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Q3(b)

Define urbanization and discuss its impact on family in India with examples.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · 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 urbanization as demographic and socio-cultural process
- Discuss changes in structure, function and relations of Indian families
- Use Indian sociological-anthropological findings and contemporary examples
- Critique the linear claim that urbanization simply destroys the joint family

Revision summary

Urbanization combines population concentration with urban occupations and institutions.

Housing and mobility favour smaller households, delayed marriage and lower fertility.

Desai distinguishes residence from jointness; Shah highlights the household developmental cycle.

Indian families may be residentially nuclear but functionally joint through property, care, ritual and remittance.

Women's paid work can increase autonomy while adding a domestic double burden.

Class, caste and migration diversify outcomes, so urbanization does not mechanically destroy the joint family.

Introduction

Urbanization is the increasing concentration of population in towns and cities together with the spread of urban occupations, institutions and ways of life. **Louis Wirth** stressed size, density and heterogeneity; Indian evidence shows that these conditions reorganise family residence and authority without automatically dissolving kinship.

Body**Structural changes**

Migration, expensive housing and occupational mobility encourage smaller residential units, delayed marriage and neolocal households. Fertility falls and education lengthens dependence of children. Inter-caste, inter-regional and companionate marriages become more visible, although arranged marriage and caste-matrimonial networks adapt through education, apps and diaspora connections.

The census household must not be confused with the family. **A. M. Shah** showed that household dimensions expand and contract through a developmental cycle. **I. P. Desai's studies distinguished co-residence from jointness: brothers in different cities may retain shared property, ritual obligations, remittances and decision-making. Urbanization often produces a functionally joint, residentially nuclear family.**

Functional and relational changes

- Production moves out of the household, while family remains a unit of consumption, care, inheritance and social capital.
- Women's education and paid work can increase bargaining power and challenge patriarchal authority, but unpaid domestic work creates a double burden. Feminist movements also make violence and marital rights publicly contestable.
- Children gain school and peer influence; authority becomes more negotiated. At the same time, coaching, housing and employment often intensify parental investment.
- Longer life expectancy and migration create old-age care gaps. Multigenerational homes, paid carers and digital contact are new combinations rather than one replacement form.
- Urban poor and migrant families may be split across village and city. Slum housing can force dense extended residence, while circular migrants depend heavily on rural kin.

M. S. A. Rao emphasised networks and social organisation in Indian urban anthropology; **M. N. Srinivas's** ideas of Westernisation and Sanskritisation also show that urban change is mediated by caste and aspiration. Caste associations, regional hostels and neighbourhood communities can strengthen kin-like support in cities.

Critical assessment

Class, caste, religion, gender and city size produce multiple urban family forms. The idealised rural joint family was never universal, and the isolated Western nuclear family is not the inevitable destination. New autonomy may coexist with surveillance, dowry, elder dependence and digital kinship.

Flow diagram

Urbanization -> Smaller residence
Urbanization -> Wage work and mobility
Urbanization -> Education and lower fertility
Smaller residence -> Residential nuclearity
Wage work and mobility -> Remittances and kin networks
Residential nuclearity -> Plural family forms
Remittances and kin networks -> Plural family forms

Conclusion

Urbanization changes where families live, who earns, when people marry and how care is negotiated. Its dominant effect is diversification and networked jointness, not a simple march from joint to nuclear. Indian families remain adaptive institutions inside unequal cities.

Facts & figures

Louis Wirth

Urbanism as a Way of Life linked urban social relations to population size, density and heterogeneity.

I. P. Desai

Indian family studies showed that jointness is multidimensional and can persist without one common residence.

A. M. Shah

Distinguished family and household and analysed household expansion, fission and recombination through a developmental cycle.

M. S. A. Rao

Indian urban anthropology emphasised migration, networks and social organisation rather than treating the city as anonymous individuals.

Split household

Circular migration can place earners in a city and dependants in a village while income, care and decisions continue across both.

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