
BLOCK 3
FAMILY, HOUSEHOLD AND MARRIAGE

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 7: STRUCTURE AND CHANGE: FACTORS AND DYNAMICS*

Structure

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7.0 OBJECTIVE

The objective of this unit is to enable students be able to:

- Discuss the variations in family in terms of their structure and form;
 - Critically analyse theories of change in family and apply a joint-nuclear continuum to understand structure of family in India;
 - Identify the major forces responsible for change in the institution of family;
 - Explain the new forms of family which are not based only on biology.
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7.1 INTRODUCTION

Family is the universal and basic social institutions. As a social institution family can be seen both as an ideal and as a reality. The family system is an ideal because it serves as a guide to behaviour and as values, or a set of norms that are passed down from generation to generation. The structure of family is patterned and re-patterned over time within a society and in a particular group. Mating, procreation, and the associated activities of child rearing necessitate personal closeness, habitation in the same dwelling, and cooperation of the members in the provision of domestic services, therefore nuclear families are normally residential units. Families may own property and engage in economic production simultaneously. Historical family study has successfully dismantled earlier myths about family behaviour in the past over the last two decades. Economic, political and social forces have brought about changes in the specific characteristics of family units in a particular way. As a result, the size, composition and behaviour of the members of a family have changed over time in different society.

In unit 2 which is on family you must have already read the way in which family as a social institution has been conceptualised by anthropologist and sociologists. The various terms such as household, domestic group and kin as related terms to family were also discussed. In this unit we will look at different types of family to understand how family structures differ in different societies. Family as social institution had undergone changes and there is variation on authority and organisational structure. A number of theories have been given to comprehend the dynamic of change, especially the impact of economic processes, industrialisation and urbanisation, social and cultural changes and change due to enactment of new legislation and government policies.

7.2 TYPES OF FAMILY

Despite the fact that the family is a universal institution, its structure and form varies from one society to another. Sociologists and anthropologists have described the different type of families that exist in different cultures. Classification on the types of family can be done on the basis of i) size and composition, ii) generation and iii) membership.

7.2.1 Size and Composition

Depending on the size and composition family can be classified into:-

- a) **Nuclear family**—the most basic and ideal form of family, found all across the world. A husband and wife, as well as their unmarried offspring, make up a nuclear family. This is a basic family unit, and the family size is tiny. This is a self-contained, autonomous unit. This is often referred to as the major family. Its components are orientation and procreation.
- b) **Conjugal family**—family comprising of a husband and wife who have been married for a long time with or without children. The composition of the family is smaller than joint family.
- c) **Extended or joint family**—this type of family has a larger size than a nuclear family. It's also possible to have more than two nuclear families. This is the most prevalent sort of Hindu joint family. Father, mother, their sons and wives, unmarried daughters, grand children, grandfather, uncles, aunts, and their children, father's parallel cousins and their offspring, and so on make up

this family.

7.2.2 Generation Principle

Depending on the number of generation of members comprising the family, it can be classified into two or three generational family. In simple society, family could also be upto four generation, tracing backwards from great grandfather, father, son and grandson.

a) **Two generation family**- this consist of members from two generation- father, mother and their children or mother and daughter/ father and son. Murdock described the nuclear family as a two-generation family made up of the mother, her husband, and their children. Such kind can be found in both hunter-gatherer and industrial societies.

b) **Three generation family**- An extended family consisting of members from three generation, grandfather, father, his brothers and their children in patrilineal society and grandmother, mother and daughter forms a unit in matrilineal family.

7.2.3 Membership

On the basis of how members are assigned to the group, Murdoch classified family into two types:-

a) **Family of Orientation**-A family in which one is born. The family serves to socially situate children and plays an important part in their socialisation. This is understanding of family from the perspective of children.

b) **Family of procreation**- A marriage-based family is referred to as a procreation family. The family functions to produce and socialise children. When individual grow up and marry, they initiate the formation of new conjugal family through copulation and procreation.

7.3 VARIATIONS IN THE STRUCTURE OF FAMILY

Family as an institution is also dynamic, that is, there has been continuous shifts and continuities in the structure of the family. The variation can be understood at two level, first at the level of authority - whether authority in the hands of men or women and second in terms of authority structure, that is kinship relations between members residing together. The most common structure used in anthropology to understand the nature of change in family is joint and nuclear family.

7.3.1 Authority structure

The authority structure within the family differs from society to society and is largely determined by the line of descent. On this basis two types of family can be identified:

1. *Patrilineal or patriarchal Family*

A patrilineal society is one which follows unilineal principle of descent, it traced through the male line. In patrilineal society the authority is in the hands of eldest male member or the father (patriarch) Therefore patriarchal family is one where the paternal side holds all of the power. The patriarch exercises his control over

the family members and is the guardian of the family property and preside over the household's religious rites. He has complete and indisputable authority over his wife, sons, and daughters in the developed patriarchal system of the past. The residence pattern in patrilineal society is patrilocal (residence with groom's father) or virilocal (residence with husband's relatives) which leads to women transiting from their maternal home to the marital family. The patriarchal family has existed in numerous forms. In some cases, such as in India, it is part of a joint family. It is sometimes a 'stem-family,' with only one of the sons moving his family into the paternal home.

2. Matrilineal of Matriarchal family

In societies where the female line is used to trace descent, and property is likewise passed down through the female line of ancestry. This type is known as matrilineal family. Matriarchal family is a type of family in which the wife or mother is the chief authoritative figure. The matriarchal family system implies that the mother, not the father, is in charge of the household. Women have the right to perform religious rites in this type of family, and the husband resides in the wife's home. The status, name, and sometimes inheritance are passed down through the female line in a matriarchal family, also known as a maternal family or a mother-right family. The Khasi and Garo tribes of Assam and Meghalaya, as well as the Nayars of Malabar in Kerala, have this type of family.

In anthropology, while looking at the position of men and women many scholars have highlighted the privileged position of mother's brother (MB) and sister's son where they are regarded as more authoritative than father of the ego. That is though line of descent and residence is through female, power and authority passes from female to male. Audrey Richard refers to this ambiguity as 'matrilineal puzzle' (Richards, 1950). It refers to the conflict generated in a matrilineal society due to competition between in-marrying husbands/fathers and maternal brothers due to prevalence of principle of female succession and masculine authority. Due to the ambiguity of women's authority in matrilineal society, many scholars have suggested that a matriarchal society is utopian and is rarely found.

7.3.2 Organisational Structure

A nuclear family consists of two generations of a family living in the same home. In most cases, this meant that parents and their children shared a home. An extended nuclear family was defined as joint family. Therefore joint family is the extension of nuclear family horizontally as well as vertically i.e. lineal and collateral. The family becomes a joint when more relatives are added to the nuclear family. As a result, a joint family includes nuclear family as well as all relatives living in the same household from the husband's and/or wife's side. Joint family is also known as extended family. The phrases joint and extended are used interchangeable in sociology and social anthropology. A joint family is made up of multiple nuclear families who are linked by an extended parent-child tie. It could also suggest an increases in the number of siblings of a particular sex, as well as their spouses and children. When ancestry is traced through the male line, the extended/joint family is based on the extension of the father-son relationship. On the other hand, a matrilineal extended/joint family is formed through an extension based on a matrilineal line.

Irawati Karve defined joint family as a corporate group. Joint family is a group

of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked in one kitchen, who hold property in common, participate in common family worship and are related to one another as some particular type of kindred (Karve 1968). Joint family often symbolises a close bond between members of family. Following are the characteristic features of joint family:

- Shared residence
- Joint kitchen
- Large in size and composition
- Affinal and consanguinal relatives are important
- Principle of seniority on age and gender
- Distribution of responsibility on basis of position
- Mutual rights and obligations
- An economic unit of consumption
- Common religious functions and rituals

Joint family is typically found in India, China, Japan because a large population in these countries are connected to traditions in agriculture. Joint family is one of the three most important fundamental institutions in Indian society, the other two being caste and village. Thus 'joint family' is the norm for familial institutions in India. Joint family consists of father, his married sons, all stay together with their wives and unmarried children. The Hindu joint family is one notable institution. Large joint family existence reflects the rich culture of Hindu society. The Hindu joint family is a group consisting of known ancestors and relatives and exists in large size in which members generally live together under the same roof, eat, cooked food in one hearth, hold property in common and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other. In this type of family each child gets special attention, love, and care under the guidance of grandparents or elders. Children learn, and in the process imbibe cultural, traditional, social values from their elders in a joint family.

Check Your Progress 1

1. What is matrilineal puzzle? How does it affect the position of women in society?

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2. Give two characteristics of joint family.

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7.4 FACTORS FOR VARIATIONS

Generally the factors leading to changes in the family are discussed in the context of the issue of disintegration of the joint family.

7.4.1 Monetisation of the Economy

The shift from barter exchange to exchange of goods and services through cash, diversification of occupational opportunities for employment in varied spheres, improvement in information and communication technologies not only brought about a change in the economy but also impacted the structure of family. The monetisation of economy was the outcome of colonial policy but it drastically transformed Indian social structure.

7.4.2 Industrialisation and Urbanisation

India's family life pattern was seen to be shifting as a result of the two processes of industrialisation and urbanisation. The acculturation of an urban lifestyle resulted from people migrating from rural to urban areas to work in industries. Density of people, heterogeneity of population, job diversity and specialisation, and complex division of labour are all hallmarks of urban living. Better access to educational and healthcare institutions is also part of the plan. In addition to a lack of living space, urban life is characterised by impersonality and anonymity. A continuous movement of people into cities seeking education, jobs, medical treatment, and other services has occurred, partly as a result of population pressure on land. Due to family members' transit from one location to another, residential separation has an impact on the size and composition of the family.

7.4.3 Social and Cultural Factors

Opportunities for higher education arose in a big degree during British period once again. In areas of education, all castes and communities had access to the English facilities. Some of those who were able to gain access to and exposure to English-medium education (especially exposure to individualistic, liberal, and humanitarian ideas) began to question some Hindu rituals and traditions relating to child marriage, denial of women's educational rights, property rights, and ill-treatment of widows. Educated young men not only desired to marry at a far later age than family tradition demanded, but they also wanted to marry women with some educational background. Uneducated or less educated women were anticipated to have a different kind of influence on family matters than educated women (especially college educated women).

7.4.4 Legislative Measure and Government Policies

Employment, education, marriage, and property laws have had an impact on the family system in certain way. The Indian Workmen Compensation Act (1923) and the Minimum Wages Act 1948, both passed for the benefit of the employee, aimed to decrease the economic reliance of members on the joint family for economic support. The Hindu Gains of Learning Act of 1930 declared that the property acquired by a Hindu as a result of his education was his personal property, even if his education had been paid for by the joint family. In 1929, the Child Marriage Restraint Act was passed in order to prevent child marriages. It determine the limit age for boys and girls to marry at 18 and 14 years old, respectively. This Act also aimed to provide women more opportunities for education. In India, the minimum age for marriage is now 21 years old for boys and 18 years old for girls. Post-independence, the Hindu Succession Act of 1956 was passed, giving a daughter and a son equal rights to their father's property. These statutes challenged the inheritance patterns that existed in joint families before to the Act's enactment, as well as the family's dependence on women.

The other factors which have been held responsible for encouraging smaller

units are

- i) Opportunities for higher education
- ii) Heightened ambitions
- iii) increased occupational mobility
- iv). Growing sense of individuality (i.e., thinking in terms of individual needs and ambitions rather than in terms of kinship needs and larger familial requirements).

7.5 THEORIES OF CHANGE: FROM JOINT TO NUCLEAR

The structure of family has been changing due to the impact of economic, cultural and political changes. Different theorists have tried to explain the changes taking place- evolutionary theories see changes from large size family to conjugal family. Nuclearisation theory uses the evolutionary framework to explain the emergence of nuclear family. In the context of India, the evolutionary plane fails to describe the dynamics of change and hence a continuum is used to explain the joint and nuclear as different stage in the development cycle.

7.5.1 Evolutionary Theories

The evolutionary theory of the change in the family structure was summed up by the work of Maine, 'Ancient Law' (1861) where he argued for change from status to contract. The transition from status to contract was visualised as a shift in the institution of marriage (centered on family and kin (i.e. status orientation) to individual choice (i.e. contract orientation). Evolution from status to contract was used by many thinkers to explain the emergence of nuclear family. The joint family based on kin relation gave way to conjugal or nuclear family. A general theory of social evolution was used to explain the development of the nuclear family. Structure differentiation is a process that occurs during the evolution of societies. As a result, a number of new social institutions emerged, each specialising in a role. Many of the functions of the traditional family have been taken over by new specialised institutions such as schools, colleges, workplaces, and hospitals in these conditions. This has aided the formation of nuclear families.

7.5.2 Theory of Nuclearisation-From Joint to Nuclear

The genesis of family nuclearisation theories may be traced back to the start of the industrial revolution, when the process of modernisation impacted the structure of family. Nuclearisation of the family is considered as the outcome of its impact. Such an interpretation presupposes existence of non-nuclear family. Industrialisation and urbanisation has altered traditional family institutions which was described as 'joint' and led to formation of single conjugal family labelled as nuclear family. Many sociologists argued that industrialisation, urbanisation, spatial and social mobility, individualism, and the increase of women's education and position have resulted in significant changes in family structure. According to Talcott Parsons (1956), the emergence of modern industrial society led to the growth of "isolated nuclear family", one which is "structurally isolated" because it's not part of a larger kinship network.

Goode (1968) agrees with Parsons that rising industrialisation is weakening extended family and kinship networks. He does not, however, believe that industrialisation is the root cause of the disintegration of extended family ties.

The move to an industrial family has been far faster than projected by the degree of modernisation. Goode argues that the nuclear family's philosophy is what has aided its spread, particularly in developing countries. This is due to the high regard with which western lifestyles and values are held in many of these emerging countries.

According to Engels (1884-1972), there was no family during the early days of communism, and promiscuity reigned dominant. With the development of private property and state institutions, the monogamous nuclear family developed. The emergence of private property required its transfer to legal heirs. To control female sexuality and assure legitimate progeny, the monogamous nuclear family evolved.

7.5.3 Joint-Nuclear Continuum

In contrast to the theory of nuclearisation theory, sociologists in India have argued that the nuclear and the joint family systems in India has to be seen on a continuum. K.M. Kapadia (1972) has highlighted the fact that families who have moved to cities maintain their ties to their joint family in the village or town. They do not function as an isolated or completely separate unit in the city, even after they residentially separate themselves from a joint family and form a nuclear family. The kinship orientation and joint family ethic are retained in these families. The physical presence of family at specific events such as birth, marriage, death, illness, and so on demonstrates this. Sometimes members of city families travel to the village to participate in such celebrations, and sometimes members of rural family's journey to the city to participate in the functions, ceremonies, and activities of their kin. In the performance of particular roles, the joint family ethic is quite clear.

Kolenda in her book 'Regional Differences in Family Structure in India' (1987: 4) argued that joint family got strengthened due to industrialisation. In joint family the economic conditions has to be good enough to support large numbers of its members. Industrialisation provided this as more hands were needed in a renewed family enterprise in which kin helped one another in striving for upward mobility.

I.P. Desai, in his famous work, *Some Aspects of Family in Mahuva* (1964), points out that in Gujarat 'a residentially nuclear group is embedded in social, cultural and other non-social environments, which are not the same as those in the societies of the West. M.N Srinivas (1969) in his study of social change in India also rejects the theory of evolution from to nuclear family. He says: "Even if figures of urban areas show a dwindling in the size of the family, it does not mean that the joint family system is breaking down. Urban families are frequently not autonomous entities but limbs of bigger families situated elsewhere. Any crisis in the parent or offspring family will be faced as a common problem. Weddings, funerals and other ceremonies are usually celebrated in the parents household. There is occasionally transference of persons from one family to the other" (Srinivas, 1969:72)

A.M. Shah in his book *Family in India* questions the assumptions the evolutionary theories suggested towards a breakdown of joint family to nuclear family. His study of family life in a Gujrat village suggested for re-defining 'joint family'. According to Shah, industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation rather than leading to decline led to increase in the size of households. Further he

asserts that though the number of nuclear family may have increases yet the commitment to the values and norms of joint family prevails in both rural and urban India.

According to a number of Indian sociologists (Desai ;1964, Madan:1965, Dube:1955) the dynamic of family structure cannot be understood with reference to the Western binaries of joint and nuclear. Instead despite process of change, the two coexists and therefore change in the structure has to be understood as joint-nuclear continuum. Joint and nuclear families can be viewed as two stages on a cycle's continuum. This implies that these two forms are part of a developmental cycle. In terms of size, composition, role and status of individuals, family and society norms and punishments, the structure of a family evolves over time. They contend that, due to the phenomenon of fission and fusion, family should be described as a process that goes through cyclical changes. Death and partition "deplete" family structure from joint to nuclear, but marriage and birth "expand" family structure from nuclear to joint. Relatives that comprise a combined family are generally maintained together.

In India, there are probably few families that are perennially nuclear in nature. Additional family members, such as an elderly parent or unmarried brothers and sisters, are frequently invited to live with a man, his wife, and their unmarried children. The nuclear family, then, is a stage in a cycle that includes other types of family units. Even when certain causes have made it impossible to establish a nuclear family, ritual, economic, and sentimental bonds with relatives who form up a joint family are often maintained for a long time.

Check Your Progress 2

1. Do you agree with nuclearisation theory that joint family has disintegrated to nuclear family?
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2. What is development cycle? How can it be used to understand change in the structure of the family?
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7.6 EMERGENCE OF NEW FORMS OF FAMILY

Families have been changing and affected by multiple forces and variables like industrialisation, growing independence of women, rise in levels of education, economic change, legal regulations, feminist critiques and political discourses. Since the 1970s, changes in the structure of the family has been taking place. There was the emergence of new forms of family like single parent family, same-sex or family by choice and co-habitation without marriage. These forms were referred as 'non-traditional' family as it did not fit into the classical definition of family formed on basis of biology and alliance. However, many in academics preferred to use the term 'new families' to refer to forms of family that did not exist or were not visible until the later part of twentieth century. This section focuses on the some of the multiple patterns and arrangements that mark a shift

7.6.1 Family by Choice

The term 'families we choose' was used by Kath Weston to describe queer forms of kinship different to the biological family. Also described as 'families we create' suggests that individuals have a choice in the formation of family. According to Weston, in gay and lesbian communities in 1980s San Francisco, "Kinship began to seem more like an effort and a choice than a permanent, unshakable bond or a birth-right." Weston's (1991) study provides a significant basis to re-conceptualise and redefine the concept of family and kinship in view of relationships between gay men and lesbian women. It questions the genealogical basis to kinship by bringing it to scrutiny and de-naturalising it, implying that kinship need not be postulated taking procreation as the base or center piece. The study reflects on the non-procreative, non-material and symbolic relations of lesbian women and gay men in the U.S., which provide a critique of kinship and its underlying assumptions.

The family by choice is an illustration of the fact that biology is not the only defining feature of kinship. People can be kin without sharing blood and marital relation. Kinship is based on love and enduring solidarity expected to characterise these familial relationship. Further it also negates the ideas of procreation based on heterosexual identities. Family is no longer seen only as unit for reproduction rather it can be a non-procreative unit. Such family ties are based on ideology of choice and love, and stand in opposition to biological model of kinship. The families of choice therefore, emerge as an important basis to question biologically modelled heterosexual domain of kinship, which has failed to provide support and care to lesbian women and men.

7.6.2 Live-In Relationship

Live-in relations, set a departure from the conjugally established familial units, have emerged as preferred form of arrangements among many. Live-in relationship i.e. cohabitation is an arrangement whereby two adults decide to live together on a long term permanent basis in an emotionally and sexually intimate relationship outside the wedlock of marriage. The live-in relation may be entered into both by heterosexual and homosexual couples. There is a preference for living-in relation among the younger generation in the urban cities across the globe. There are a number of reasons that may govern individual's preference for live-in relations. It finds its foundation in the fundamental right of an individual to have the liberty to choose his or her partner. For many it has emerged as a basis to assess the mutual compatibility or to establish financial security prior to entering into a legalised wedlock. For some it provides an escape from marriage expenses. Also, those unable to enter into marital alliance may enter in live-in relation for e.g. members of same sex, interreligious or interracial group.

However, live-in relations are seen by many as immoral and viewed encouraging free-sexual behaviour. They are seen as threat to the traditional institution of marriage and family. Added to this, the children born from these relationships are pointed as to have less secure future. In short, these relations are viewed as threat to the legally wedded wife and her children and are seen to give encouragement to extra-marital affairs. Such relations have also been contested on medical grounds and pointed as responsible for rising HIV/AIDs cases.

The live-in relations are considered far short-lived than relations based on marriage as they do not require legal recourse to be terminated. Though live-in relationships have been accorded legitimacy along with children born from such arrangements, the latter is not entitled to claim inheritance in Hindu ancestral coparcenary property (in the undivided joint Hindu family) and can only claim a share in the parent's self-acquired property.

7.6.3 Surrogacy Families

The term 'surrogacy family' is used to refer to a family formed with the help of third party (generally a women) who rents her womb for the gestation of the child. The surrogate enters into a legal contract with the fertility clinic that after the delivery of the child, she will have no claim or relations. Surrogacy family functions as traditional family but the only difference is that the notion of maternity is complicated. Motherhood is not defined by the period of gestation but by the capacity to rent a womb. The absence of gestational link between mother and child does not affect their physical and emotional relationship. Surrogacy provides an opportunity to individuals who due to medical reasons cannot conceive, to same-sex partners and those who are want to bring up children without necessarily marrying.

7.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have learnt that the structure of family gives rise to different types of family depending on size, composition, generation and membership. Family as social institution had undergone changes and there is variation on authority and organisational structure. A number of theories have been given to comprehend the dynamic of change, especially the impact of economic processes, industrialisation and urbanisation. Social and cultural changes and change due to enactment of new legislation and government policies are also factors that change nature of families. Due to these changes there is the emergence of number of new family forms which are established not on the basis of biology, example are : homosexual families, live in relationship and surrogacy families.

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7.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

1. Matrilineal Puzzle is a term coined by Audrey Richard. It refers to the conflict generated in a matrilineal society due to competition between in-marrying husbands/fathers and maternal brothers due to prevalence of principle of female succession and masculine authority. Due to the ambiguity of women's authority in matrilineal society, many scholars have suggested that a matriarchal society is utopian and is rarely found.
2. Two characteristics of joint family are:
 - i. Joint family often symbolises a close bond between members of family.
 - ii. Joint family exists in large size in which members generally live together under the same roof, eat, cooked food in one hearth, hold property in common and who participate in common family worship and are related to each other.

Check Your Progress 2

1. According to the nuclearisation theory, industrialisation and urbanisation altered traditional family institutions which was described as 'joint' and led to formation of single conjugal family labelled as nuclear family. However this theory applies more to Western society where the peasantry shifted to industry and established singular-conjugal family. In the context of India such an evolutionary pattern has not been witnessed and the concept of joint is complex and found in industrialized and urbanised society.
2. Joint and nuclear families can be viewed as two stages on a cycle's continuum. This implies that these two forms are part of a developmental cycle. In terms of size, composition, role and status of individuals, family and society norms and punishments, the structure of a family evolves over time. They contend that, due to the phenomenon of fission and fusion, family should be described as a process that goes through cyclical changes. Death and partition "deplete" family structure from joint to nuclear, but marriage and birth "expand" family structure from nuclear to joint. Relatives that comprise a combined family are generally maintained together.

UNIT 8: RE-IMAGINING FAMILIES*

Structure

8.0 Objectives

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Understanding Family in Classical Theories

8.2.1 Basic Concepts and Terms

8.2.1 Different Sociological Perspectives

8.3 Problems and Challenges

8.3.1 Family by Adoption

8.3.2 Challenging Biology

8.4 New Direction in study of family

8.4.1 Cultural Theory: Beyond Blood and Marriage Ties

8.4.2 A Feminist Critique: Power and Discrimination

8.5 New Family Forms

8.5.1 Family by Choice

8.5.2 Live-in Relationship

8.5.3 Single Parent Family

8.5.4 Surrogacy Families

8.6 Let Us Sum Up

8.7 References

8.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

8.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- Enumerate the key characteristics of family in dominant/classical theories in sociology;
- Examine the problems and challenges of understanding family only from classical perspective;
- Elaborate on the criticism of family by cultural theorists and feminists;
- Provide an account on how the meaning of family has changed historically and has significant implications on kinship studies;
- Examine new forms of family which are different from traditional-biological family.

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Family is one of the vital institutions of human society. In sociology, family has been referred as the fundamental/primary institution of society providing an expression to basic and universal biological needs, care-giving and socialisation functions. Though it is a universal institution, there are cross-cultural variations

in the definition of family. There is no singular structure and pattern of family. While in certain cultural contexts family is described as a large group constituted by husband, wife, children and kinfolds in others it is explained as a smaller unit with adult man, woman and their children. Whatever, variations may be evident in the structure and pattern of family by the virtue of members who constitute it, by most it is seen as a group of persons united by ties of affinity (created by marriage) and consanguinity (those based on birth) who reside in a single household.

In general perception it is seen as ahistorical and static structure of society incapable of any real change, a constant form of social life, representing natural order of things (Mitterauer and Sieder 1982:1). However, there has been several changes in the meaning as well composition of family. There have been multiple arrangements and patterns that have come to characterise family in contemporary times that mark a significant departure from conventional models making many to interpret it in crisis and contest its future. Family has been constantly evolving and changing its forms. In the light of the shifts and changes taking place, there have been attempts made to examine the institution from a point of view that question the conventional understanding. But before we go into the debates and discourses of re-imagining families, it is pertinent that we understand the meaning and concept in the classical theories.

8.2 UNDERSTANDING FAMILY: CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGY

There is not one clear single definition of “family”. It tends to be used either in a broad sense (all the descendants of a common ancestor, as in a “family tree”) or in a narrower sense, of parents living together with their children as a “unit”. In sociology family is defined as a unit that comprises of people living together who are related either by blood (cognate) or marriage (agnate). Different terms are used to refer to English word Family- *kutumba, graha, kula, vamsa, parivar*. Family is viewed as a “cultural ideal and a focus of identity” (Karlekar 1998: 1741). In the conventional sense family is simply seen as a part of natural order of things understood in terms of relations formulated as a part of intersection of three elements- marriage, parenthood and cohabitation/residence. The family is understood as the first line of defence especially for children and a major factor in their survival, health, education, and protection. It is also viewed as a major source of nurturance and emotional bonding. Such conceptions are consistent with descriptions of family and its functions. Therefore, in classical theories, family has been understood as a combination of three elements: marriage, parenthood and residence. The biological factors are the paramount in dominant understanding of family. A heterosexual conjugal household is seen as fundamental to the formation of family.

8.2.1 Basic Concepts and Definitions

There are several concepts that are often considered synonymous of family but in sociology a clear-cut distinction is made between them. Further, there is no one definition of family. The definition depends on the perspective taken and the purpose of defining family. In this section, let us examine the core concepts and definition relevant for understanding of family.

8.2.1.1 Household : A household can be defined as ‘a group of persons sharing a home or living space, who aggregate and share their incomes, as evidenced by the fact that they regularly take meals together i.e. in what is described as the ‘common cooking pot’ (Scott and Marshall, 2005). In other words, a household is the basic residential unit where economic production, consumption, inheritance, child rearing and shelter are organised and carried out. The household (*ghar*) is a residential and domestic unit composed of one or more persons living under the same roof and eating food cooked in the same kitchen (hearth/*chulah*).

According to sociological perspective household may not be always an essential element in defining family. People can be member of one family while not sharing a common household. A.M. Shah (1968:129) focuses in relation to the Indian scenario pointing out that two brothers and their wives and children may live in separate households, but may be bound by number of relationships of many kind. They would co-operate in economic pursuits, hold and manage property jointly, help each other on many occasions, celebrate festivals, rituals and ceremonies jointly, and so on (ibid.). This is a normal process, which highlights the importance of technical distinction between household and 'family'. Thus, two or more households may be separate but they may constitute one family (ibid.).

8.2.1.2 Difference between Family and Household : The family is based on the principles of kinship whose members usually share a common residence. They reside in a house/homestead. This residential unit is called the household. The members of a household have a set of relational ties amongst them. These ties are linked with the statuses held and the corroborating role complexes members of the family are expected to constitute. The household is a commensal and co-resident group/ unit. According to A. M. Shah, kin and residence rules distinguish between family and household.

The household is an extension of family, a family can be a household but a household need not be a family. A group of people can live together, regardless of whether there are any kinship ties. For example, flat mates (such as students), people living on their own, multiple-occupancy homes for migrant workers, etc. A family not only consist of household but often family is an extension of two or more households, members of which though may have separate residence yet may belong to same family and have familial bonding and responsibilities. Family along with being a functional unit is more of an ideological and emotional unit, whereas household may be described as more of a functional unit.

It is more apt to take ‘household’ as the unit of analysis to understand Indian social structure rather than ‘family’. Family according to them “...is a grouping of households of agnatically related men, their wives and unmarried sisters and daughters” (Shah, 1993: 420). Thus, for them the proper object of study should be the household dimension of family rather than family itself (Uberoi, 2001:15). The distinction between family and household helps us to understand the changes taking place in family in India, in terms of composition.

8.2.1.3 Domestic Group : Domestic groups can described as a group of people residing together and sharing activities of domestic life. It is often used synonymous with household, where several households are spread across several regions but think of themselves as one kinship unit. Domestic group are basically resource owning and production unit. They are living (and usually eating) together, and characteristically exercising corporate control over

family property. Meyer Fortes defined domestic groups as a house-holding and housekeeping group which helps members to organise resources which are needed for the development of all its members. According to Fortes, each domestic group undergoes a cyclical development. There are three main stages or phases in the developmental cycle of the domestic group. The first phase of expansion lasts from the marriage of two people to the completion of their procreation. The second phase of dispersion or fusion begins with the physical departure of the oldest child for school or a job, or with the marriage of the oldest child. This period continues until all the children are dispersed or married. This is the phase of replacement in the social structure of the family, founded by the families of their children.

8.2.1.4 Differences Between a Domestic Group and a Family: The original meaning of family in Latin is similar to that of “domestic group” but in sociology the two have been differentiated on the basis that some domestic groups are formed by individuals who have no kinship relationship. At the same time, members of one family may be distributed over two or more domestic groups. The actual composition of the nuclear family and the domestic group may be identical. However, one can differentiate the strictly reproductive functions, in our sense of the concept of social reproduction, from the activities concerned with the production of food and shelter and the nonmaterial means for ensuring continuity with society at large. One might put it that the domestic domain is the system of social relations through which the reproductive nucleus is integrated with the environment and with the structure of the total society.

8.2.2 Sociological Perspectives

Sociology looks at the social institution of the family through many lenses, but its four dominant theoretical premises are:

- i. functionalism,
- ii. conflict theory,
- iii. symbolic interactionism and
- iv. feminist perspective

These varying perspectives provides varying approaches for understanding the family as a social institution.

8.2.2.1 Functional Perspective: The functionalist perspective demonstrates family as a vital institution. According to it, family has important functions for the society and individuals. They have analysed family in terms of the functions it performs and mostly highlighted the positive functions. Society is regarded as a system made up of different parts which depend on each other. Sociologists like George Murdock and Talcott Parsons advocated a functional understanding of family. George Murdock spelt his views on family in *Social Structure*, 1949. Talcott Parsons updated Murdock’s perception on family. For George Murdock family performed four functions, namely, regulation of sexual behaviour, reproduction, economic cooperation and socialisation. Talcott Parsons pointed out the efficacy of family rests in two important functions of primary socialisation of children and stabilisation of adult personality. He

argued that in modern industrial societies while the state had come to perform economic function (through welfare provisions) and provide education but still the family continued to perform irreducible and significant functions.

Focuses on the structural properties and important social functions performed by the institution. The functions performed by the institution of family as highlighted by functionalist theories are:

- Biologically family provides a legitimate platform for two adult members to sexually cohabit together as a couple and enhance social continuity.
- Family provides shelter and fulfils basic metabolic need of meeting food intake.
- Family acts as an economic unit in which members take part in productive activity; members may do similar or different jobs
- Household works are divided on the basis of division of labor based on age, gender and position of a person in family and even personal competence.

8.2.2.2 Conflict Theory posits that society is characterised by conflict between social groups. Groups with unequal power and competing interests compete for scarce resources. They examine families' function within a society to perpetuate structural inequalities. This perspective suggests that the family structure contributes to social inequality because it supports economic and gendered inequality by reinforcing patriarchal values. For example, intergenerational transmission of wealth within families creates and maintains inequality.

8.2.2.3 Social Interactionism is a social theory that focuses on the analysis of patterns of communication, interpretation, and adjustment between individuals in relation to the meanings of symbols. This perspective emphasises that families reinforce and rejuvenate bonds through symbolic mechanism rituals such as family meals and holidays. They also explore the changing meanings attached to family. This theory argues that shared activities help to build emotional bonds among family members, and that marriage and family relationships are based on negotiated meanings.

Check Your Progress 1

1. What are three elements that characterise family according to dominant understanding?

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2. State any four functions of family as given by the functional theories.

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8.3. PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES IN CLASSICAL THEORIES

This section elaborates on the idea of connectedness that stands in contradiction to biologically established kinship and family ties. It focuses on adoption-based affinity and homosexual alliances/kinship. In the contemporary society, there are lot of uncertainty when it comes to determining the idea of family as a safe-haven. The question does arises whether every family continues to provide emotional and physical protection to its members. The answer would be as negative especially in the light of increase in child sexual abuse by members of primary groups, increase in disputes among siblings over property, increase rate of domestic violence on women and divorce as well as the mental health issues of homosexuals and transgender individual. The family may not be seen as protective haven. Rather many have started questioning the fact of being born in family without a choice and therefore the concept of family by choice.

8.3.2 Family by Adoption

Adoption creates a familial relationship of parent and child between people who are not naturally related. It challenges the inevitability of biology as the only basis to parenthood. In short, it draws attention to connectedness forged through law. Historically, adoption has been practised in almost all societies. This shows centrality of the idea of attaining parenthood among all human beings. However, the purpose of adoption in traditional contexts has varied considerably from those emphasised today. In ancient times childless couples have resorted to adoption to ensure continuity of the male line for political, religious or economic reasons. Consequently, the adoption of male persons was prevalent predominantly, then. The aspect of welfare and well-being of the child was not significant. Contrarily, the modern laws pertaining to adoption are fundamentally concerned with the welfare of the child. This idea gathered force post-World War I period in Europe and United States as a large number of children had been orphaned and there was tremendous increase in illegitimate birth. Later the idea was to gain legitimacy from scholarly studies in disciplines like psychology and sociology, which emphasised the positive implications of stable family life on the development of child.

In present contexts in addition to the adoption by childless couples, an unmarried adult individual may adopt and assume the role of a single parent. Adoption is also a viable idea for homosexual couples and individuals who may want to start an independent family of their own. However, in India despite repeal of Section 377 of the Constitution, which has decriminalised homosexuality, homosexuals are still not eligible for adoption. Different countries have different legal procedures and laws regarding adoption. In India the Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection) Act, 2015 lays out provisions and criteria for adoption. According to this Act adoption is the process through which the adopted child is permanently separated from his biological parents and becomes the lawful child of the adoptive parents with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities that are attached to a biological child. The Act recognises five kinds of adoption recognised in law in India. These include adoption of an abandoned, surrendered, destitute children adopted by unrelated person/s living within and outside the country. Similarly, a related child can be adopted by relatives living within and outside the country. Also, the stepparents can adopt children within the country.

8.3.2 Step-Families: Redefining the Family

Stepfamilies are not new and have been common throughout history but absent in sociological and anthropological studies prior to 1970s. Now there has been lot studies of step families on two grounds, first due to increase case of re-marriage in many Western countries as well as in India, the instances of step-families or blended families have increased. Second, the change in the anthropological approach to the study of marriage, family and kinship.

A stepfamily can be defined as family in which at least one of the parent has a child or children from previous relationships. Going by this definition, the step-families does not fit in the conventional definition of family based on sharing of blood and there are also number of conflicts going on in such families. Children in a stepfamily may live with one biological or adoptive parent, or they may live with each biological or adoptive parent for a period of time

The step families are different from nuclear-biological families on several account. The problems in step families are the result of entry of few members into a family on re-marriage of either father or mother. It's not only the issue of children but also the problem of sharing responsibilities among the members. The entire notion of parental responsibility is altered in such families. The members also face problems of sharing living space, developing relationship, negotiating relations with previous spouse as well as emotional and mental issues.

8.4 CRITIQUE OF THE CLASSICAL THEORY

The definitions of family in sociology were offered from a Western cultural understanding of biology and its centrality to the formation of family. Prior to 1970s, most sociologist were engaged with the task of differentiating family from household and further to use it for a comparison of social changes taking place due to industrialisation. The dominant assumption was about family as a procreative and a safe-haven for its members which was getting affected due the growth of rationality and scientific temper. This began to change post 1970s, the traditional assumption about the functionality of family began to be challenged. Family began to be conceptualised in terms of its fluid nature that reflected the divide between kinship as a given biological fact and kinship as social, constructed and processual.

The section focuses on the underside of the family as an institution in general and particularly in the Indian context by elaborating on some of the scholarship that offers a critique to it. These critiques are relevant as they offer perspectives to comprehend alternate arrangement which are beyond biology and marriage yet constitute a family.

8.4.1 Cultural Theory: Beyond Blood and Marriage Ties

The cultural theorists made the claim that classical definitions of the family were heavily influenced by largely unexamined Western cultural assumptions about biology and its relationship to kinship. They were of opinion that sociologist studying family had only two engagements, firstly to compare and differentiate family from household and secondly to examine the changes taking place due to impact of industrialisation. And seen in the earlier section, family was defined as a functional unit where the task of reproduction, emotional ties and other domestic work was done. However, post 1980s, changes were visible in theories of family, especially in kinship studies, where the traditional embedded

assumptions about the universality of the family and its sociological purposes were debated and ultimately discarded.

Family began to visualise in terms of its fluid nature that reflected the divide between kinship as a given biological fact and kinship as social, constructed and processual.

Family begun to be re-imagined beyond the ideal of nuclear family and biological ties for reproduction. The meanings of the family re-imagined at two new levels:

- i. Children are no longer taken as a necessary precondition, and
- ii. Family relations are extended to include friends.

Such an understanding of family broadened the discourse on family whose meanings were seen as continuously negotiated in everyday situations. Judith Stacey work titled *Brave New Families*, gave a new description of the creative nature of contemporary post-industrial family life due to changes in economic realities, gender roles, and kinship conceptualisations. Theorisation of same-sex family challenged the assumption of hetero-sexual family as the norm. The new ways of conceptualising families has laid emphasis on human interaction, gendered relation, and parent-child relationships. According to these cultural theorists, there are alternate modes of constructing that signifies the subjective meaning of relatedness, rather than formal objective ties based purely on biological or marriage ties

8.4.2 A Feminist Perspective: Power and Discrimination

Mainstream studies have described the family as an indispensable social institution based on cooperation, harmony, common interests and equality. To a large extent they have also taken 'man' within the family as the basic unit of their study and have neglected the woman's experiences. Feminism challenged this vision of the family as a cooperative, harmonious and egalitarian realm. They have sought to show that rather than being a mutually beneficial institution maintained on equal contribution of all members, the family functions largely with the exploitation of the woman's labour. The feminist criticisms bring to scrutiny family by focusing on power dynamics underlying it. They illuminate the hierarchies and sexual repression that underlie family, and henceforth, reflect on its in egalitarian and oppressive character.

Feminists like Marxists and functionalists have argued that the family is essentially a conservative institution that functions to preserves the social order. However, they disagree with functionalists and agree with Marxists that in doing so it benefits only a powerful group within society. For feminists, this group is men. They argue that families preserve, support and embed patriarchy. Feminists criticise mainstream theories for not recognising existing unequal power relations within the family that help maintain patriarchy at the cost of the woman's life and rights. Okin (1989) observes that justice is glaringly lacking from the cornerstone institution of society: the family. She elaborates that marriage and the traditional family structure renders women vulnerable to dependency, exploitation and abuse. Her work is a critique of traditional scholarship on justice that holds family as a noble institution, a moral community and an instance of "enlarged affection". Feminist critique makes us aware of inequality of sexes questioning the unequal division of labour in the traditional family structures, where women are preordained into home-making and child rearing activities and men take up paid work. This leads to economic

dependency of women on men and make many of them fear divorce and be victims of violence and abuse. Further, when women seek work outside the home, the justness of family decisions does not change, due to tendency to burden women with more family responsibilities than men (Pagac 1990:1822).

Yet, another critique of the institution of family comes from the work by Raheja and Gold (1996) on image of women in oral folk tradition of Rajasthan in North India. Their work highlights that the folk songs of women in North India are an expression of their critique of conventional conceptions of family and kinship and women's position in it. While these songs posit a positive self-image of women, as they are a powerful expression of opposition by them of their subordination, they do not dismiss the inequalities, disadvantages and sexual repression women face in family in everyday contexts. Karlekar (1998) enumerates family in Indian context as a site for violence; and thereby questions its sanctity as a cultural ideal. She uses the life-cycle approach and argues that at every stage there is discrimination and violence, particularly against girl children and later women within the household, either natal or conjugal (p. 1741). In this context she focuses on familial violence reflecting on it in terms of female infanticide, child labour and inter-spousal violence etc.

Check Your Progress 2

1. How does the cultural theory challenge the understanding of family as a biological unit? Write in answer in three/four lines

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2. What is Okin's perception on the institution of family?

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8.5 NEW FAMILY FORMS

Families have been changing and affected by multiple forces and variables like industrialisation, growing independence of women, rise in levels of education, economic change, legal regulations, feminist critiques and political discourses. Since the 1970s, changes in the structure of the family have been taking place. There was the emergence of new forms of family like single parent family, same-sex or family by choice and co-habitation without marriage. These forms were referred as 'non-traditional' family as it did not fit into the classical definition of family formed on basis of biology and alliance. However, many in academics preferred to use the term 'new families' to refer to forms of family that did not exist or were not visible until the later part of twentieth century. This section focuses on the some of the multiple patterns and arrangements that mark a shift from conventional understanding of family.

8.5.1 Family by Choice

The term 'families we choose' was used by Kath Weston to describe queer forms of kinship different to the biological family. Also described as 'families we create' suggests that individuals have a choice in the formation of family.

According to Weston, in gay and lesbian communities in 1980s San Francisco, "Kinship began to seem more like an effort and a choice than a permanent, unshakable bond or a birth-right." Weston's (1991) study provides a significant basis to reconceptualise and redefine the concept of family and kinship in view of relationships between gay men and lesbian women. It questions the genealogical basis to kinship by bringing it to scrutiny and denaturalising it, implying that kinship need not be postulated taking procreation as the base or centre piece. The study reflects on the non-procreative, non-material and symbolic relations of lesbian women and gay men in the U.S., which provide a critique of kinship and contest assumptions regarding the bearing of biology, genetics and heterosexual intercourse on the meaning of family.

The family by choice is an illustration of the fact that biology is not the only defining feature of kinship. People can be kin without sharing blood and marital relation. Kinship is based on love and enduring solidarity expected to characterise this familial relationship. Further it also negates the ideas of procreation based on heterosexual identities. Family is no longer seen only as unit for reproduction rather it can be a non-procreative unit. Such family ties are based on ideology of choice and love, and stand in opposition to biological model of kinship. The families of choice therefore, emerge as an important basis to question biologically modelled heterosexual domain of kinship, which has failed to provide support and care to lesbian women and men.

8.5.2 Live-In Relationship

Live-in relations, a departure from the conjugally established familial units, have emerged as preferred form of arrangements among many. Live-in relationship i.e. cohabitation is an arrangement whereby two adults decide to live together on a long term permanent basis in an emotionally and sexually intimate relationship outside the wedlock of marriage. The live-in relation may be entered into both by heterosexual and homosexual couples. There is a preference for living-in relation among the younger generation in the urban cities across the globe. There are a number of reasons that may govern individual's preference for live-in relations. It finds its foundation in the fundamental right of an individual to have the liberty to choose his or her partner. For many it has emerged as a basis to assess the mutual compatibility or to establish financial security prior to entering into a legalised wedlock. Also, those unable to enter into marital alliance may enter in live-in relation for e.g. members of same sex, interreligious or interracial group.

However, live-in relations are seen by many as immoral and viewed encouraging free-sexual behaviour. They are seen as threat to the traditional institution of marriage and family. Added to this, the children born from these relationships are pointed as to have less secure future. In short, these relations are viewed as threat to the legally wedded wife and her children and are seen to give encouragement to extra-marital affairs. Such relations have also been contested on medical grounds and pointed as responsible for rising HIV/AIDs cases. The live-in relations are considered far short-lived than relations based on marriage as they do not require legal recourse to be terminated. Though live-in relationships have been accorded legitimacy along with children born from such arrangements, the latter is not entitled to claim inheritance in Hindu ancestral coparcenary property (in the undivided joint Hindu family) and can only claim a share in the parent's self-acquired property.

8.5.3 Surrogacy Families

The term 'surrogacy family' is used to refer to a family formed with the help of third party (generally a women) who rents her womb for the gestation of the child. The surrogate enters into a legal contract with the fertility clinic that after the delivery of the child, she will have no claim or relations. Surrogacy family functions as traditional family but the only difference is that the notion of maternity is complicated. Motherhood is not defined by the period of gestation but by the capacity to rent a womb. The absence of gestational link between mother and child does not affect their physical and emotional relationship. Surrogacy provides an opportunity to individuals who due to medical reasons cannot conceive, to same-sex partners and those who are want to bring up children without necessarily marrying.

Check Your Progress 3

1. Give any two difference between biological family and family by choice.

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2. Illustrate with suitable example the formation of new family forms due to impact of reproductive technologies.

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8.6 LET US SUM UP

The unit began by focusing on how in the dominant thinking the institution of family has been regarded as the cornerstone/basic unit and an inevitable part of human society. By most family is regarded in positive light, efficacious and desirable. It however, pointed out that such an understanding diverts attention from the underside of family and discourages from rethinking on it. In doing so the unit reflected on feminist critiques and their questioning of many of the assumptions that underlie the traditional/conventional perceptions of family and kinship. These shake the foundation of family by attacking the role of women in it. Then, various alternatives like families based on ideology of love and live-in relationships may be seen as possible ways to negotiate with the traditionally sexually oppressive family forms and kinship patterns. Again, the unit reflected on the challenges posed by stepfamily indicating that being in family may not always be all that a fulfilling experience.

The unit has reflected on the multiplicity of family forms and patterns that allow us to move beyond the terrain of biology. The stepfamily, family based on adoption, gay and lesbian ties based on choice challenge the biological determined understanding of family and kinship.

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8.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The three characteristics of family according to dominant understandings are:
 - i. A union between man and women for purpose of procreation- Family is formed with primary function of procreation and hence defined as a mating relation between man and woman.
 - ii. Institution legalised through marriage: the union between man and women is legalised to constitute a family only through marriage solemnised by the community.
 - iii. Performs functions of providing economic, emotional and physical security and protection to all its members.
- 2) The functions performed by the institution of family as highlighted by functionalist theories are:
 - i. Biologically family provides a legitimate platform for two adult members to sexually cohabit together as a couple and enhance social continuity.
 - ii. Family provides shelter and fulfils basic metabolic need of meeting food intake.
 - iii. Family acts as an economic unit in which members take part in productive activity; members may do similar or different jobs
 - iv. Household works are divided on the basis of division of labor based on age, gender and position of a person in family and even personal competence.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The cultural theorists were of opinion that the traditional theories of family focused on two things, firstly to compare and differentiate family from household and secondly to examine the changes taking place due to impact of industrialization. Cultural theories expanded on this and for them the meanings of the family re-imagined beyond biology and marriage. Children were no longer considered as a necessary precondition for setting up of family and further family relations are extended to include friends.
- 2) Okin (1989) observes that justice is glaringly lacking from the cornerstone institution of society: the family. She elaborates that marriage and the traditional family structure renders women vulnerable to dependency, exploitation and abuse. Her work makes us aware of inequality of sexes questioning the unequal division of labour in the traditional family structures, where women are preordained into home-making and child rearing activities and men take up paid work. This leads to economic dependency of women on men and make many of them fear divorce and be victims of violence and abuse.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The basis of the formation of biological family is the sharing of blood and heterosexual union. On the contrary families by choice is non-procreative and is formed on basis of love and solidarity between homosexuals. The second difference is that individuals are born in biological family, so it is formed at birth. The family of choice is formed when individual are grown up and are able to select their family members.
- 2) The emergence of new reproductive technologies has expanded the choice of procreation and family. Surrogacy families is an illustration of the new form of family resulting due to the reproductive technologies.

