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## UNIT 2: FAMILY\*

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### Structure

#### 2.0 Objective

#### 2.1 Introduction

#### 2.2 Conceptual Understanding

##### 2.2.1 Definition of Family

##### 2.2.2 Difference between Family and Kin

##### 2.2.3 Difference between Family and Household

##### 2.2.4 Difference between Family and Domestic Group

#### 2.3 Main Characteristics and Functions of Family

##### 2.3.1 Characteristics of Family

##### 2.3.2 Functions of Family

#### 2.4 Types of Family

##### 2.4.1 Traditional and Modern Family

##### 2.4.2 Biological Family – Nuclear, Joint and Extended

##### 2.4.3 Postmodern Family – Family by Choice, Blended Family etc.

#### 2.5 Changes in Family

#### 2.6 Let Us Sum Up

#### 2.7 References

#### 2.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 2.0 OBJECTIVE

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After reading this unit you will be able to:

- Explain the institution of family, its characteristics and types;
- Narrate the difference between household, family and domestic group;
- Note the changes in family.

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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The term family comes from the Latin word ‘familia’ meaning a household. It is the most efficient example of a ‘primary group’. A family is a group and an institution, as it has certain rules and procedures at its base. Anthropologists study family with reference to different dimensions including co-residence rules, patterns of authority, descent, marriage, property and kinship terms. As an institution it was founded on man's essential biological and social imperative needs. It is considered as the most basic and fundamental unit in the society and therefore a universal grouping in human societies. It is the bond of kinship which primarily unites the members of a familial grouping together. The two fundamental principles of integration that serve as binding force to keep a family intact are based on the connections arising through marriage and descent. These principles operate to produce three major kinds of relationships are those existing between- husband and wife, parents and children and siblings.

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## 2.2 CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING

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In sociology and anthropology there are different definitions of family that describes its main characteristics and functions.

### 2.2.1 Definition of Family

- George Murdock defined the family as a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relation and one or more children, owned or adopted of the sexually cohabited adults.
- Others define family as a group of people who are united by ties of marriage, ancestry or adoption and who are reorganised by the community as constituting a single household and as having responsibility of rearing children.
- The U.S.A census defines the family as two or more person who are related to each other by blood or marriage or through adoption and who live together.

According to the above definitions family is a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. However, it is important to differentiate family from other similar social groups like kin, household and domestic group.

### 2.2.2 Difference between Family and Kin

In common parlance the term family and kin appears to be the same but in anthropological literature the two are different. While the family denotes a relationship between the spouses and their children, who are described as 'siblings', the kin includes within the bound a large number of persons; and what creates a kinship will necessarily depend upon the social organisation in the context of which the term is applied. A distinction has to be made for this purpose between the biological parent and the sociological one; and in some communities the person who is called father may not be the biological parent. For example, in Malagasy, among the Tanala tribe there is a practice that the husband may claim as his own the first three children that may be born to his wife after he divorces her on the ground of adultery.

### 2.2.3 Difference between Family and Household

Family and household are often used interchangeably but are not the same thing. Family is a group of two people or more who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together. All such people are considered as members of one family, whereas household is a single economic unit all the members of which are mutually dependent on one another for the production of their food supply and the satisfaction of most of their wants. Households consist of family or part of family or a part of the core members. However there may be household members who are not members of the family, such as servants or lodgers, while family membership, in terms of shared consumption, production and ties of intimacy, often extends over several households. A person living alone in a housing unit, or a group of unrelated people sharing a housing unit such as partners or one who occupies a room are also counted as a household. Thus the most distinct difference between family and household is that a family

is a kinship unit whereas the household is a residential unit.

### 2.2.4 Difference between Family and Domestic Group

A domestic group is defined as a group of human beings who habitually share a common dwelling and a common food supply. A family can be a domestic group but there are some differences between a family and domestic group. The domestic group may consist of one or more nuclear families as well as people without any kinship link including servants or any other members who work and share the same production space. At the same time, members of one family may be distributed over two or more domestic groups. As a concept domestic group is wider than family and often used synonymously with household.

Meyer Fortes in his work, 'The Developmental Cycle' has differentiated between domestic group and family. For Fortes, family is the kinship and the reproduction nucleus of the domestic domain. It consists of two or more successive generation bound through the parent-child linkage. In contrast the domestic group is essentially a house holding and housing unit organised to provide material and cultural resources needed to maintain and bring up members. By highlighting the difference between domestic group and the family, Fortes was differentiating the reproductive and productive functions.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Define the institution of family. Use around four lines.

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- 2) What is the difference between family and household?

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## 2.3 MAIN CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS OF FAMILY

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### 2.3.1 Characteristics of Family

The traditional family had the following characteristics as highlighted by studies done by sociologists and anthropologists:

- 1) Universality- the Family is a universal institution. It was found in many simpler societies. In advance societies, the whole social structure is built of family units. According to MacIver, "It is found in all societies, at all stages of social development and exists far below the human level among myriad species of animals". Every human being is a member of some family

- 2) Permanent relations between husband and wife-The family is constituted of the husband and wife and their children. Thus, a permanent relation of some kind is established between man and woman is the main characteristics of traditional family. This relation is considered as imperative for the nurturing and socialisation of children.
- 3) Sexual relation as the basis of family- The family rests on sexual relation between husband and wife. In the traditional understanding marriage, sexual relation and family were considered as complementary. In other words marriage of man and woman was institutionalised for legitimacy of sexual relation for procreation of offspring. This led to the formation of elementary family, the basic unit of society.
- 4) Significance of blood relations- in the traditional family, blood was substance of utmost importance. All those connected through same blood were regarded as member of the same family. In other words all members of a family are descendant of the same ancestors.
- 5) Financial and Economic sharing of responsibility- In a traditional family the financial and economic responsibility is shared among the members. That is those considered as earning members take care of the non-earning members of the family. In a traditional set up, this sharing of responsibility was on the basis of sexual division of labour. Men were assumed as bread winner and hence went out to earn livelihood. The women were assigned to the domestic sphere.
- 6) Common habitation- It was assumed that all members of a family shared a common habitation, that is, stayed together in one residence. The common habitation helped members in sharing economic responsibility.
- 7) System of Interaction and Communication: The family is composed of persons who interact and communicate with each other in their social roles such as husband and wife, mother and father, son and daughter etc.
- 8) Distinctive nomenclature- Each family is identified on the basis of a distinctive nomenclature that is the family name. It was a common practice to take the name of the eldest male member as the family name. Though this practice varies from society to society the most common was the one found in patriarchal family.

### 2.3.2 Functions of Family

The family performs a wide range of functions in different society, some of the most common function of family are:

1. Satisfaction of Sex Needs: This is the essential function which the family performs. The sex instinct is the natural and biological urge of human beings. The satisfaction of sex desire requires that male and female should live together as husband and wife. Hence, family is the only place where husband and wife can satisfy their sex instinct. Family satisfies sexual desires of male and female through the institution of marriage. Without family the satisfaction of sex needs is impossible. The modern family satisfies sex instinct in a greater degree than the traditional family.
2. Reproduction- The task of race perpetuation has always been an important function of the family. An ongoing society must replace its members. It primarily relies on the biological reproduction of its own members. The family is an institution par excellence of the reproduction and the rearing

of children. It secures a legitimate and responsible basis for procreation by regulating sexual behaviour. It provides care and personal protection to the newly born human beings and children.

- 3. Organising production and consumption- in pre-industrial societies, the economic system is dependent on each family’s production much as of what it consumed. The family has been a traditional means for securing the members with their consumptions need.
- 4. Socialisation of children- the family is responsible not only for reproducing family but also for ensuring that its children are encouraged to accept the lifestyle it favours, to master the skills it values and perform the work required. The society provides predictable social contexts within which its children are socialised and the family is the unit for transmission from society to the new members.
- 5. Property Transformation- The family acts as an agency for holding and transmission of property. Most families accumulate much property such as land, goods, money and other forms of wealth. The family transmits the property from one generation to another.
- 6. Granting of a social status- The birth of an individual in a family assigns him/ her a social status. Thus, in the first instance, individuals define themselves in relation to the family they belong; the sense of belonging plays an important role in terms of assuming various roles within the family. In this sense, most of the prescribed statuses of a person are directly related to the family to which he belongs, for example, age, ethnicity, nationality, social class, religion etc. are conferred to an individual because he was born into a particular family.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) Give any three characteristics of the family.

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- 2) Mention any three functions of family.

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**2.4 TYPES OF FAMILY**

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Though family is a universal institution, its structure or form varies from one society to another. Sociologists and anthropologists have mentioned about different types of families found in different cultures.

**2.4.1. Traditional and Modern Family**

A traditional family consists of a man, woman, and one or more of their biological or adopted children. Most traditional families are extended including grandparents, uncles, aunts, parents and children. The modern family is a nuclear family, is small in size and consists of father, mother and one or two children. There are differences between traditional and modern family.

The first difference is structure of family. The typical size of traditional family has more than two generations living together. A married couple could live with their descendants and their relatives under one roof. On the other the modern family generally has three to four people. A couple has only one or two children. The second difference is the role of family members. In traditional family, the man is always the breadwinner while the woman is the housewife. The man is very patriarchal and makes decision himself. The woman has to do the housework, take care of their children and serve her parents-in-law. In contrast, the role of the man and woman in the modern one is equal. They both work outside. They share their housework and their thoughts. The last difference is the relationship of the family. In the past, the family lives and works together, so the family relationship is attached. The modern family has very limited time to spend together. The parents work all day and the children learn whole day. They rarely spend time for other members. For this reason, the relationship of the modern family is not close-knit.

#### **Activity 1**

What is the structure of the family in which you live? Compare it with the family in which your grandparents lived. Discuss the similarities and differences in the study center.

### **2.4.2. Biological Family – Nuclear, Joint and Extended**

In the beginning sociologist and anthropologists looked at the institution of family as biological. That is they used biology as the criteria for classifying kin relation. Two types of kins were recognised- consanguine and affine. Consanguine were relatives related through blood and affine were those connected through marriage. Thus family was defined with reference to biology. Family was seen as an institution in which all members were related either through blood or marriage. However such a theorisation began to change in the beginning of 21st century and theorists have argued for conceptualising family beyond biology. Ralph Linton has classified family on the basis of blood relation into two main types namely, consanguine and conjugal.

- (i) **Consanguine Family-** The consanguine family is built upon the parent-child relationship (on blood-descent). The family is a descent group through the male line which is firmly vested with authority. The consanguine family comprises a nucleus of blood relatives surrounded by a fringe of wives and others who are incidental to the maintenance of the family unit. Such families can become very large. The Nayar family is a typical example.
- (ii) **Conjugal Family-** The conjugal family is a nucleus of the husband, the wife and their offspring, who are surrounded by a fringe of relatives only incidental to the functioning of the family as a unit. In this type family, the authority and solidarity of the family group reside solely in the conjugal (husband and wife) pair. In contrast to consanguine type of family, the conjugal family is much more isolated from wider kinship relationships. The consanguine family, which is typical of an agricultural society, is large, stable, secure, self-sufficient and authoritarian. On the other hand the conjugal family, typical of a modern society, is small, transient, isolated and relatively insecure but democratic.

Another common method of classifying family is in terms of the composition, the different types are:

- i). Nuclear family: Nuclear family is a unit composed of husband, wife and their unmarried children. The size of the nuclear family is very small. It is free from the control of elders. It is regarded as the most dominant and ideal form of family in modern society. The nuclear family is based on conjugal bonds. While discussing the nature of nuclear family in India, Pauline Kolenda has discussed additions / modifications in nuclear family structure. She has given the following compositional categories.
- (a) Nuclear family refers to a couple with or without children.
  - (b) Supplemented nuclear family indicated a nuclear family plus one or more unmarried, separated or widowed relatives of the parents, other than their unmarried children.
  - (c) Sub-nuclear family is defined as a fragment of a former nuclear family, for instance a widow/ widower with her/his unmarried children or siblings (unmarried or widowed or separated or divorced) living together.
  - (d) Single person household.
  - (e) Supplemented sub-nuclear family refer to a group of relatives, members of a formerly complete nuclear family along with some other unmarried, divorced or widowed relative who was not a member of the nuclear family.
- ii). Extended family: The term extended family is used to indicate the combination of two or more nuclear families based on an extension of the parent-child relationships. According to Murdock, an extended family consists of two or more nuclear families affiliated through an extension of the parent-child relationship ... i.e. by joining the nuclear family of a married adult to that of his parents. In an extended family, a man and his wife live with the families of their married sons and with their unmarried sons and daughters, grand children or great grant children in the paternal or maternal line. According to Bottomore there are different types of extended family:
1. Patrilineally extended family- based on an extension of the father-son relationship
  2. Matrilineally extended family- based on the mother-daughter relationship.
  3. Fraternal or collateral family- horizontally extended family consisting of two or more brothers, their wives and children. In India, the family weather extended vertically and/or horizontally is called the joint family. Strictly speaking it is a property-sharing unit.
- iii). Joint family: Joint families are composed of sets of siblings, theirs spouses, and their dependent children. According to M.S. Gore the joint family consists of a man and his wife and their adult sons, their wives and children and younger children of the paternal couple. The size of joint family is very large. Generally, the eldest male is the head of the family. The rights and duties of the members in this type of family are laid down by the hierarchy order of power and authority. Children of the joint family are children of all the male members in the parental generation. The conjugal ties or the relationship between husband and wife is considered less significant than the filial ties or the relations between father and son.

### 2.4.3. The Postmodern Family - Fictive Family and Blended Family

In postmodern society, family structures are incredibly varied and individuals have much more freedom of choice in aspects of their lives which would have been relatively constrained in the past i.e. lifestyles, personal relationships and family arrangements. In such society, family members are not necessarily bound to one another by legal marriage, blood, or adoption. The term postmodern family has been used by sociologists to refer to the new forms of family emerging in the contemporary society. The concept describes the multitude of forms in which the institution of family can occur. It brings out an alternate understanding of family that it does not require a male and female sharing a household with their biological offspring. On the contrary, a family can be formed with two individuals of the same sex, sharing a household with marriage and reproduction. Some of the different forms of the postmodern family are

1. Cohabitation families, or unwed couples who live in the same household
2. Single-parent families, which consist of one parent and one or more biological or adopted children
3. Family by choice or Same-sex families, which consist of couples of the same sex and one or more children
4. Blended Family, family formed with second marriage partner and children from previous marriage.

Let us discuss these forms of postmodern family briefly-

1. Cohabitation families – Such a family is formed when a man and woman live together in a sexual relationship without being married. Cohabiting couples may choose to live together in an effort to spend more time together or to save money on living costs. Many couples view cohabitation as a “trial run” for marriage.
2. Single-parent families- Single-parent families are those in which one parent takes care and responsibility of one or more children without the assistance of the other biological parent. The sense of marriage as a "permanent" institution has been weakened, allowing individuals to consider leaving marriages more readily than they may have in the past. Other factors for the rise of single-parent families are increase in divorce rate and separation of two parent families, birth outside of marriage, and adoption by individual within or outside marriage and some single parents choose to remain unmarried because of unavailability of marriage partners.
3. Family by Choice: A relatively newly recognised type of family, again especially in industrial countries like the United States, is the family by choice. The term was popularised by the LGBTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) community to describe a family not recognised by the legal system. Family by choice can include adopted children, live-in partners, and kin of each member of the household and close friends. Increasingly family by choice is being practiced by unmarried people and families who move away from the consanguine family. The phrase ‘Families We Choose’ is used by Kath Weston to describe the ways in which GLBT folks create their own “gay families” out of their friends and ex-lovers. These family formations, which provided great emotional



and well as service support, “tended to have extremely fluid boundaries”. Gay families were chosen and individualistic in meaning, in contrast to blood family which is definitely not chosen. These families also lacked models and were free form and created a new, not necessarily mimicking blood family lines. Weston also discusses the issue of community and the social construction of a LGBTQ identity, around which a person’s life may orbit to a greater or lesser extent. She describe that white participants often experienced the gay community as their first community experience, whereas for people of color, they felt a conflict between now-competing identities and displacement of one identity while in the space of the other.

- 4. Blended family: A blended family consists of previously divorced spouses, their new marriage partners, children from previous marriage as well as multiple sets of grandparents and other relations. Blended families are becoming more common, especially in industrial societies like the United States.

**Activity 2**

Look around in your neighbourhood and compare two families- one having a biological child and another in which the child is adopted. Do you think attitudes differ for biological parents and for social parents by adoption? If so how? Discuss

**Check Your progress 3**

- 1) Discuss the concept of postmodern family. Answer in three lines.

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- 2) What do you understand by ‘Family we choose’?

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**2.5 CHANGES IN FAMILY**

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Due to changes taking place in the socio-economic and political structure around the globe, there have been changes in the structure and relationships in the family. Today, for many individuals, families are constructed and maintained through social bonds and support networks instead of biological ties. Individuals are forming “families of choice” to whom they turn for emotional, financial, and physical assistance. Global communications such as the Internet, e-mail, and satellite linkups are facilitating these relationships over space and time. While in the past, locale mattered, today social relationships are maintained over great distances with ease.

There is also change in the way the family is perceived. Family life in traditional society was assumed to begin with marriage, proceed through birth and nurturing

of children and end with death of parents. Today, it is believed that there is neither predictable sequence nor a unified mode of formation. Couples cohabit before marriage, continue to live- in for their entire life without marriage and reproduction or end the first or second marriage, re-marry and stay with their step children. Family structures have become more diverse and complex in the last decade but despite this family will continue to play an important role in the lives of individuals. The family no longer has a definite and fixed definition as it exists in multiple forms

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## 2.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have studied various aspects of the institution of family. We began with various definitions of family and then studied how family is different from kins, household and domestic group. We also studied the main characteristic and functions of family as well the various types of family. It also included discussion on the emergence of new forms of family and the changes taking place

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## 2.7 REFERENCES

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## 2.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) A family is a group and an institution, as it has certain rules and procedures at its base. It is considered as the most basic and fundamental unit in the society and therefore a universal grouping in human societies. As a social group characterised by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction.
- 2) Family and household are often used inter changeably but are not the same thing. Family is a group of two people or more who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together. Whereas a household is a single economic unit in which all members are mutually dependent on one another for the satisfaction of most of their wants.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The family is a universal institution. The family is constituted of the husband and wife and their children. The family is composed of persons who interact and communicate with each other in their social roles

- 2) The family performs the function of socialising the children, that is, the elder members enable younger members to learn the norms and values of the society. The family acts as an agency for holding and transmission of property. The family grants social status to the members.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The term postmodern family has been used by sociologist to refer to the new forms of family emerging in the contemporary society. The concept describes the multitude forms in which the institution of family can occur. It brings out an alternate understanding of family that it does not require a male and female sharing a household with their biological offspring.
- 2) The phrase 'Families We Choose' is used by Kath Weston to describe the ways in which LGBTQ folks create their own "gay families" out of their friends and ex-lovers. These family formations, which provided great emotional and a support system, "they tended to have extremely fluid boundaries". Gay families were chosen and individualistic in meaning, in contrast to blood family which is definitely not chosen.

