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1. What is family? A layman’s definition of family is a group of people made of father, mother and children sharing blood ties. The word family originated from a Latin word “familia” meaning household servants. A lot of definitions of family have been put forward such as a group of people of common ancestry, a group of people who share a legal bond or blood bond etc. Murdock defines family as a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children, own or adopted. The question of what constitutes a family is a prime area of debate in family sociology, as well as in politics and religion. Social conservatives tend to define the family in terms of structure with each family member filling a certain role (like father, mother or child). Sociologists, on the other hand, tend to define family more in terms of manner in which members relate to one another than a strict configuration of status roles. However, an acceptable comprising elements of the definitions of family mentioned above is a socially recognized group (usually joined by blood, marriage, cohabitation or adoption) that forms an emotional connection and serves as an economic unit of society. Sociologists identify different types of families based on how one enters into them. A family of orientation refers to the family into which a person is born. A family of procreation describes one that is formed through marriage. These distinctions have cultural significance related to issues of lineage.
2. Sociologist Maclver, classified the functions of family into two broad categories such as essential and non-essential functions. These functions are also known as primary and secondary functions. However, common functions of family are:
3. Procreation and rearing of children: family provides legitimate basis for production of children. It institutionalizes the process of procreation. By performing this function of procreation family contributes to continuity of family and ultimately the human race. Hence perpetuation of human race is the most important function of family. Not only the production of children but also child rearing is another important function of family. Family is the only place where the function of child rearing is better performed.
4. Socialization: It is said that man is not born human but made human. Family plays a vital process in the socialization process. It is one of the primary agents of socialization. Humans learn norms, values, morals and ideas of society. He learns culture and acquires character through the process of socialization. His personality develops in the course of his living in family. Through socialization man becomes social and acquires good character.
5. Provision of home: Family performs the function of providing a home for common living to all its members. It is only in a home that children are born and brought up. Even if children are born in hospitals in modern time still they are taken care of and properly nourished in a home only. Family provides recreation to its members. A home provides emotional and psychological support to all its members.
6. Educational functions: As a primary education institution family used to teach letters, knowledge, skill and trade secret to its members. Family looks after the primary education of its members and moulds their career and character. He learns informal education such as discipline, obedience, manners from family. Though the educational functions of family are taken over by schools, college and universities still family continues to play an important role in providing the first lessons and primary education to its members.
7. Religious functions: Family is the centre of all religious activities. Family members pray and observe different religious rites, rituals and practices jointly. Children learn different religious values from their parents. An individual often practices the religion of the family he/ she is born into. The family plays an important role in shaping the religious attitude of its members.
8. Cultural functions: Cultural traits, beliefs, practices are preserved by the family. Man learns and acquires culture from family and transmits it to succeeding generations. That is why family is considered the centre of culture.
9. THE AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY

Basically, the heading would be interpreted as the type of marriage that existed in the pre-colonial times in Africa. For Africans, family has a wider meaning that that of the whites. In traditional African society, family includes father, mother, children, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, in-laws and other relations. In the traditional society, polygamous marriages were a preferred form of marriage. They were seen as a means of extending familial relationships. Members of the family could live in a family compound consisting of several houses or live close to one another. There are certain patterns and features that characterize African traditional families. Some of these features are marriage, family size, occupation etc. However, in contemporary times there have been changes to these the old patterns as a result of modernization. Family patterns such as polygamy, widow inheritance, that were the norm in traditional rural African societies are gradually changing due to the acceptance of modern values. The introduction of modern changes are felt in the types of marriages contracted, ages at which both genders get married, childbearing, family size etc.

VALUES IN THE AFRICAN SOCIETY

Despite, the changes to the traditional ways there are some values that are retained in the African society. For example, respect for elders and ancestors.

* Respect is highly accorded to the aged and ancestors in the African society.
* Collectivism is another value present in the traditional and modern African society. Africans value togetherness as opposed to individuality.
* Values like integrity, honesty, morality are held in high esteem.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

African traditional families are mostly rural, patriarchal, hierarchical, polygamous and open to kinship networks and attached to lineage continuation. These features played a vital role in influencing the type of marriage adopted and the number of children women gave birth to. In the traditional times, the men were superior and women were subservient. The men often decided the number of children they wanted. Marriage systems in Africa differ. In some places, pairings between men and women are temporary, others permanent. Depending on the culture, a couple may have to live in the husband’s home or the wife’s home. In some cultures, each spouse continues to live in the home they were born in. Children may stay with parents until puberty and then leave to fend for themselves. African marriages were largely polygynous. A man may marry more than one wife. In this case, the wives constitute the units of the family. Each of the wives are assigned houses were they live and train their children. The mothers and their children more than the husband and wife, form the basis of family and kinship in such communities. Christian marriages in Africa, however, were monogamous-one man, one wife. Early marriages were also rampant in the traditional African societies. Girls were usually married as early as 15 years. Arranged marriages also characterized African societies. Marriages were arranged by parents without their children’s consent. Childbearing was important. Children were pivotal for lineage continuation and women who could not give birth or birth children late were castigated. Family size in the traditional African society constituted of large households. The traditional African family practiced communal living. Families also had their occupations. Some of these occupations were farming, nomadic farming, carpentry, basket weaving, blacksmithing.

However, in contemporary African society many of these values have changed. Polygyny is not as rampant. Occupations have strayed from the local purview. Marriage patterns are changing and new ones are being made. Despite these changes, some of the traditional African values and ways of living are retained.

1. My nuclear family is a small one. We are monogamous in nature. We are five in number-my father, my mother, my two siblings (2 brothers) and I. I will classify my family as a contemporary African family. My father is a marine engineer. My mum is a business woman. I am a student in the university while my brothers are secondary school students. I hold the position of first child and only daughter in my family. My parents perform their roles as parents to us. They nurture and impart morals and values in us. My mum and dad also provide our basic needs i.e food, shelter, clothing as well as our wants- holidays, gadgets, outings. My parents act as our support systems. My brothers and I also perform our roles as children in the family. We take care of household chores. We accord our parents respect as elders in the family. As children, we do our possible to make good grades in school and make our parents proud. I would describe my position as first born and only daughter in the family to be bittersweet. It comes with a lot of responsibilities and privileges as well. One of such responsibilities is to take care of my younger siblings and account for them. I also have to be an example to them. I also do most of the household work. However, there are privileges. I get to have a say in matters in the family. My parents do not bother me as much as they do my brothers and I have the lion’s share of items. Values and morals such as integrity, honesty, trustworthiness, hard work, respect, responsibility, fairness, reliability, confidence, forgiveness, patience, generosity, tolerance, loyalty, humility and love are imparted in us by my parents. My family’s religion is Christianity. My parents teach us to pray and have faith in God. We are taught the commandments and tenets of our faith. We also go to church and observe religious celebrations such as Palm Sunday, Easter, Passover, Christmas. As a family, we try to strengthen our bond with one another and our extended family members. We have a good relationship. It is not the best of best but we work daily to make it better. However, we love and can always rely on one another.