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Q3(a)

**Define family and critically examine the universality of family**

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2015 · Anthropology GS 1 · 15 marks · Family

2.4 Family: Definition and universality; Family, household and domestic groups; functions of family; Types of family (from the perspectives of structure, blood relation, marriage, residence and succession); Impact of urbanization, industrialization and feminist movements on family.

**Core demand of the question**

- Define family and critically examine the universality of family
- Write about 200 words for 15 marks

**Revision summary**

Family organises sex, filiation, and domestic care.

**Murdock** claimed the nuclear family as universal.

Nayar taravad, kibbutz, and ghost marriage break that atom.

A childcare group is widespread; the nuclear household is not.

Treat 'the family' as a variable form, not a natural given.

**Introduction**

A family is a socially recognised group that cares for children and organises sex, descent, and domestic labour. Whether that group is universal depends on how tight the definition is.

**Body****Definitions**

- **Murdock** called the nuclear family a universal building block: adults of both sexes and their children, with common residence and reproduction.
- **Goody** and later critics said many societies start from a wider kin corporation, not from a isolated couple.

**Claims of universality**

- Childcare, incest rules, and some durable mating appear very widely.
- **Malinowski's** parental group among Trobrianders still named mother, father, and mother's brother with different duties.

**Limits**

- **Nayar taravad**, described by **Gough**, had visiting husbands. The residential family was matrilineal, not **Murdock's** nuclear unit.
- **Israeli kibbutz** and some commune experiments split sleeping, meals, and parenting.
- Same-sex parenting, fostering, and **Nuer** ghost marriage show filiation without a living opposite-sex pair in the house.

- Collier, Rosaldo, and Yanagisako argued that 'the family' is an ideological package, not a natural atom.

### A usable settlement

- Some domestic arrangement for raising children is universal. Murdock's nuclear form is not.

### Flow diagram

Family -> Childcare filiation  
Murdock nuclear -> Claimed universal  
Nayar kibbutz Nuer -> Limits

### Conclusion

Family as childcare and recognised filiation is widespread. The nuclear, co-resident, heterosexual household is historically common, not a human constant, as Nayar and kibbutz cases show.

### Facts & figures

#### Murdock

Social Structure (1949) treated the nuclear family as a universal statistical unit.

#### Gough

Nayar marriage showed visiting husbands and matrilineal residence, not a nuclear house.

#### Malinowski

Argued for a parental group even where mother's brother holds authority.

#### Yanagisako

Feminist kinship work treated family as a cultural category, not a biological atom.