

Changing Pattern of Family in India

Part II

Studies on structural changes indicate that :

The number of fissioned families is increasing but even living separately, they fulfil their traditional obligations towards their parental families.

There is more jointness in traditional (rural) communities and more nuclearity, in communities exposed to forces of industrialization, urbanization and westernization.

The size of the (traditional) joint family has become smaller.

So long as the old cultural values persist among people; the functional type of joint family will be sustained in our society.

The important values which sustained joint family structure are :

Filial devotion of sons.

Lack of economic viability of some brothers, i.e., their inability to support their children economically.

Lack of a state-organized system of social security for the old-age men and women.

A material incentive for organizing the size of the labour unit since it constituted the major share of the capital required for production of goods and services and people had to depend on family labour.

Changes from 'traditional' to 'transitional' family include trends toward new-local residence, functional jointness, equality of individuals, equal status for women, increasing opportunity to individual members to achieve their aspirations and the weakening of family norms.

The factors which are now breaking the joint family are :

A differential earnings of brothers generating tensions in the family, as unit of production and service today is predominantly an individual. Up to a point, the values the members inculcate may enable them to subside tension by mutual adjustment and compromise but brothers separate when they focus on the conjugal units.

The death of the 'root couple' who holds economic power, and inability, incompetence and self-interest of sons and their wives to take up the role of 'parental couple'.

Incentive depending on family labour is disappearing with the emergence of a cash nexus.

System of social security, savings and extended earning opportunities of the people are leading to nuclearisation of joint family structures.

Interactional Changes :

The changes in intra-family relations may be examined at three levels: husband-wife relations, parental filial relations and relations between daughter-in-law and parents-in-law. The relations between husband and wife in the Indian family have been reviewed by Goode, Kapadia, Gore and Murray Straus.

Change in power allocation in decision-making : In traditional family, wife had no voice in family decision making. But in contemporary family in budgeting the family expenditure, in disciplining the children, in purchasing goods and giving gifts, the wife now credits herself as equal in power role. Though husband continues to play the instrumental role and wife the expressive role, yet both often talk things over and consult each other in the process of arriving at a decision. This also does not mean that husband-dominant family is changing into wife-dominant or egalitarian family. The assumption of economic role and the education of wives have made wives potential equals.

The source of power has shifted from 'culture' to 'resource', where 'resource' is 'anything that one partner may make available to the other helping the latter to satisfy his/her needs or attain his/her goals, as such, the balance of power will be on the side of that partner who contributes greater resources to the marriage.

Murray Straus's study on 'husband to wife power score' also supported the hypothesis based on 'resource theory' rather than the 'cultural values theory'. He found that middle-class husbands have a higher 'effective power' score than the working class husbands. It indicated that compared to middle-class families, working class families have less joint husband-wife activity of all types. It also means that in middle class families, both husband and wife take more active part than do working class families in attempting to direct the behaviour of the family group toward solution of the problem.

Straus's study thus indicated that both nuclearity and low socio-economic status are associated with reduction in the husband's power. Emphasizing the 'resources' factor does not mean that 'culture' (what Max Weber has called 'traditional authority') has lost its importance. In fact, both factors are important today in 'conjugal bonds'. It may thus be averred that though an average Indian family is husband-dominant yet the ideological source of power of women is giving place to a pragmatic one.

Emancipation of wife: The change in conjugal bonds is also evident from the increasing emancipation of the wife. In urban areas, wives go with my husband for social visits, taking food with husband or even before he does, going together to restaurants and movies, etc. indicate increasing 'companion' role of wife. Husband no longer regards his wife as inferior to him or devoid of reasoning but consults her and trusts her with serious matters. As regards the closeness of man to his wife and mother, man, particularly the educated one, is now equally close to both (Gore).

The relations between parents and children may be assessed in terms of holding authority freedom of discussing problems, opposition of parents by children, and modes of imposing penalty. In traditional family, while power and authority was totally vested in the patriarch and he was virtually all powerful who decided everything about education, occupation, marriage and the career of children in the patriarch and he was virtually all powerful who decided everything about education, occupation, marriage

and the career of children in the family (Kathleen Gough, McKim Marriott), in contemporary family- not only in nuclear but also in joint family- the grandfather has lost his authority.

The authority has shifted from patriarch to parents who consult their children on all important issues before taking any decisions about them (Ross) also maintains that grand-parents are no longer as influential as they were earlier (Gore) also found that it is now parents who take decisions about schooling, occupation and marriage of their children. They even oppose their parents.

Kapadia and Margaret Cormack also found that children today enjoy more freedom. Some legislative measures have also given powers to children to demand their rights. Perhaps, it is because of all this that parents do not use old methods of punishing their children.

They use economic and psychological methods (denying money, scolding, restricting freedom, reasoning) more than the physical methods (beating). In spite of these changes in relations between parents and children, the children do not think only of their rights and privileges but also of the 'welfare of parents'.

Relations between daughter-in-law and parents-in-law have also undergone change. However, this change is not so significant in daughter-in-law relations. The educated daughter-in-law does not observe purdah from her father-in-law and discusses not only the family problems but also the social and even the political issues.

Taking all three types of relations- husband-wife, parents-children and daughter-in-law and father in law-together, it may be concluded that

The younger generation now claims more individuality.

Consanguineous relationships do not have primacy over conjugal relationships.

Along with the 'cultural' and 'ideological' factor, the 'resource' factor also affects relations.