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Q3(b)

How do you assess the changing patterns in kinship relations in societies today?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 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

- How do you assess the changing patterns in kinship relations in societies today?
- Keep the assessment within a 20-mark length

Revision summary

Kinship is relatedness through descent, marriage, and care, not only a joint house.

Parsons's isolated nuclear family does not describe Indian change.

Later marriage, migration, divorce, and new parenthood forms diversify households.

David Morgan's practices and Karve's regional systems are better tools than Morgan's old stages.

Gendered care and caste endogamy continue inside the new household types.

Introduction

Kinship is the organised recognition of relatedness through descent, marriage, and care. Patterns today are changing in law, residence, and everyday practice, but they are not disappearing. The assessment must name what is new without announcing the end of the family.

Body

What older models assumed

- Lewis Henry Morgan treated kinship as a classificatory system tied to stages of society. That evolutionary ladder is no longer used as a law of progress.
- Later anthropology, including Claude Levi-Strauss, treated alliance and the exchange of spouses as structure.
- Talcott Parsons described the isolated nuclear family as the form that fitted industrial society in the United States.
- Irawati Karve mapped North and South Indian kinship as different regional systems of descent, marriage, and household.

Patterns now visible

- Later marriage, lower fertility, and longer life change the span of generations living at once.
- Dual-earner households, migration, and urban housing shrink co-residence of joint kin without ending remittance and ritual obligation.

- Divorce, remarriage, single-parent households, and live-in arrangements, recognised in some Indian judgments, multiply forms of household.
- Chosen kin and friendship care appear where marriage is delayed or refused.
- **David Morgan's** family practices shift attention from a fixed group to the activities of calling, visiting, and caring that make relatedness.
- Same-sex partnerships and assisted reproduction disturb the old identity of blood, marriage, and parenthood.

Indian specificities

- Joint household ideology remains strong even when brothers live in different cities and share a village house at rites.
- Gotra, clan, and caste endogamy still organise a large share of marriages, now with matrimonial sites as a new market.
- Matrilineal pockets such as the Khasi and the Nair past show that change is not a single path from joint to nuclear.
- **A. M. Shah** warned against treating the joint family as a simple census headcount of co-residence.

Assessment

- The direction is toward more diverse households and more negotiated practice, not toward the death of kinship.
- **Gender remains central:** care still falls heavily on women even when the chart of the household looks nuclear.
- Class splits the pattern. Secure professionals buy privacy. Migrant labour depends on village kin as social security.
- Global media spread companionate marriage ideals. Property and honour continue to discipline those ideals.

How to study the change

- Combine census household type with Morgan's practices and with Karve's regional map.
- Do not use Parsons's isolated nuclear family as the Indian destination.

Flow diagram

Kinship -> Descent marriage care
Descent marriage care -> Diverse households
Migration dual earning -> Diverse households
Morgan family practices -> Diverse households
Caste endogamy honour -> Continuity
Diverse households -> Change with continuity

Conclusion

Kinship today is more diverse in household form, more stretched by migration, and more visible as practice than as a single joint or nuclear type. Morgan's evolutionary stages do not explain this. Regional systems, gender, and class do. Kinship is changing in pattern. It is not finished as a social institution.

Facts & figures

Lewis Henry Morgan

Classified kinship systems and tied them to an evolutionary sequence no longer used as a law.

Irawati Karve

Mapped North and South Indian kinship as distinct regional structures.

A. M. Shah

Distinguished household composition from the joint-family as an ideological and property unit.

David Morgan

Family Practices: relatedness is done through activities, not only through a fixed group.

Parsons nuclear family

Ideal type of an isolated conjugal unit fitted to industrial occupational mobility in the United States.

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