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Q5(d)

Analyze critically David Morgan's views on family practices

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 1 · 10 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- Analyze critically David Morgan's views on **family practices**
- Keep the analysis within a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Morgan defined family as practices that **display** relatedness, not only as a co-resident group.

The view fits diverse households, migration, and rites across houses.

It makes **gendered care** visible as work done.

It underplays law, property, and caste as closures on who may practise.

Use it with Shah, Karve, and feminist political economy, not as a solo theory.

Introduction

- **David Morgan shifted the sociology of family from a fixed institution to family practices:** the activities through which people **display** relatedness. The view is powerful for contemporary diversity. It is weaker if it dissolves structure, law, and gender into a set of optional habits.

Body**What Morgan argued**

- In Family Connections and later **Family Practices**, Morgan treated family as something people do: phoning, feeding, visiting, naming, and caring.
- Practices are historically situated, have an audience, and can be more or less intense.
- The approach fits later marriage, divorce, step-ties, friendship care, and households that do not match Parsons's isolated nuclear type.
- It also fits Indian urban life where brothers do not co-reside but still perform joint rites and remittances.

Critical gains

- It avoids treating the census household as the whole of kinship, a warning **A. M. Shah** also gave in another vocabulary.
- It makes gender visible as who actually does the practice, not as a role label on a chart.
- It allows chosen kin without forcing them into a fake biological box.

Critical limits

- Property, law, and caste endogamy still organise who is allowed to practise family with whom. Practice theory can underplay that closure.
- Talcott Parsons and older functionalism over-fixed the group. Morgan should not over-unfix it into pure process.
- Feminist work on unpaid labour needs the practice idea, but also needs **Marx** on surplus and patriarchy as structure, not only as a habit.
- Cross-cultural use must not treat British late modernity as the world pattern. Karve's regional systems still constrain practice in India.

Judgement

- Use Morgan to see doing. Keep descent, alliance, and law to see who may do.

Flow diagram

Morgan -> Family as doing
Family as doing -> Care visit name feed
Law caste property gender -> Who may practise
Care visit name feed -> Displayed relatedness
Who may practise -> Displayed relatedness

Conclusion

Morgan's **family practices** correctly treat relatedness as activity and fit diverse households. A critical analysis keeps law, property, caste, and gendered labour as structures that decide whose practices count as family. The view is a necessary shift, not a complete theory of kinship.

Facts & figures

Family Practices

Morgan's later statement that family is constituted through historically situated activities.

Display

Practices are done before an audience that confirms relatedness.

Parsons nuclear type

The isolated conjugal household that Morgan's approach was written against as a universal.

A. M. Shah

Distinguished household composition from joint-family ideology, a parallel caution on counting houses.

Gendered care

The empirical finding that women still do a disproportionate share of family practices.

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