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Q8(a)

Discuss the changing nature of kinship relations in the contemporary world.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Systems of Kinship

Systems of Kinship: Family, household, marriage; Types and forms of family; Lineage and descent; Patriarchy and sexual division of labour; Contemporary trends.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the changing nature of kinship in the contemporary world
- Keep the discussion within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

Kinship organises descent, marriage, and care; it is stretching, not dying.

Alliance and caste endogamy persist beside delayed marriage and chosen intimacy.

Migration, IVF, and law split biological and social parenthood.

Census and NFHS show mixed households.

COVID made kin the shock-absorber of care and shelter.

Introduction

- **Kinship is the social organisation of relatedness:** descent, marriage, and care. Claude **Levi-Strauss** treated alliance and the exchange of spouses as elementary. The contemporary world has not abolished kinship. It has stretched, delayed, and partly chosen it, under law, migration, and new technology.

Body

From elementary structures to mixed forms

- **Levi-Strauss's** alliance still organises much marriage, including caste endogamy in India.
- William J. **Goode** expected industrialism to spread a conjugal family. **Census** households show nuclear, joint, and female-headed mixes, not a single path.
- David Schneider taught that kinship is also a cultural code of blood and law, which same-sex and adoptive families now contest.

What is changing

- Later marriage, lower fertility in many classes, and longer education rearrange the generation clock.
- **Giddens's pure relationship** and chosen intimacy describe a limited urban script: exit is thinkable.
- **Migration and NRI households produce kinship at a distance:** remittance, video ritual, and marriage markets across borders.
- New reproductive technology and legal adoption separate biogenetic and social parenthood.

What persists

- Care of the old and the child still leans on women, as Oakley and NFHS decision-making files show.
- Honour, dowry bargaining, and violence show that "choice" is stratified.
- Work from home put paid labour back into kin space, thickening household control for some women.

Shocks and public kinship

- COVID-19 made the household the hospital and the school. Kin absorbed risk that the state did not.
- **Lockdown reverse migration was a kinship event:** the village house as the only remaining right to shelter.

Discussion

- Contemporary kinship is more diverse in form and more loaded as a welfare system.
- It is not a simple shift from joint to nuclear, nor from structure to pure individual contract.

Flow diagram

Kinship -> Alliance descent
Kinship -> Chosen delayed migrant
Law IVF adoption -> Chosen delayed migrant
Gendered care -> Persistence
Lockdown village house -> Kinship

Conclusion

Kinship is changing through delayed marriage, migration, law, and technology, while alliance, caste, and gendered care persist. **Levi-Strauss**, **Goode**, Giddens, and Schneider frame the debate. **Census**, NFHS, WFH, and 2020 returns show India as mixed, not post-kin.

Facts & figures

Levi-Strauss

Elementary structures: kinship as alliance and the exchange of spouses.

Goode

Predicted a world shift toward the conjugal family with industrialisation; empirically mixed.

Pure relationship

Giddens: intimacy continued for its own sake and exit, a limited late-modern possibility.

Kinship at a distance

Migrant and NRI relatedness through remittance, ritual media, and translocal marriage.

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