life of the individuals most intimately. Starting from birth to death, the family exerts a constant influence on the individuals. It is the first group in which we find ourselves comfortable as it provides for the most enduring relationship in one form or the other. Every individual grows up in a family and every one of us is a member of one family or the other. Family can be defined in general as a group of individuals united by blood ties, marriage or adoption, and residing together. Families form the society, though the form of the family varies widely across the world.

The word ‘Family’ is taken from Latin word ‘Famulus’ which means a servant. In Roman law, the word ‘family’ denotes a group of producers, slaves and other servants as well as members connected by common descent or marriage. Thus, family, to begin with, consists of at least a man (husband) and a woman (wife) leaving with physical/sexual relationship, either with or without a child or children. Historically, the concept of family has undergone several changes, from a hard and fast social structure or institution to a flexible human relationship. Thus, family, to put in its simplest definition, is a more or less durable association of husband and wife, with or without children and/or other dependents.

Different scholars have defined family in different ways.

- The family is a group of persons united by ties of marriage, blood or adoption constituting a single household interacting with each other in their respective social role of husband and wife, mother and father, brother and sister, creating a common culture” (Burgess and Lock, 1950).

- Family is a social group characterized by a common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship and one or more children of the sexually co-habiting adults or adopted by them (Murdock, 1949).
- Family is a group defined by sex-relationships sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children (MacIver and Page, 1959).
- Family is a group of persons whose relations to one another are based upon consanguinity and who are therefore kin to one another (Kingsley Davis, 1960).
- Family is the institution within which the cultural traditions of a society are handed over to a newer generation. This indispensable function could not be fulfilled unless there are relations between parents and children; the relations reciprocally of authority and respect (Malinowski, 1927).

From the above definitions, it becomes easy to sum up the meaning, or offer general definition of the family. In simple words, family is a system of relationships existing between parents and their own or adopted children. It is a biological and social unit composed of husband and wife, if smallest, and added to by child(ren).

With this understanding of the concept of family, let us identify its characteristics.

6.2.2 General Characteristics of Family

We can identify the following features/characteristics of family, as they can be inferred from the kind of relationships that we can easily imagine to exist between its members in general.

- i) **A Mating Relationship:** A family comes into existence when a man and a woman establish mating relationship between them. When there is no marital relationship, the possibilities for its break down are more.
- ii) **A Form of Marriage:** Mating relationship is established through the institution of marriage. In marriage, parents or elders may select partners for their sons/daughters or the choice may be entirely left to the individuals concerned.
- iii) **A system of Nomenclature:** Every family is known by a name and has its own system of reckoning descent, be it through the male lineage or the female lineage.
- iv) **An Economic Provision:** Every family needs income and other material support to satisfy the economic needs, usually carried out by the head of the family.
- v) **A Common habitation:** A family requires a home or household for its living. This becomes inevitable for bearing and rearing of children.
- vi) **Universal institution:** Family is a universal institution found in every age and in every society.

Thus, a family is primarily characterized by biological relationships implying institutionalized relationship between the husband and the wife, and other members. All societies — ancient or modern, primitive or civilized – consist of one form of family or the other.

6.2.3 Distinctive Features of Family

Family has the greatest sociological significance. It occupies the central position in social structure and functions. The family, unlike other institutions, enjoys a unique position in every society because of its distinctive features, which are as follows.

- i) **Universality:** There is no human society in which some form of the family or the other does not exist. According to Malinowski (1927), the typical family is a group consisting of mother, father and their progeny which is found in all communities. The irresistible sex needs, the urge for reproduction and the common economic needs have contributed to this universal existence of family.
- ii) **Emotional basis:** Family is built upon the sentiments of mutual love, affection, sympathy, cooperation, relationship and friendship. It is based on emotions, procreation, maternal devotion, fraternal love, parental care and sentiments of the members.
- iii) **Limited size:** The family is the smallest social unit and is smaller in size as compared to the other social groups.
- iv) **Formative influence:** The family is the earliest social environment with which the child comes into contact. It is the most important agency for socialization of children. It shapes the personality by molding the character of its members, and emotionally conditions the children.
- v) **Nuclear positions in the social structure:** The family, being the nucleus of all other social organizations, occupies the central position in the social structure. The entire social structure is made up of family units, which in turn influence the life of society.
- vi) **Responsibility of members:** The members of the family have certain responsibilities, duties and obligations. The smooth running of the family depends on how best the members discharge their responsibilities in mutual co-operation and co-ordination with the other members of the family.
- vii) **Social regulation:** The family is guarded by certain social and legal regulations. The society takes precaution to safeguard family from any possible break down – by divorce, desertion or separation.

6.2.4 Structure and Types of Family

Family structure is conceptualized as the configuration of role, power, status and relationships in the family. Family structure has implications for family unity and stability and development of individuals. The functions that the family as an institution performs are divided among family members in the form of roles. *Roles* are culturally defined and are passed on to generations. The family structure can be explained as follows.

- **Filial Relation:** Parent-child relation.
- **Fraternal Relation:** Relation between siblings.
- **Conjugal Relations:** Relation between husband and wife.
- **In-law Relation:** Relation between family members related through marriage and not by blood.

Reflection

With the understanding of “family” you just think of as to how you can distinguish between family and other social groups on the basis of: a) Universality; b) Emotional Basis; c) Limited Size; and d) Formative Influence. Assess for yourself, whether the concept and meaning of family you had just before reading the above sub-sections had changed now or not?

Based on the structure of the family we can classify it into different types or forms. We will discuss these types or forms below.

Types of Family: On the basis of different considerations families can be classified into various types as follows.

- 1) **Types based on marriage:** On the basis of marriage family can be classified into three major types, viz. the following.
 - i) **Monogamous family:** It is a form of family in which an individual has only one spouse at any one time. The most widespread form of marriage is monogamous, which is preferred in most parts of the world. Monogamy appears in two forms. *Serial monogamy* in which the individual may remarry after the death or divorce of a spouse, and *straight-life monogamy* in which remarriage is not permitted.
 - ii) **Polygamous family:** It is a general term that covers any form of marriage of three or more persons. Polygamy may appear in two forms:
 - **Polygynous family:** The family in which a man has several wives at the same time.
 - **Polyandrous family:** The family in which a woman has more than one husband simultaneously.
- 2) **Types based on the nature of authority:** On this basis, family can be classified into the following two main types.
 - i) **Matriarchal family:** The matriarchal family is also known as the mother-centered or mother-dominated family. Here, the mother or the woman is the head of the family and she exercises her authority. All the members of the family are subordinate to her. In this system, women reign supreme and hold full possession of all legal rights and family power. In India, it is found in small pockets in south and the northeast India. For example, the Nairs and Mappillas in Kerala, the tribal groups of Minicoy Island of Lakshadweep and the Khasis and the Garos of Meghalaya have the matriarchal family system.

Characteristics of matriarchal family: These include the following.

- a) *Descent, inheritance and succession:* Here the descent is traced through the mother. Daughters inherit the property of the mother. They succeed their mother. The status the children is mostly decided by the status of mother.
- b) *Matrilocal residence:* Matriarchal family is matrilocal in residence. After the marriage, wife stays back in her mother's house. The husband pays occasional visits to the wife's house.
- c) *Exercise of Power:* In theory, the mother exercises authority and power in the matriarchal family. She is the head of the family and her decisions are final.

- ii) *Patriarchal Family:* The patriarchal family is also known as father-centered or the father-dominated family. Patriarchy is a social system in which the role of the male as the primary authority is central to social organization, and where fathers hold authority over women, children, and property. In a patriarchal family, the father or the eldest male member is the head of the family and he exercises authority. In most patriarchal societies, the male spouse makes the major decisions, but his power is based on cultural norms rather than legal traditions.

Characteristics of patriarchal family: These include the following.

- a) *Descent, inheritance and succession:* Patriarchal families are patrilineal in nature, that is, the descent is traced through the male lineage. Only the male child inherits the property of the father. In some instances, the eldest male child enjoys some special rights and normally succeeds the father.
- b) *Residence:* Patriarchal family is patriarchal in residence. Sons continue to stay with the father in his own house after their marriages and the wives come and join them. Children are brought up in their father's family.
- c) *Authority:* The father or the eldest male member of the patriarchal family is the dominant person. He takes all major decisions pertaining to the family affairs and he is the owner and manager of the family property.

- 3) *Types based on size or structure and the depth of generations:* On the basis of size, structure and depth of generations, the family can be classified into the following types.

- i) *Nuclear family:* The nuclear family comprises couples and their unmarried children and is generally financially independent of other families. A nuclear family is an autonomous unit free from the control of the elders. Since the newly-weds create a separate residence, the physical distance between parents and married child or between parents and grandparents minimizes their interdependence. The nuclear family is the characteristic of all the modern industrial societies. The nuclear family is the basic building-block of most kinship systems. It is the most important unit in terms of the social functions of the family in

contemporary western civilization. The nuclear family fits the needs of industrial societies more adequately than extended family structures. The nuclear family is ideal and almost universal.

The structure of the nuclear family: The structure of the nuclear family is not same everywhere. T. B. Bottomore (1962) makes a distinction between the two kinds of nuclear family systems: a) the family systems in which the nuclear family is relatively independent, b) the family systems in which the nuclear family is incorporated in, or subordinated to a relatively larger group, that is to the extended family.

The independent family, which is a common feature in the modern industrial society, has emerged mainly due to the growth of society, social mobility and individualism. The modern nuclear family is mainly found in the advanced societies of the west and is becoming gradually common in the developing countries also.

- ii) *Joint or the Extended Family:* The joint family is also called as the undivided family or the extended family. In an extended family, three are more generations included in a single, functional family consisting of grand-parents, parents, grand-children, brothers, sisters and their spouse and children. Joint family can be defined as “a group of individuals who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common, who participate in common family worship and are related to each other as some particular type of kindred” (Karve, 1965). It normally consists of members who at least belong to three generations: husband and wife, their married and unmarried children and their married and unmarried grandchildren. The joint family system constitutes the basic social institution in many traditional societies, particularly in India.

Characteristics of joint family: These include the following.

- a) *Large size:* The joint family is large consisting of people of three or more generations including at least grandparents, parents and children, and other near-relatives.
- b) *Common Residence:* The members of the joint family usually live under the same roof. They may also live in separate houses in close proximity to each other.
- c) *Common Kitchen:* Members eat the food prepared jointly at the common kitchen.
- d) *Common Property:* The members hold a common property. The total earning of the members are pooled into a family treasury and the family expenses are met out of that.
- e) *Common Religion:* Generally, the members of the joint family believe in the same religion and worship similar deities. They perform jointly the religious rites and duties.
- f) *Exercise of Authority:* In the patriarchal joint family, usually the eldest male member exercises authority and other members are subordinate to him. In contrast to this, in the matriarchal joint family, the eldest female member exercises the supreme authority.

Merits of the joint family system: These include the following.

- *Ensures economic progress:* The joint family meets the basic needs of its members -- food, clothing and shelter.
- *Advantage of division, of labour:* Every member in the family is given the advantage of division of labour.
- *Social insurance:* The joint family acts as a social insurance for the old, sick and incapable.
- *Helps social control:* The joint family acts as an agent of social control by exercising control over the behaviour of its members. The individuals are taught to subordinate their individual interests to family interests.
- *Promotes psychological security:* The joint family, through creating a harmonious atmosphere in the family, contributes to the development of social solidarity. It provides psychological security to its members and prevents the growth of excessive individuation inside the family.

Demerits of joint family: These include the following.

- *Retards the development of personality:* The joint family system does not provide enough opportunity to its members to develop the qualities of adventure, self-determination, industriousness, etc. The elders take up most of the responsibilities and the younger ones are over protected.
- *Un-controlled procreation:* In the joint family, the responsibility for bringing up and educating the children is shared. The offspring of one member is treated on the same footage as others.
- *Promotes idleness:* The joint family is said to be the home of idlers. Since all members of the family are assured of the basic necessities of life, no one takes much interest in productive activities.
- *Undermines the status of women:* In patriarchal joint families, women have only secondary roles and are not given sufficient freedom to express and to develop their personality. Women in such families can hardly resist their elders because obedience is enforced upon them.

Gradual disintegration of joint family in India: The joint family system is most suited to agricultural societies. With the trend towards urbanization and industrialization, the joint family living arrangement becomes irrelevant. Modern education brought about a change in the attitudes, beliefs, values and ideologies of people. Educational attainment and economic independence results in individualism among men and women. As the level of education rises, the proportion of people supporting the joint family system gradually decreases. The large-scale migration of people from rural areas also affected the existence of joint families. Cities provide opportunities for men and women for gainful employment. When people start earning, they also seek freedom. Change in age at marriage, freedom in mate selection, changing attitudes towards marriage has affected the traditional joint family set-up. In addition to these, the increasing influence of western values and cultures also undermine the authority of elders and questions the relevance of joint family arrangements. Many scholars argue that joint family system in India is not only changing, but also tending towards disintegration.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

1) Explain in brief the general characteristics of family.

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2) Describe the effect of urbanization on disintegration of joint family in India.

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6.3 BASIC NEEDS, SHARED RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF FAMILY

Basic needs of the family are of different types: biological, physical, social, psychological / emotional, economic, educational and religious, among others. The family has to meet these needs, and the members of the family have different rights and responsibilities in this regard. These rights and responsibilities are integral part of the functions of the family.

In this section, the focus of our discussion will, therefore, be on the functions of the family, and shared rights and responsibilities of its members. Further, we will also touch upon the social changes affecting the Indian family system and the alternative family systems emerging in India.

6.3.1 Functions of Family

The family as a social institution performs several functions. Opinions, however, differ regarding the functions of the family. Kingsley Davis (1960) has categorized the main functions of the family into four divisions: i) Reproduction, ii) Maintenance, iii) Placement, and iv) Socialization of the young.

Lundberg (1956) has listed four basic functions of the family:

- i) The regulation of sexual behaviour and reproduction.
- ii) Care and training of children.
- iii) Co-operation and division of labour.
- iv) Primary group-satisfaction.

Ogburn and Nimkoff (1940) have divided family functions into six main categories: i) Affectional, ii) Economic, iii) Recreational, iv) Protective, v) Religious, and vi) Educational.

After combined reading of and a comprehensive look at the categories of functions mentioned above, we can divide the functions of the family into two broad categories: i) essential functions, and ii) non-essential functions.

i) *Essential functions of the family:* These include the following:

- *Stable satisfaction of sex-needs:* The sexual behaviour of men and women is regulated through family and, thus, it provides for the satisfaction of sex-needs.
- *Reproduction or procreation:* The process of reproduction is institutionalized in the family. The family introduces legitimacy to the act of reproduction.
- *Production and rearing of children:* It is one of the most essential functions of the family and is also called as the maintenance function of the family. Family is the best institution for production and rearing of children and no other institution can bring up children as efficiently as a family can.
- *Provision of home:* Family provides the home for its members and the entire family is dependent on it for comfort, protection, space and peace.
- *Family as an agent of socialization and cultural transformation:* The family guarantees not only the biological continuity of the human race but also the cultural continuity of the society of which it is a part. Along with the cultural transformation, the family also indoctrinates the child with the values, morals, beliefs and ideals of the society. Family acts as a mechanism to discipline the individuals.
- *Function of status ascription:* The family is the source of our social identification. Our families confer upon us the nationality and the ethnic, religious, residential, educational and/or class status.

ii) *Non-essential functions of the family*: These include the following.

- *Economic functions*: The fulfillment of the economic functions of the society has been the traditional function, but one of the most important functions of the family.
- *Educational functions*: The family provides the basis for the child's formal learning. In spite of changes occurring in society, the family still provides the child the basic training in social attitudes and habits important to participation in social life.
- *Religious functions*: The family is a centre for the religious training of the children. The family not only meets the spiritual needs of its members but also passes on the religious inheritance to the next generation.

6.3.2 Shared Rights and Responsibilities within the Family

Family relationship consists of natural, humane and caring qualities which are strengthened by promoting and protecting every individual's rights for status, equality, freedom of choice, social security, and physical security from abuse and violence. Each individual member of the family is expected to behave rationally and perform certain functions. These functions cast certain roles and responsibilities upon each member and are to be performed by each member accordingly. These are influenced by social norms and practices. If these roles and responsibilities are not performed by each of them as expected, then disharmony prevails in the family, and at times, in the neighbourhood and society as well. Thus, each member of the family has certain rights and responsibilities. The healthy growth and development of the family can be ensured when both the parents share the responsibility of looking after the children, and other members of the family as the case may be. When male members join female members in performing household responsibilities including child-rearing, it leads to the improvement of the quality of life in the family. The elderly (aged) members of the family and the children need special care and emotional security. If there are some handicapped members in the family, they also need extra support from others. All the family members are supposed to take care of such members and respect their individuality. They are as valued members of the family as others.

The major rights and responsibilities that are shared among the members of the family are listed below.

- i) Every member has the right to equal allocation of family resources, and equal responsibility towards household work.
- ii) Both the married partners have the rights to gender equality in their conjugal and other related affairs.
- iii) Every member has the right to freedom and choices in family life.
- iv) Every member has the right to life and security of person.
- v) Every member has the right to care and support from other family members in crisis events such as disability, illness and old-age.
- vi) Individuals are free to seek legal protection of the State for their rights within the family.

- vii) It is the responsibility of every family member to register birth, marriage and death of every family member.
- viii) It is the responsibility of every family member to promote sensitivity and responsiveness, democratic decision-making, and peaceful and non-violent approaches to solving conflicts in their family interactions and affairs.

6.3.3 Social Changes Affecting Indian Family System

Family as a social institution continues to be one of the most important elements in the fabric of Indian society with deep-rooted values. If we look at the general and distinctive characteristics/features of family discussed elsewhere above with special reference to the context of Indian family, both historically and currently, it is an undisputed fact that the family in India has contributed to the stability of Indian society and culture. Today, the Indian family is subject to the effects of changes that have been taking place in the economic, political and cultural spheres of our society. The process of industrialization, urbanization and migration along with the changes in the socio-economic, political and cultural milieu of our society have led to changes in the structure, functions, roles, relationships and values of the family. Due to increased urbanization and migration, the concept of joint or extended family in India is gradually fading away and resulting in the formation of more and more number of nuclear families.

A major aspect of the family that has been affected or influenced most is the *traditional role allocated on the basis of sex, age or kinship*. Due to increasing employment of women, their traditional role has changed and similarly the roles of the father, mother and elders in the family has also changed. The cherished Indian values such as respect for the aged, concern for the weak, devotion to one's duty and co-operation are also undergoing changes.

The concepts of freedom, individuality and rights have had their impacts on the relationships in the family too. Today's family is slowly moving towards materialism, individualism and liberalism. The function of setting moral standards for the children and adolescents has been taken over to a great extent by peer-groups, mass-media, etc. In other words, the influence of family on socialization and personality development of individuals is gradually declining.

The consequences of these changes are visible in the form of problems such as child-neglect, behavioural problems in children, indiscipline among the youth, alcoholism, neglect of the elderly, elderly abuse, desertion, divorces, etc. Therefore, there is a need for the families to cope with the pressures and challenges of their life situations, which are affected by the interacting forces in the economic, political and cultural spheres, among others. In the process of the families adjusting to the changing circumstances, there is inevitable emergence of alternative family patterns in India.

6.3.3.1 Alternative Family Patterns Emerging in India

In Indian society, many variations are occurring in the family life due to personal or socio-economic circumstances. India is experiencing the most striking feature of the presence of a range of family variations, from the traditional extended families with strict gender-based (and gender-biased) sex roles to the modern dual-career families (wife and husband employed) based on liberal sex roles such as adults cohabiting without marriage. Of course, there are experimental or

chosen lifestyles, like living without marrying and being childless voluntarily, which are restricted to an extremely small group of people. Thus, most commonly observed family variations or patterns of emerging families in India are:

- i) Single-parent families,
- ii) Female-headed households,
- iii) Dual earners or dual-career families,
- iv) Single-child families, and
- v) Childless families.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.
 b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under "Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions".

3) What are the essential functions of a family?

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4) What are the major changes taking place in the Indian family system?

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6.4 RESPONSIBLE PARENTHOOD: GENDER EQUALITY, CARE OF THE CHILDREN AND THE AGED

As we have discussed elsewhere above, the family is the first and the most important institution that the child comes into contact with and it shapes the life and personality of the individual. Parents play an important role in the upbringing of the children. Responsible parenting is essential for proper growth and development of the children and also other dependent members of the family,

including the aged. In this section, we would be discussing these aspects of responsible parenting with an emphasis on gender equality, care of the children and the aged.

6.4.1 Responsible Parenting

A marriage relationship undergoes transition from simple husband and wife relationship into parenthood with addition of any child(ren) to the family. The transition to parenthood is quite different from the other transitions in life. At times, it may create crisis in the life of married couple as it forces them to take on an important and demanding responsibility. In fact, the task of parenting leaves the couple little time to devote for each other.

Parenting is the process of raising and educating a child from birth until adulthood. Parenting is the process by which parents or other significant caregivers rear children in their heritage and for life in their society. Parenting is used interchangeably with words such as “bringing up” or “child-rearing”. The constant overseeing of small children and infants is necessary for their survival. Parenting is the process by which the children learn the basic skills necessary or essentially required in life; they develop self-identity and learn to be autonomous (Shashi, 2007).

Responsible parenthood refers to the will, ability and commitment of parents to respond to the needs and aspirations of children and the entire family, particularly through family planning. Responsible parenthood means effective sharing of the responsibilities of parents. One of the basic purposes of entering into marriage and founding the family is that of procreation. Parents bear and rear children and it is a joint responsibility of both the parents to plan child-birth and spacing and make every provision for their future. Parental responsibilities relate to pregnancy, antenatal care, childbirth, post-natal care, child-rearing, growth and development of the child.

Methods and aspects of parenting: Parenting usually utilizes rewards, praise and punishment as tools of behavioural control of child. The different aspects of parenting are as follows:

- i) *Physical care:* It includes the provision of shelter, physical safety, nourishment, education and medical care.
- ii) *Social development and emotional support:* It includes the following.
 - a) Love and play.
 - b) Social skills and etiquette.
 - c) Ethics and value systems.
 - d) Moral and spiritual development.
 - e) Norms and contribution to the child’s religion and ethnic customs.
- iii) *Financial support:* This aspect of parenting includes the provision of financial support to the children for carrying out various activities such as education, medical care and other basic requirements (Shashi, 2007).

Aspects of responsible parenthood: The different aspects of responsible parenthood are as follows.

- Responsible parenthood means the knowing and respecting the parental functions.
- To deliberate and take generous decision to raise a family with due respect for the morale and law either to avoid for the time being or even for an indeterminate period, a new birth.
- Husband and wife should recognize fully their own duties towards themselves, towards the family and towards the society, in a correct hierarchy of values.

6.4.2 Gender Equity and Equality

Gender equity refers to fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men, and often requires women-specific projects and programs to end existing inequalities. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has declared that women have a right to equality (UNFPA, 2006). United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) defines gender equality as "Leveling the playing fields for girls and women by ensuring that all children have equal opportunity to develop their talents" (UNICEF, 2008). Gender equity is an important aspect of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to end world poverty by 2015. "Every single goal is related to women's rights, and societies where women are not afforded equal rights as men can never achieve development in a sustainable manner" (UNFPA, 2006).

Gender equality is the first and the foremost of the human rights. Women are entitled to live with dignity and freedom from wants and fears. Empowering women is an indispensable tool for advancing development and reducing poverty. Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of the whole family and community at large along with improving the prospects for the future generations. The importance of gender equality is underscored by its inclusion as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and gender equality is considered to be a key in achieving the other seven goals. In spite of all these, discrimination against women and girls -- including gender-based violence, economic discrimination, reproductive health inequalities and harmful traditional practices -- remain the most pervasive and persistent forms of inequality (UNFPA, 2006).

Responsible parenthood plays a major role in gender equality. It is the parents especially the mother, who can ensure that the girls are treated on equal-footing as that of the boys in the family. Parents should ensure that there is no gender discrimination with respect to the basic facilities such as proper food, medical care, educational facilities, etc.

Our world is characterized by deeply unequal sharing of the burden of adversities between the two sexes. Gender inequality is present in most parts of the world and this inequality can take various forms. In fact, gender inequality is not a homogenous phenomenon but is rather a collection of disparate and interlinked problems. According to Amartya Sen (2001), the *seven types of gender inequality* are as follows.

- Mortality inequality:** In some regions in the world, gender inequality involves the matters of life and death, and takes the brutal form of unusually high mortality rates for women and consequently the preponderance of men in

total population, as compared to the preponderance of women found in societies with little or no gender bias in health care and nutrition. Mortality inequality is observed extensively in North Africa and in Asia, including China and South Asia.

- ii) **Natality inequality:** Son preference, which is common feature in most of the male-dominated societies, can manifest itself in the form of the parents wanting the child to be a boy, instead of a girl. With the availability of new technologies to determine the gender of the foetus, sex-selective abortions have become common in many countries. This is particularly prevalent in China, South Korea and India. This *high-tech sexism* is also emerging as a statistically significant phenomenon in India and South Asia (Sekher and Hatti, 2010).
- iii) **Basic facility inequality:** Women also face inequality in the basic facilities such as education. In countries such as Afghanistan, India and also in the countries of Latin America and Africa, girls have far less opportunity of schooling than boys do. Besides education, the inequalities in other basic facilities available to women including the encouragement to nurture their talents, the participation in rewarding social functions of the community, etc., continue at large.
- iv) **Inequality in special opportunities:** Even when little difference is present with respect to the basic facility including schooling, the opportunities of higher education may be fewer for young women as compared to the men. Indeed, gender bias in higher education and professional training can be observed even in some of the richest countries of the world, like Europe and North America.
- v) **Professional inequality:** Though lesser in degree, gender inequality does exist in employment and promotion in work and occupation. Women are likely to face higher handicap than men in certain areas.
- vi) **Ownership inequality:** In many societies, the ownership of property is very unequal and even basic assets such as homes and lands are shared unequally. This type of inequality has existed in most parts of the world, though there are local variations. In India, even though traditional property rights have favoured men in bulk, the Nairs in Kerala are an exception with the matrilineal family system.
- vii) **Household inequality:** Gender inequalities exist in different forms such as son preference, anti-female bias in survival, sharing the burden of household work and childcare. In many societies, the concept of men working outside the home is accepted but for women work outside home should be combined with various inescapable and unequally shared household duties. This inequality includes unequal relations not only within the family but also in employment and recognition in the outside world (Amartya Sen, 2001).

There are, thus, several dimensions of gender inequality existing in all societies including India. Therefore, responsible parenthood would ensure that these gender inequalities are absent in upbringing of their children.

6.4.3 Care of the Children

Care of children includes physical care of the young children and provision of educational and other facilities to them as they grow. Bringing a child into the world means making a commitment for its proper upbringing. Therefore, parents have to decide how many children they wish to have and when. The decision has to be taken by both the spouses together, in the interest of the health of the mother and the growth and development of the child(ren). Parents have to provide opportunities for the child to grow and develop into a useful and responsible member of the society. Every child has a right to get proper love and care of the parents. Without discrimination based on gender, the parents have to take care of the health, nutritional, educational and other needs of the children. One of the most important tasks of the parents is to get the child immunized strictly according to the immunization schedule. Each child has a right to get education to become a productive and enlightened citizen. It is essential that the parents give equal treatment to the girl-child in every respect on par with their son.

Healthy growth of the child – boy or girl – to a great extent depends on the health of the mother. When the size of the family is small with adequate spacing between child-births, there is scope for better health of the children and, the mother is most likely to be in a good state of physical, mental and social health and also would be in better position to socialize them more effectively.

Role of the family in socialization of the child: Every family and society prescribes its own ways and means of giving social training to its newborn members, so that they may develop their own personality. This social training is called “socialization”. Socialization is a process by which persons learn the ways of living in a given society. Children are, therefore, taught the values of their society through contact with already socialized individuals.

Family is the first agency that acts in the socialization process of children. Family is the most important agent in socialization of the children as it maintains contacts with the children for longer period of time as compared to the other groups or agencies of the society and through close emotional association it is also able to exert maximum influence on their life at home and in the society. Both adults and other siblings act as role models in providing examples for children in development of their personality by bringing in attitudinal and behavioral changes in them. The process of socialization begins, for everyone, in the family. The parental, particularly the maternal, influence on the child is very great in its socialization process.

6.4.4 Ageing and Family: The Indian Context

In India, the family is the most important institution for supporting aged persons in their advanced age. The Indian family, like most families in oriental culture, is considered strong, well knit, resilient and enduring. However, heterogeneity and diversity are the characteristics of Indian families. There are regional and cultural variations in the family structure and functioning. The norms and values of family-life vary according to religion, caste, social class and residential patterns (Dhruvaranjan, 1989). In traditional Indian society, elder people lived within multi-generational extended families including one or more adults, children, grand children and other kin. The aged in these societies received unparalleled sense of honour in decision-making responsibilities in the economic and social activities

of the family. Traditionally, family has been the institution that provided care and support to the individuals at different stages of life. The elderly in the family enjoyed unquestionable power and authority and were treated as knowledge banks and resource persons for the younger ones. In the last few decades, industrialization coupled with urbanization has brought significant changes in the family structure in India. As a result of such changes, the extended families in India have gradually changed to nuclear ones which have in turn affected the position of the elderly in the family as well as the family's capacity to take care of them. The break-up of the extended family system is facilitated by the changes in terms of education, aspirations, values and availability of resources. As a result of all these, the family is unable to meet the financial, social, psychological, medical, recreational and welfare needs of the aged, thereby creating a need to look for other support sources.

Further, the inter-generational relationship and role of women in the family started changing, thus, impacting upon the care of the aged in the family. The most prominent feature of disintegration of the joint-family system is the erosion of authority commanded by elder members, as they cease to be the economic head of the family. Thus, modernization has profoundly influenced the values like interdependence, cooperation and self-sacrifice giving way to changes in the structure and functioning of the family system. Although, at present the inter-generational families are fewer, the interaction between the generations is mostly based on affection and characterized by unconditional mutual respect. However, in India as compared to the other western countries, the older people are still cared for by the younger relations. In India, keeping parents in old-age homes draws criticism from social networks and community at large as living in old-age home is not popular in India. The strong cultural pressure makes the families to take care of the elderly.

Living arrangements of the elderly are determined by various factors such as marital status, health status, financial dependency, kinship patterns as well as cultural traditions including social support, etc available to the aged. All these are important factors of overall well-being of the elderly and give an indication of the extent of support available to the elderly from the family and kin. Thus, the living arrangements available to the elderly enable us to understand the status of the elderly and the aged, particularly in the absence of public institutions and social security schemes meant for them in a country like India.

In India, still a higher proportion of elderly or the aged are living with their families. There are changes both in composition and quality of interactions among the members. The generational gap is widening due to the fast-changing lifestyles, globalization, migration of young and influence of diverse ideologies. There are evidences that inter-generational relations are undergoing transitions due to social and cultural changes. Especially, the teenagers perceive their grandparents in a different way (Gayatri Devi, 2004).

India's National Policy for Older Persons assures elderly that their concerns are national concerns and they will not be ignored, marginalized or left unprotected. The policy aims to strengthen their legitimate place in society and help older persons to live their last phase of life with purpose, dignity and peace.

Women and Ageing: Women take care of everyone in the family. Aged in the family gets special attention from the women, particularly the daughter-in-law. Today's women, due to their higher education and work outside the home,

sometimes come in conflict with their care-giving role, especially for the old family members. As a result, it becomes necessary at times for the women to leave her job to take care of the elderly. This dilemma is going to increase in future as the family structure becomes more and more vertical in shape with problems getting multiplied, particularly when there are elderly persons in the home requiring constant care and support.

Life expectancy of women is longer than men and its implications are many. Larger proportions of elderly women are likely to become widows and are less likely to remarry as compared to men due to low social acceptance of widow-remarriage in India. Widowhood brings about both subjective and objective consequences. The subjective consequence can be almost the same for widows and widowers, but the objective consequences differ due to the distinctively different roles of men and women. The major role of man is that of provider and that of women as homemaker. When death strikes the spouse (woman), a man loses a homemaker, and if it is contrary (i.e. male spouse dies), a woman loses a provider. Hence, widow faces much more serious situation than the widower does. Since women lives longer, they are likely to suffer more from chronic illness and disabilities. In India, widows suffer from social exclusion and they are dependent on their sons for their survival.

Extended families are declining in many parts of the developing world, as young people move to the cities and establish nuclear families. Even where extended families are still the norm, they are showing the strains of longer life expectancy and greater care-burdens. As a result, many elderly are living alone, in all parts of the world. Older people can be subjected to abuse and violence. Such abuse can take many forms, including physical, emotional and financial abuse and neglect. Most often, the perpetrators of abuse are family members and primary care-givers (Sebastine and Sekher, 2010).

Check Your Progress

- Notes:** a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.
 b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under “Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’ Questions”.

5) What are the different aspects of responsible parenthood?

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6) Describe the role of family in socialization of children.

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6.5 SMALL FAMILY NORM AND QUALITY OF LIFE

The size of the family is a matter of concern not only for the individual family members but also for welfare of the community and the nation as a whole. India has adopted the goal of universalizing the two-child family norm, the achievement of which has important consequences at micro and macro levels.

6.5.1 Significance of Small Family

In spite of significant progress that India made in various sectors since independence, the fruits of these developments have not yet reached the poor, who constitute the major chunk of the population. Due to rapid increase in population during the past few decades, it has been a difficult task to bring in radical improvement in the quality of life of millions of people. It calls for universal adoption of small family norm in India.

Small Family and Quality of Life: The size of the family affects the quality of life of human beings. The quality of life is determined mostly by the social status, economic standards and size of the family, among others. The family size has its impact on the following aspects of the family and the nation:

- i) Fulfillment of basic human needs;
- ii) Income and growth of the economy and savings;
- iii) Food and nutrition-quality and quantity;
- iv) Health, especially that of the mother and the child; and
- v) Education, particularly of the children.

Here, we attempt to say little more about how these aspects of family affect the quality of life.

- **Larger the family, lower the share of basic needs:** In any society, the larger the size of the family the relatively smaller will be the per capita share of basic needs. In other words, the smaller the family or the fewer its members the larger will be the per capita share for existence and development.
- **Income, savings and resources:** Smaller family would lead to less expenditure and as a result, large part of the income adds up to the savings.
- **Family size, food and nutrition:** Increase in family size results in decrease in per capita food and nutrition availability and this slows down the nutritional and general health standards of the members. This results in decrease in productivity of labour affecting the overall economic development.
- **Family size and fragmentation of land:** Preference for a large family size eventually leads to fragmentation of land-holding, especially in rural areas leading to decrease in per capita productivity. Decrease in the per capita productivity leads to migration to urban areas, which in turn, exerts pressure on urban public systems, leading to poor social and economic development.
- **Family size and health:** Large family size would lower the amount of money available for spending on health care, which in turn leads to higher morbidity and mortality.
- **Family size and education:** Small family leads to lower expenditure and higher savings, which can be spent or invested on education of the children, especially their higher education.

All these emphasise the need for adoption of small family for improvement in the quality of life of not only family but also the nation as a whole.

6.5.1.1 Advantages of Small Family

The specific advantages of small family norm are as follows.

- Health of the mothers:** Adoption of small family with reasonable gap between the two children provides mothers sufficient time to replenish her body nutrients depleted due to earlier pregnancy.
- Better care of the children:** In small family, due to less number of children, mother has sufficient time to provide attention, affection and love towards her children.
- Participation of women in fruitful activities:** In small families, the mother has more time to participate in other fruitful activities like education and vocational training. The mothers can also contribute to the family income by engaging in gainful economic activities.
- Advantages for the children:** Small family provides conducive environment for physical and psychological growth of the children. The children in such families are able to get proper education, nutrition and healthcare along with parental care and love.
- Advantage for the community and the country:** Small family will lead to less depletion of natural resources. The basic facilities like schools and hospitals will be available for all. Small and planned families would bring happiness, peace, harmony and prosperity to the community in particular and the country at large.

6.5.1.2 Efforts to Spread Small Family Norm

The efforts to popularize small family norm among the people can be made in two ways. The first is, by providing necessary information and services to help people to adopt small family norm. Second, by bringing in changes in the associated factors such as increasing the female literacy rate, raising the age at marriage, and improving the general socio-economic conditions.

Small family norm or the two-child family norm helps in improving the quality of life not only of the individuals but also of the community and the nation at large. In spite of its well-known benefits, the small family norm is yet to be widely accepted in India. The various religious, cultural and socio-economic factors have major deterrent effect on adoption of the small family norm in India (Sekher, 2011). For making the small family norm popular in India, concerted efforts should be made to provide education and information to the people, especially those residing in the rural areas and urban slums to motivate them to accept the two-child family norm. It is imperative for everyone to advocate and adopt the two-child family norm and contribute towards improving the quality of life of the individuals, the family, the community and the nation.

Check Your Progress

Notes: a) Space given below the question is for writing your answer.

b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of this unit under "Answers to 'Check Your Progress' Questions".

7) Explain the merits or advantages of small family norm.

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6.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit has discussed the concept of family, its structure and roles, shared rights and responsibilities within a family; types of family and the alternative family patterns emerging in India. It has highlighted the responsible parenthood, gender equality, care of the aged and the children, and the small family norm. We hope that you are very clear about all these aspects that we have discussed in this unit and also about what is expected of you as an adult educator.

6.7 ANSWERS TO “CHECK YOUR PROGRESS” QUESTIONS

- 1) Family is the simplest and the most elementary form of any society. A family is a unit of the society implying institutionalized physical, biological and social relationship between the husband and the wife. Family is a universal institution found in every age and in every society. All societies — ancient or modern, primitive or civilized — belong to one or the other form of family. The *general characteristics of the family* can be listed as follows:
 - i) A family comes into existence when a man and a woman establish *mating relationship* between them. This mating relationship is established through the *institution of marriage*. When there is no marital relationship, the family breaks down.
 - ii) Every family has its own *system of nomenclature* and is known by a name and has its own *system of reckoning descent*, be it through the male lineage or the female lineage.
 - iii) An *economic provision* is an essential part of every family, as family needs income and support to satisfy the economic needs, usually carried out by the head of the family.
 - iv) A *common habitation* is an important characteristic of a family and a family requires a home or household for its living. This becomes inevitable for bearing and rearing of children.
- 2) The *joint family* is also called as the *undivided Hindu family* or the *extended family*. Three or more generations are included in a single, functional joint family consisting of grandparents, parents, grand children, brothers, sisters and their spouse and children. The joint family system is an integral part of the Indian society, but gradually changing and getting disintegrated due to increasing urbanization and migration of its members. Modern education has brought about a change in their attitudes, beliefs, values, ideologies and practices. Educational attainment and economic independence results in individualism among men and women. As the level of education rises, the proportion of people supporting the joint family system gradually decreases. The large-scale migration of people from rural areas also affected the existence of joint families. Cities provide opportunities for men and women for gainful employment. When people start earning, they also seek freedom. Change in age at marriage, freedom in mate selection, changing attitudes towards marriage, etc., have affected the traditional joint family set-up. Along with these, the increasing influence of western values and cultures also undermines the authority of elders and questions the relevance of joint family arrangements. Many scholars argue that joint family system in India is not only changing but also tending towards disintegration.
- 3) The family as a social institution performs various functions. The functions of the family can be broadly divided into *essential* and *non-essential functions*. The essential functions of the family are as follows:
 - i) The satisfaction of the sex-needs by regulating the sexual behaviour of men and women.
 - ii) Procreation is another essential function of the family. The process of reproduction is institutionalized in the family.

- iii) Production and rearing of children which is also called the maintenance function.
 - iv) Family provides the home for its members and the entire family is dependent on it for comfort, protection and peace.
 - v) Family acts as an agent of cultural transformation, besides being an agent of socialization. Family guarantees not only the biological continuity of the human race but also the cultural continuity of the society. The family also indoctrinates the child with the values, morals, beliefs and ideals of the society and acts as a mechanism to discipline the individuals.
 - vi) The family is the source of our social identification and confers upon us the nationality and the ethnic, religious, residential, educational and class status.
- 4) Joint family has been the most important element in the fabric of Indian society. But, today due to changes in the socio-economic, political and cultural milieu of our society the changes are taking place in its structure, functions, roles, relationships and values. Due to increased urbanization and migration, joint families in India are gradually fading away and resulting in formation of nuclear families.

Along with the disintegration of the joint families, the increasing employment of women has led to the change in the traditional role of the women. Similarly, the roles of the father, mother and elders in the family have also changed. The cherished Indian values such as respect for the aged, concern for the weak, devotion to one's duty and co-operation are undergoing changes. Today's family is slowly moving towards materialism, individualism and liberalism. The function of setting moral standards for the children and adolescents has been taken over to a great extent by peer-groups, mass-media, etc. The influence of family on socialization and personality development of individuals is gradually declining. The major consequences of these changes are problems such as child-neglect, behavioural problems in children, indiscipline among the youth, alcoholism, neglect of the elderly, elderly-abuse, desertion, divorces, etc. Therefore, there is a need for the families to cope up with the pressures and challenges of their life situations, which are affected by the interacting forces in the economic, political and cultural spheres.

- 5) *Responsible parenthood* refers to the will, ability and commitment of parents to respond to the needs and aspirations of the children and other members of the family. The different aspects of responsible parenthood are as follows:
- Responsible parenthood means the knowing and respecting the parental functions.
 - To deliberate and take generous decisions to raise a family with due respect for the morals and law and with a view to avoid for the time being or even for an indeterminate period a new birth.
 - Husband and wife should recognize fully their own duties towards themselves, the family members and the society, in a correct hierarchy of values.

- 6) Socialization is a process by which children learn the ways of living in a given society. The process of socialization begins for everyone in the family. The parental, particularly the maternal influence on the child is very great for the process of socialization. Children are taught the values of their society through contact with already socialized individuals. Family is the first and the most important agent that acts in the socialization process of children, as it maintains contacts with the children for longer period of time compared to any other groups. Through close emotional association it is able to exert maximum influence on their lives. Both adults and other siblings act as role models in providing examples for children in development of their personality, attitudes and behavior.
- 7) Small family norm helps in improvement of the quality of life not only of the individuals but also of the community and the nation at large. The merits of small family norm are as follows.
- i) *Health of the mothers:* Adoption of small family with reasonable gap between the two children provides mothers sufficient time to replenish her body nutrients depleted due to earlier pregnancy.
 - ii) *Better care of the children:* In small family, due to less number of children, mother has sufficient time to provide attention, affection and love towards her children.
 - iii) *Participation of women in fruitful activities:* In small families, the mother has more time to participate in other fruitful activities like education and vocational training. The mothers can also contribute to the family income by engaging in gainful economic activities.
 - iv) *Advantages for the children:* Small family provides conducive environment for physical and psychological growth of the children. The children in such families are able to get proper education, nutrition and healthcare along with parental care and love.
 - v) *Advantage for the community and the country:* Small family will lead to less depletion of natural resources. The basic facilities like schools and hospitals will be available for all. Small and planned families would bring happiness, peace, harmony and prosperity to the community in particular and the country at large.

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Suggested Readings

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