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# UNIT 5 FAMILY

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## 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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A study of this unit would enable you to:

- define the term family;
  - explain the concept of family as one of the social institutions of society;
  - describe the various forms of family;
  - explain the nature and characteristics of family;
  - distinguish the social functions of family; and
  - describe the role of family in contemporary modern society.
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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous units, in Block 1, we have taught you some basic concepts. We also gave a good idea about simple and complex societies. In this unit we introduce you to the definition of the family, family as a social institution and variations in the family form. We also explain the biological basis of the family. Important features such as social functions of the family, roles and the importance of the family in industrial society are also brought out in this unit.

The basic unit of the social structure in every society is the family. This is as true among simple societies as within the complex, modern societies. However, it varies in internal organisation, in its degree of autonomy and in the sanctions and taboos by which it is protected and perpetuated. Its universality, its persistence through time and under widely variant cultures, and its necessity for biological and social reasons should be an effective reply to the 'prophets of doom' who fear that the family is of less significance today than in earlier times. The specific pattern of family life in any given social structure is the product of the mores and varies with time and place and peoples. Therefore, the family has been seen as a universal social institution, as an inevitable part of human society. It is built around the needs of human beings to regularise sexual behaviour and protect and nurture the young ones.

It is the unit in which resources are pooled and distributed for consumption, around which residence is organised and domestic tasks are performed. The social organisation is associated with such emotive issues as love, marriage, home and child bearing. It is the family that gives us our principal identity our social status and even our very name, which is the lable of this identity in the larger society of which we are a part. This unit will give you an idea about the family as a social institution, the discussion will be kept at a sociological level.

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## 5.2 DEFINITION OF FAMILY

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The early and classical definitions emphasised that the family was a group based on marriage, common residence, emotional bonds, and stipulation of domestic services. The family has also been defined as group based on marital relations, rights and duties of parenthood, common habitation and reciprocal relations between parents and children. Some sociologists feel that the family is a social group characterised by common residence, economic co-operation and reproduction.

In recent times the concept of family is viewed in terms of certain criteria applicable to all societies. For instance, it is felt that the family is a primary kinship unit, which carries out aspects of the sexual, reproductive, economic and educational functions. Keeping in view these definitions, we generally picture a family as a durable association of husband and wife with or without children, or a durable association of a man or woman along with children. Thus, members in the family live together, pool their resources and work together and produce offspring. A family is also viewed as an adult male and female living together with their offspring in a more or less permanent relationship such as marriage which is approved by their society. These definitions point out the basics or the minimum essentials of the family as a special kind of social grouping: (i) it involves a sexual relationship between adults of opposite sexes; (ii) it involves their cohabitation or living together, (iii) it involves at least the expectation of relative permanence of the relationship between them; and (iv) most important of all, the relationship is culturally defined and societally sanctioned-it is a marriage. Marriage and the family are not just something people become involved in on their own. Some of the ways in which they must relate to each other are decided for them by their society. It is a well known and recognised fact that marriage is the basis for the family. Since reproduction and control over it has been the concern of all societies, marriage as a legal institution becomes a crucial factor. Marriage is recognised as a special kind of relationship since it is the one in which families are created and perpetuated, and the family is the ultimate basis of human society.

### 5.2.1 Family as an Institution

In the previous block of this course, ESO-11 you learnt about social institution and how family is one of the pivotal and most significant institution of all societies.

There are various forms of family found all over the world; but most sociologists and anthropologists agree that universally the most common features of a family is that it is composed of individuals related to each other by blood, marriage, or adoption.

Family, like any other institution of society forms around complex, socially significant problems, solving the problems of social existence is critical to collective living in all societies. George Murdock (1949; 4-11) lists four important functions served by the nuclear family, these functions serve to resolve four major problems of society. According to him the nuclear family along with other social institutions, serves to:

- i) regulate sexual relations;
- ii) account for economic survival ;
- iii) controls reproduction; and
- iv) socialises children

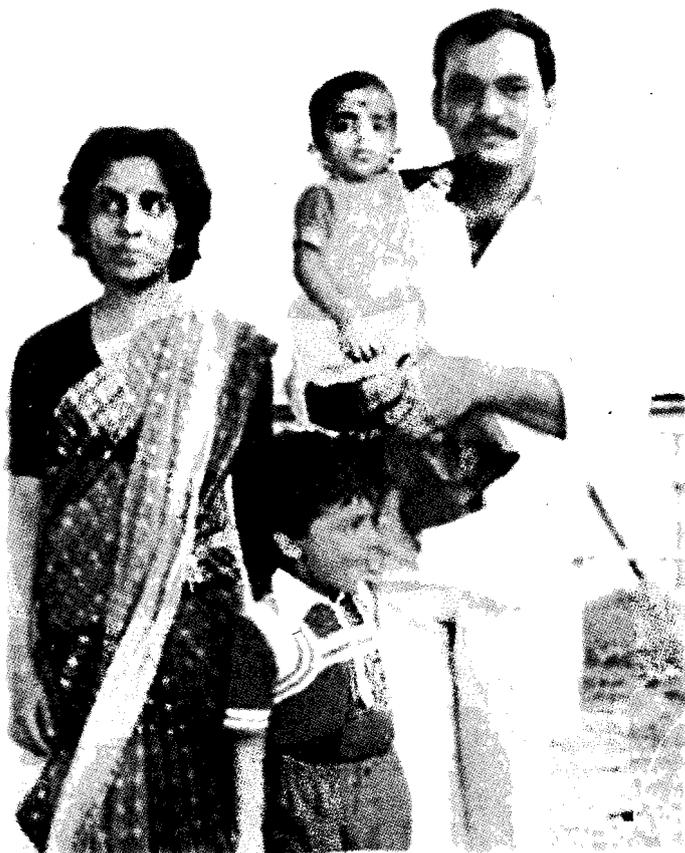
Out of all these functions, some thinkers believe that socialisation of children is one of the most central tasks of the family. Thus, one can see that family, as an institution, helps solve the problem of regulating sexual behaviour, surviving economically, reproducing new members of society and socialising them to become effective members of that society and culture.

### 5.2.2 Variations in Family Forms

The bewildering variety of family forms, noticed in societies throughout the world in the course of human history, is a cultural phenomenon of considerable interest. For instance, with regard to **residence** some societies are **matrilocal** in their marriage and family customs, while others are **patrilocal**. In the former case, the young married couple takes up residence at the home of the bride's parents, whereas, in the latter type the couple takes up residence at the home of the bridegroom's parents. Residence in most parts of India is patrilocal in that it gives to the husband and not the wife the right to choose the place of residence after marriage.

The issue of **descent** as to who will be related to whom and how, is not as simple as it might first appear. Those who are socially defined by a given society as "related", are called **kin**. Therefore from the point of view of lineage, there are three different systems for tracing descent. In a **matrilineal society** descent is traced through the female line, and in a **patrilineal society** through the male line. It is also common to trace descent bilaterally in some societies.

From the point of view of **authority**, the pattern of dominance and subordination and decision-making in the family, two different patterns are visible in different societies. These are **patriarchy**-male dominant; **matriarchy**-female dominant. Most of the societies have the patriarchal pattern. However, in modern societies of today, social and cultural change is tending to establish more equalitarian pattern of decision-making in which authority is shared between the conjugal pair.



i) Nuclear Family



ii) Extended Family

Yet another distinction is made between the **conjugal family** or family by marriage on the one hand and **consanguine family** or family by blood on the other, based on the membership type of the family. While the conjugal family consists of parents and their children, the consanguine family is made up of either parent and the units' blood relatives, such as, mother, her children, her parents or father, his children, his parents etc.

Finally, we can also classify families into nuclear and extended types based on the way they are organised. The nuclear family consists of a married couple and their children. The extended family is commonly defined as the nuclear family plus all kin belonging to either side, living together. It may be pointed out here that a consanguineous family implies 'ties of blood'. Ties of blood means the relationship between parents and their children, between siblings; even cousins on both paternal and maternal sides. It implies no particular form.

### 5.2.3 Universal Nature of Family

As stated earlier, the family is the most permanent and pervasive of all social institutions. There is no human society without any family system. All societies both large and small, primitive and civilised, ancient and modern, have institutionalised the process of procreation of the species and the rearing of the young. It is a permanent and universal institution and one of the constants of human life.

However we need to point out here that the same type of family is not found everywhere. There are several types of family. For example in the West the nuclear family is found. This comprises the husband and wife together with their children. In Indian villages and in small towns the extended or joint family is found. In India, too, largely nuclear families are found but often, amongst the better off families in villages, especially where agricultural land is there or amongst the Communities involved in business and trade, one often finds the large joint or extended family. This form of family has people living in it of two, three or sometimes four generations under the same roof.

### 5.2.4 Biological Basis of the Family

The institution of the family is to be explained in terms of biological factor-the existence of two sexes and the sexual character of reproduction in the human species. It appears as a natural answer to the human sexual drive, a phenomenon solidly based in the biology of the human organism. Family provides legitimacy to all these biological activities with the support of marriage.

The family is characterised by its limited size. Because of this characteristic feature, family is identified as a primary group. It may include parents and their unmarried children or parents and their married as well as unmarried children. The bonds that tie together these limited number of members with limited common interests are the outcome of emotional factors such as love, mutual affection and solicitude. This emotional basis of the family makes it an ideally suitable primary social group in every society.

#### Activity 1

Examine the type of family in which you live, in terms of residence, emotional attachment, household, size etc. and write a short essay on "My Family and its Social Structure". Compare your answer with those of other learners at your study centre.

### 5.2.5 Common Residence and Nomenclature

The family is one of the most durable of all social institutions. Each family has a residence, an address and a name. We recognise any family with the help of the family name, location and address. A family can mean two quite different things depending upon the vantage from which we view it. For instance, the family in which one is a

child is the **family of orientation** and the family in which one is a parent is the **family of procreation**. Each family thus has common habitation for its living. Without a dwelling place, the task of child bearing and rearing cannot be adequately met. However, family as a concept has a wider meaning than mere household since a family can be spread out geographically sometimes but yet emotionally, socially and legally be known as a family. For example, a married couple may be living in two different cities or their children may be working somewhere else, even living in a different country/city; but they think of themselves as one family.

**Check Your Progress 1**

**Note:** i) Use space below for your answers.  
 ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) Give a definition of the family. Use around three lines.  
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- 2) What is the biological basis of the family? Discuss in about three lines.  
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### 5.3 SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF THE FAMILY

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The reasons for the endurance and universality of the family are largely grounded in the functions that it performs for individuals and for society. The major functions the family accomplishes are discussed below:

**i) Member replacement and physical maintenance**  
 In order to survive, every society must replace members who die and keep the survivors alive. The regulations of reproduction is centred in the family as are cooking and eating and care of the sick. Once children are born, they will be nurtured and protected within the family. It is the family that feeds, clothes and shelters them.

**ii) Regulation of sexual behaviour**  
 The family regulates sexual behaviour. Each and every member's sexual behaviour is influenced to some extent by what is learned in the family setting. The sexual attitudes and patterns of behaviour we learn in the family reflect societal norms and regulate our sexual behaviour. The sociological notion of sexual regulation should not be confused with repression. The norms, on the other hand, specify under what conditions and with what partners sexual needs may be satisfied.

**iii) Socialisation of children**  
 The family carries out the serious responsibility of socialising each child. Children are taught largely by their families to conform to socially approved patterns of behaviour. If the family serves society as an instrument for the transmission of culture, it serves the individual as an instrument of socialisation. A family prepares its children for participation in the larger world and acquaints them with the larger culture.

**iv) Status transmission**

Individual's social identity is initially fixed by family membership by being born to parents of a given status and characteristics. Children take on the socio-economic class standing of their parents and the culture of the class into which they are born, including its values, behaviour patterns and definitions of reality. In addition to internalising family attitudes and beliefs, children are treated and defined by others as extensions of the social identity of their parents. In short, family acts as a vehicle of culture transmission from generation to generation.

**v) Economic activity**

Until recent times, the family was an important unit of both production and consumption. The family produced most of the goods it consumed and consumed most of the goods it produced. But today, modern families mainly earn incomes. Thus, their principal function is that of the consumption of goods and services which they purchase. Because of the production of income the provision of economic support for family members is a major function of the modern family.

**vi) Social emotional support**

The family as a primary group is an important source of affection, love and social interaction. Caring for family members does not end with infancy and childhood. It is seemingly the nature of human beings to establish social interdependencies, not only to meet physical needs, but also to gratify emotional and psychological needs for response and affection as well as.

**vii) Inter-institutional linkage**

Each baby is a potential participant in the group life of the society. Family membership in a religious, political, economic, recreational and other kinds of organisations typically gives individuals an opportunity to participate in activities that might otherwise be closed to them. The family, then, not only prepares the individual to fill social roles and occupy a status in the community, but also provides the opportunities for such activity. Some institutions depend also on the way the family functions in this regard to insure their own continuity and survival.

**Check Your Progress 2**

**Note:** i) Use space below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) Briefly discuss, in three lines, one important function of the family.

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**5.4 ROLE OF FAMILY IN INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY**

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Many sociologists feel that the family has lost a number of its functions in modern industrial society. Institutions such as business, political parties, schools, welfare and recreational organisations, creche and play schools, now specialise in functions earlier performed only by the family. This reduces the dependency of the individual on his or her family and kin. The high rate of geographical mobility in industrial society decreases the frequency and intimacy of contact among members of the kin-family network. The

relatively high level of social mobility and the importance of ‘achieved’ status in modern society have weakened the importance of family and its extended form since it has less to offer to its members.

### 5.4.1 Importance of Family

However, this does not mean that the family is declining in importance. It has in fact become more specialised and its role is still vital. By structuring the personalities of the young and stabilising the personalities of adults, the family provides its members with the psychological training and support necessary to meet the requirements of the social system. In fact, the loss of certain functions of the family has made its remaining functions more important. The family’s responsibility for socialising the young remains important as ever. Even though the family has largely lost its functions as a unit of production, it still maintains a vital economic function as a unit of consumption. Parents of today are expected to do their best to guide, encourage, and support their children in their educational and occupational choices and careers. Compared to the past, parents are more preoccupied with their children’s health and emotional well being. State health and welfare provisions have provided additional support for the family and made its members more aware of the importance of health and hygiene in the home. In a nutshell, the family has adapted and is adapting to a developing industrial society. It remains as a vital and basic institution in society.

Across the span of history, the form and organisation of the family have varied, but in every social structure it has been a primary group and the basic unit of social organisation. Through the family the individual is a person with status, and children are reared and guided, and the cultural heritage is transmitted to succeeding generations. Families may be organised in an amazing variety of ways. Although the family is rooted in the biological nature of human beings, in human experience it is always a social institution which is governed by cultural norms.

With the growth of industry and the rise of cities, family life and family patterns have changed. The economic functions are largely transferred to outside agencies. Increasing emphasis is, however, placed on psychological values such as affection, companionship and emotional security.

The present is a period of transition. The family withstood the sweeping changes in the cultural pattern and found ways to adjust to each new situation. It will continue to survive, whatever further changes the future may bring.

#### Activity 2

Take 3 generations of your family, either you, your parents and their parents or you, your children and your parents (whichever is relevant to you). Identify two important changes in the emotional bond between different generations in your family and make a note of it. Compare your answer with other students at your study centre. Discuss this topic with your Academic Counsellor, as well.

#### Check Your Progress 3

**Note:** i) Use space below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) What is the role of the family in industrial society? Use around five lines for your answer.

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2) Why is the family still important in industrial society? Use around five lines for your answer.

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### 5.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have studied various aspects of the institution of family. We began with definitions of the family and then studied variations in family forms. This included describing the biological basis of the family. The universal nature of the family and common residence and nomenclature therein were also described.

We then turned to a description of the social functions of the family. Following this the role of family in industrial society is explained. This part also emphasised the importance of the family and aspects of the industrial family.

### 5.6 KEY WORDS

- Conjugal family** : Family in which the members consist of spouses (married couple) and their children.
- Consanguine family** : Family in which the members are related by descent rather than by marriage.
- Extended family** : Family consisting of one or more married pairs, their children and other near relatives.
- Family of orientation** : The family into which one is born.
- Family of procreation** : The family of which the person concerned is a parent.
- Kin** : Those who are related through descent or marriage.
- Matriarchy** : Family dominated by the mother as head of the household.
- Matrilocal** : The practice whereby a married couple settles in the home of the wife's family.
- Mores** : Ideas of right and wrong which require certain action and forbid others.
- Nuclear family** : Family consisting of parents and their children only.
- Patriarchy** : Family dominated by the father as head of the household.
- Patrilocal** : The practice whereby a married couple, settles in the home of the husband's family.

### 5.7 FURTHER READINGS

- 1) Kapadia, K.M. 1966. *Marriage and Family in India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay.
- 2) Sutherland, R.L., Woodward, J.L., and Maxwell, M.A., (editors), 1961. *Introductory Sociology*, Oxford and IBH Publishing Company, Delhi.
- 3) Murdock, G.P., 1949. *Social Structure*, Macmillan, New York.

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## 5.8 MODEL ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The family can be defined as group based on
  - a) Marital relations
  - b) Parenthood
  - c) Common residence
- 2) The biological basis of family is explained due to the existence of two sexes and reproduction. Further, it is the natural answer to human sexual urges.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) One important function of the family is to transmit the parents' status to the children. The children's social standing is related to the family.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The role of the family in industrial society has weakened quite a bit. Institutions like schools, business houses, political parties, recreational organisations, etc., reduce the role of the family. So, also does the high level of mobility.
- 2) The importance of the family in industrial society cannot be under-estimated. It still provides socialising functions, psychological training and so on. The family still performs economic functions (support), which allows children to get on in life.