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Q8(a)

Modern families have not just become nuclear and neo-local, but also filiocentric. How do you explain this trend?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · 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

- Define nuclear and **neo-local residence**
- Define filiocentric as child-centred family authority and investment
- Explain the trend through industrialisation, schooling, fertility decline, middle-class culture and emotional democracy
- Use Parsons, Ariès or Indian family studies

Revision summary

Nuclear families centre on the couple and dependent children.

Neo-local residence means a home apart from both parental households.

Filiocentric means the child becomes the emotional and economic centre.

Parsons linked the isolated nuclear family to industrial mobility.

Fertility decline, schooling and middle-class child projects deepen filiocentrism.

Indian households often mix nuclear dwellings with continuing wider kinship.

Introduction

The modern family is often described as nuclear, neo-local and, increasingly, filiocentric. Nuclear means a couple and their dependent children as the everyday household core. Neo-local means the couple set up a home apart from both sets of parents. Filiocentric means that the child, rather than the lineage elder or even the conjugal pair as a rank order, becomes the emotional and economic centre. The trend needs a sociological explanation, not a complaint about spoiling.

Body**Nuclear and neo-local change**

Talcott Parsons linked the isolated nuclear family to industrial society. Occupational mobility, he argued, is easier when the household is small and not bound to a joint estate. William Goode expected a world movement toward the conjugal family. Indian evidence is more mixed. A. M. Shah distinguished family and household. Joint living continues in many property-holding groups, while urban rental housing and migration produce neo-local nuclear units. I. P. Desai and later NFHS-style data show a rise of smaller households without a simple death of kinship. Remittances, care of the elderly and festival membership keep the wider

family alive even when the dwelling is nuclear.

Neo-locality follows jobs, education and the housing market. It also follows the wish of young couples for privacy. Patriarchy does not automatically fall when the house is nuclear. The husband's parents may still govern from another flat.

Why families become filiocentric

Philippe Ariès argued that the modern idea of childhood as a protected, precious stage is historically produced. Falling fertility, which **demographic transition** theory describes, concentrates parental investment on fewer children. Schooling lengthens dependence. The child becomes a project of the middle class: marks, coaching, health and display. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim wrote of the negotiated family and of children as last remaining sources of meaning in an individualised world. Emotional democracy, in Anthony Giddens's late-modern intimacy, raises the child's voice inside the home compared with a strictly patriarchal joint family.

In India, the only-child or two-child urban household, the coaching industry, and public anxiety about the girl child's education and safety all show filiocentrism. Advertising and social media amplify the child as consumer. This can improve child welfare. It can also produce pressure, sibling-less isolation, and neglect of the elderly, which is the other side of a child-centred budget.

The three adjectives therefore hang together. Industrial and urban work pull households toward nuclear neo-local form. Low fertility and long schooling turn that household around the child.

How the three changes support one another

A joint household with many children can centre the eldest male and the lineage property. A neo-local flat with one or two children, both in school for many years, has a smaller stage. Parents spend time on homework, health and competitive exams. The child's timetable organises the adults. This is filiocentrism as a practical order, not only as a feeling. It is strengthened by the state when childhood is legally protected, and by the market when toys, coaching and insurance are sold through the child. It is also class-specific. A landless household may still need children's labour. A wealthy joint family may remain elder-centred. The trend named in the question is strongest where wage work, small dwellings and school competition coincide. Explanation should keep that social location in view.

Flow diagram

Industry urban jobs -> Nuclear neo-local household
Low fertility long schooling -> Filiocentric investment
Nuclear neo-local household -> Filiocentric investment
Wider kinship -> Nuclear neo-local household

Conclusion

Modern families often live as nuclear neo-local units and place the child at the centre of emotion and spending. Industry, housing, fertility decline and schooling explain the trend. Kinship does not vanish, but authority inside the dwelling shifts toward the child's future.

Facts & figures

Neo-local residence

The rule or practice that a new couple lives in a new place, not with the husband's or wife's parents.

Demographic transition

The historical fall in death rates and then birth rates, which concentrates care on fewer children.

Shah on family and household

The reminder that Indian jointness may persist in property and ritual while the dwelling unit shrinks.

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