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Q3(b)

Clarify the distinction between "household" and "family" and evaluate Whether joint families have completely disintegrated

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2017 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Systems of Kinship in India

Systems of Kinship in India: Lineage and descent in India; Types of kinship systems; Family and marriage in India; Household dimensions of the family; Patriarchy, entitlements and sexual division of labour.

Core demand of the question

- Clarify the distinction between "household" and "family" and evaluate whether joint families have completely disintegrated
- Treat as a 20-mark answer

Revision summary

Household is who lives and eats together; family is the wider kin corporation.

Census roofs can hide joint property and marriage control.

Common kitchens have declined in towns.

Remittance, land, and ritual keep jointness alive.

The joint family has transformed, not vanished.

Introduction

Household and family are related, not identical. A household is the unit that lives and eats together. A family is the kinship group of descent, marriage, and obligation, which may stretch across several roofs. Joint families have changed form. They have not completely disintegrated.

Body

Household versus family

- **I. P. Desai** and later Indian family sociology treated the household as a residential and commensal group.
- Family includes natal and affinal ties, property claims, and ritual duties that survive migration.
- A migrant worker in a city room is a small household. His joint family may still decide marriage and land in the village.
- **Census** 'household' therefore understates jointness as a moral and economic system.

What 'joint' meant

- Coparcenary property, a common kitchen, and male-line authority were the classic north Indian ideal, tied to Leela Dube's seed-and-earth ideology.
- **A. M. Shah** warned against treating the ideal as the statistical majority even in the past.

Have joint families disintegrated?

- Urban jobs, housing, and women's education produce more nuclear households in towns.
- **Functional jointness persists:** remittances, elder care, wedding pools, and undivided land.
- **Yogendra Singh's modernisation of tradition fits this:** roles differentiate, obligation remains.
- Andre Beteille's disharmony appears when law gives daughters shares while brothers still farm the joint field.

Regional and class variation

- South Indian and some matrilineal histories never matched the north Indian coparcenary myth.
- Poor nuclear households may be joint in crisis; rich urban flats may be nuclear in kitchen and joint in property.

Verdict

- Disintegration of the common kitchen is widespread.
- Disintegration of the joint family as a kinship corporation is not complete.

Flow diagram

Household co-residence -> More nuclear roofs

Family kinship property -> Functional jointness

Migration law jobs -> More nuclear roofs

Migration law jobs -> Functional jointness

Conclusion

Household is co-residence; family is kinship obligation. Joint families have nuclearised as living units more than they have died as property and honour systems. Speak of transformation, not complete disintegration.

Facts & figures

I. P. Desai

Distinguished household composition from jointness as a kinship process.

A. M. Shah

Showed that the ideal joint family was never the only empirical form.

Seed and Earth

Dube's idiom that still organises who belongs to the male line across households.

Remittance household

A small urban roof funded by, and obligated to, a village family.