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WHAT IS FAMILY ?

The dictionary defines a family in several ways. One definition is "a fundamental social group in society typically consisting of one or two parents and their children." While this definition is a good starting point, there are several modern family structure that are excluded by this definition, such as childless couples or other variations on the family unit. Another definition is "Two or more people who share goals and values, have long-term commitments to one another and reside usually in the same dwelling." This definition encompasses the vast majority of modern family units; for the purposes of this article, the second definition will be used. A family can also be defined as a group consisting of two parents and their children living together as a unit. Further more It can be defined as all the descendants of a common ancestor.

Essential functions of family:

1. Procreation and Caring of Children:

It is another important sectional function of family .Necessary arrangement of stable satisfaction of sexual urge resulted in procreation. Family provides the legitimate basis for production of children. It institutionalizes the process of procreation. By performing this function of procreation family contributes to the continuity of family and ultimately human race. Hence perpetuation of human race or society 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. It provides food, shelter, affection, protection and security to all its members. It plays a vital role in the process of socialization of child. It provides healthy atmosphere in which the personality of the child develops properly. Family takes care of the child at the time of need. Hence it is rightly remarked that family is an institution par excellence for the procreation and rearing of children. It has no parallels.

Provision of Home:

Family perform another important function of providing a home for common living to all it's 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. Because family and a home have no substitute. In a home all the members of family live together and a child is brought up under the strict vigilance of all it's members. All the members need a home to live happily with comfort, peace and protection. A home provides emotional and psychological support to all it's members. Man's necessity of love and human response got fulfilled here. Family provides recreation to it's members. In a home family performs the role of a modern club. Man got peace by living in a home.

Socialization:

It is another important essential function of family. It is said man is not born human but made human. New born human baby became human being after they are socialized. Family plays an important role in the socialization process.

It is one of the primary agents of socialization. Living in a family human baby learns norms, values, morals and ideals of society. He learns culture and acquires character through the process of socialization. His personality develops in the course of his living in family. From family he learns what is right and wrong and what is good or bad. Through socialization he became a social man and acquires good character.

Non-essential or secondary functions of family:

Famous Sociologist Maclver has divided functions into essential and non-essential functions. Under non-essential or secondary functions he includes economic, religious, educational, health and recreational functions. Along with the essential functions family also performs these non-essential functions. These functions are non-essential or secondary in the sense that these are also performed simultaneously by other social institutions in family. These functions are as follows:

(1) Economic functions:

Since ancient times family has been performing several economic functions. It is an important economic unit. In ancient time family was both a production and consumption unit. It used to fulfill almost all the economic needs of it's members such as food, clothing, housing etc. In the then days family was self- sufficient. But now a days almost all the economic functions of family is performed by other agencies and family only remain as a consumption unit. It do not produce anything. All the members of family now working outside the home.

But in spite of all family still performing some economic functions of purchasing, protecting and maintaining property. It also equally distribute property among it's members.

(2) Educational functions:

Family performs many educational functions for it's members. As an primary educational institution family used to teach letters, knowledge, skill and trade secret to all it's members. It looks after the primary education of it's members and moulds their career and character. Mother act as the first and best teacher of a child. Besides he learns all sorts of informal education such as discipline, obedience, manners etc. from family. Of course at present many of the educational functions of family are taken over by school, college and universities sill family continues to play an important role in providing the first lessons and primary education to its members.

(3) Religious functions:

Family is the centre of all religious activities. All the family members offer their prayers together and observe different religious rites, rituals and practices jointly. All the members believe in a particular religion and observe religious ceremonies at home. Children learn different religious values from their parents. Living in a spiritual atmosphere spirituality develops among the children. Family transmits religious beliefs and practices from one generation to another. But at present family became more secular in their outlook. Common family worship became very rare

and absolute. Still family continues to play an important role in shaping religious attitude of its members.

(4) Health related functions:

Family as a primary social group performs several health related functions for its members. It look after the health and vigor of its members. It takes care of the sick old and aged persons of the family. By providing necessary nutritive food to its members family takes care of the health of all. Of course modern family delegates some of its health related functions to hospital. The child is born today in a hospital or in a clinic and taken care of by nurses.

(5) Recreational function:

Family-performs several recreational functions for it's members by entertaining them in various ways. In ancient period family was the only centre of recreation. All the members together organize family feasts, visit the family relations, organize family picnics etc. Family organize different festivals which is another source of recreation. The relationship between grandparents and grand children is another source of entertainment. After day's work all the members used" to assemble and exchange their view. Of course modern club replaces many recreational functions of family. But at the same time it is said that present family acts as a modern club without its evil effects.

(6) Cultural functions:

Family also performs several cultural functions as well. It preserves different cultural traits. Man learns and acquires culture from family and transmits it to succeeding generations. That is why family is considered as centre of culture.

(7) Social functions:

Family performs a number of social functions. It teaches about social customs, mores, traditions, norms, etiquette to the coming generations. Family exercises social control over its members and bring them into conformity with accepted standards. Senior members of family directly control the behavior of children and thereby they became a good citizen.

## AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FAMILY

Family plays a central role in African society. It shapes such daily experiences as how and where individuals live, how they interact with the people around them, and even, in some cases, whom they marry. It can determine a person's political identity and the way money and property are transferred. In rural areas, the family typically remains the basic unit of agricultural production.

However, no single type of family exists in Africa. Societies have defined family in many different ways, and many bear little resemblance to the Western idea of the nuclear family. Furthermore, throughout the continent, traditional family patterns are changing. Colonialism, capitalism, the growth of cities, exposure to Western culture, and increasing opportunities for women are some of the factors that are affecting the shape of family life.

## FAMILY STRUCTURE

Each of the many family systems in Africa can be defined in terms of two broad kinds of relationships. Relationships of descent are genealogical—that is, based on the connections between generations. Relationships of affinity are marital—based on marriage. The interweaving of these relationships creates the family that an individual sees every day, as well as the wider network of kinship that surrounds each person.

### Relationships of Affinity

Marriage systems in Africa are highly diverse. In sub-Saharan Africa, some pairings of men and women are temporary, others permanent. Depending on the culture, a couple may live in the husband's home or the wife's home. Among some groups, such as the ASANTE, the spouse continues to live in the home in which he or she was born. Children may stay with their parents until they marry, or they may spend part of their adolescence in the home of another relative. In some cultures, young people leave their families at puberty to live in villages of adolescents. African marriage can be polygynous—that is, a man may have more than one wife. In practice, though, only the senior or wealthy individuals in a society have been able to have multiple wives. When polygyny occurs, the family unit is based on mothers. Each wife has her own house and property that are generally transferred to her own children. The mother and child, rather than the husband and wife, thus form the basis of family and kinship in such communities. Christian marriages in Africa, as elsewhere, are generally monogamous, with a man having only one wife.

In some African societies, nuclear families are contained within larger social groups that may include kinfolk, neighbors, people of the same age or gender, and others. The nuclear family does not always have its own property or decide what tasks its members will perform. Rather, relationships between husbands and wives and between parents and children often unfold within larger domestic units called households, which may consist of joint or extended families.

### Households

In a household community, several generations and several nuclear families live and work together. In joint family households, all members live together in a single large homestead or compound. In extended family households, the nuclear families within the household each live in separate compounds. A joint or extended family is under the authority of its senior member, typically a grandfather or greatgrand-father. Such families may be patrilineal or matrilineal. Most members of a joint or extended family household are born and raised within it or marry into it. Some, however, such as adopted children or adults, may be unrelated to the others. In sub-Saharan Africa, distant relatives are sometimes invited to settle with a household, but they usually have lower status than their hosts. A household might also include servants or, in the past, slaves.

The household functions as an economic as well as a family unit. It can be described in material terms—for example, by acres of land, number of buildings, or certain tasks performed by certain members. A family compound among the Tswana of Botswana might include the huts and grain sheds of a man and his wife (or wives) and children, an unmarried brother, and an elderly mother. In rural areas, household members work together to produce food and other goods; in a

town or city, the members might work to pay rent and buy groceries. In either case, the household needs to maintain itself, which means that productive new members must be added to replace the elderly, the disabled, and those who die. In this way, households are more flexible and inclusive than other family groups.

### Marriage Systems

Marriage takes many forms in Africa. Throughout the continent, the diversity of systems reflects the traditions, religious, and economic circumstances of a wide variety of distinct cultures. Islamic laws and customs have shaped the institution of marriage in North Africa and in some nations of western and eastern Africa. In recent years, modern life, industry, and cities have brought changes to African marriages and to the roles of men and women.

African marriage systems do share several characteristics. They almost always involve the transfer of bridewealth—cash, goods, or services—from the groom or his family to the bride's family. This exchange is both real and symbolic, as it marks the woman's passage from one social group to the other. Thus, for Africans, marriage is a matter between families as much as between the bride and groom, and many families arrange the marriages of their members. The Western attitude that marriage is the union of two people drawn together by love has had some influence in Africa, especially in the cities. But African cultures emphasize that the union of two individuals must fit into the larger picture of social networks known as KINSHIP groups. Each marriage creates an alliance between or within kinship groups, and the children of the union will inherit property, rights, and responsibilities from their kin.

### Types of Marriage Systems

In Africa the institution of marriage varies as widely as the many thousands of ETHNIC GROUPS and cultures. Although some cultures forbid certain types of marriage, all the traditions are designed to promote kinship ties, to safeguard land and wealth through an orderly transfer, and to create a social order in which members of the community clearly understand their roles and relationships to others. Polygamy is common in much of sub-Saharan Africa, and it is the privilege of men, not of women. Polygamy enlarges a family and increases its ability to work and earn a living. It also demonstrates the power and status of the head of the household. In addition, polygamy gives men more freedom in selecting partners. If a man follows certain rules and traditions for his primary marriage, his others may be guided by personal choice or feeling.

Africans practice four other main types of marriage. Each is defined by whom a man or woman is allowed, expected, or encouraged to marry. One common type of marriage involves unions between close relatives. A man may marry his niece, his cousin, or even his half sister or granddaughter. A second type consists of marriages between in-laws, people already related from previous marriages. A man might marry his wife's brother's daughter, his niece-in-law. A third type, called the levirate, occurs when a man marries the widow of his older brother. Finally, a sororate union is a man's marriage to his wife's younger sister, either after his wife's death or while she is still alive.

Many societies in central and southern African favor marriage between cousins. Since cousins' parents are brothers and sisters, the marriage of two cousins means that bridewealth is transferred among siblings and their families. This system of marriage, with several variations,

strengthens the bonds between brothers and sisters and ensures that the bridewealth stays within the extended family. Such arrangements are especially common among pastoralist peoples who offer cattle, vital assets for them, as bridewealth. However, some ethnic groups prefer bridewealth paid in service, not money or cattle. For instance, among the Bemba, farmers in a poor region of ZAMBIA a man earns his bride by working for years for her family.

Some marriage systems circulate women instead of wealth. Among some peoples of central NIGERIA, women must marry many men from different kinship groups. They change their residence each time they go to a new husband or return to an earlier one. Young children follow their mother at first, but when they get older, they join a male member of the family—their father, their mother's brother, or one of their mother's other husbands. Other Nigerian groups expect a man who marries to give a sister in marriage to a male in his bride's family. In this way, the two families exchange women through marriage. If the man has no sister to offer, he must give his wife's family custody of his children instead.

African men rarely seek to divorce their wives because divorce means that they must give up the marriage's material goods as well as its social alliances. Women do sometimes seek a divorce. In some cases, they may wish to end a traditional first marriage and to make a second marriage based on personal choice. Generally, however, the courts do not allow women who divorce to keep their children.

#### Islamic Marriage and Divorce

Islam, the major religion of North Africa, encourages marriage as the proper way of regulating sexuality and organizing families. Many groups regard marriages between cousins as ideal because they strengthen family ties and keep property within the extended family. When families arrange marriages, the selection process may begin with the women, but the final decision comes from the elder men of the family. The groom or his relatives pays bridewealth to the bride's family, which in turn provides a dowry for the bride. The wedding ceremony usually takes place at the groom's family home. Islamic law—based on the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam—gives men and women different rights and privileges in marriage and divorce. A man can divorce his wife whenever he wishes to do so, whether she agrees to the divorce or not. A woman can only divorce her husband under certain conditions. The practice of polygamy is limited to men, who may have as many as four wives at the same time. Women are not permitted to have more than one husband. Polygamy has never been universal among North Africans, and the practice has dropped sharply in modern times.

#### Marriage in Modern Africa

Modern life in Africa's growing cities has distanced people from their traditional rural kinship groups. Men and women in urban areas are becoming more likely to insist on their personal wishes in arranging a marriage, though they may still seek approval from their families in the countryside. African women now have greater opportunities for jobs and education, and they have gained more power to make choices and be independent. They are generally marrying at a later age and having fewer children.

Modernization has brought other changes to marriage systems. Many families now accept money instead of the more traditional forms of bridewealth such as cattle. In urban areas this change has made it easier for employed young men to marry. In addition, media such as television and film in urban areas have exposed more people to Western models of

relationships. Like other forms of social organization in Africa, marriage systems are changing as people combine the demands of modern life with those of tradition.

#### DESCRIPTION OF MY NUCLEAR FAMILY

A nuclear family, elementary family or conjugal family is a family group consisting of two parents and their children (one or more). It is in contrast to a single-parent family, the larger extended family, and a family with more than two parents.

In my own definition , a nuclear family is made up of parents and their children living in the same household

My Nuclear family consists of My family , My mother, My elder sister, My younger brother and I.

#### MY FAMILY TREE