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Q3(c)

Discuss the changing dimensions of family structure in urban India

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · Sociology GS 2 · 10 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

- Discuss the changing dimensions of family structure in urban India
- Keep the note to a 10-mark length

Revision summary

Urban India shows more nuclear and stem households.

Joint-family duties survive as property, care and ritual.

Endogamy and gender honour change slower than co-residence.

- **Class splits the picture:** middle-class flats versus slum crowding.

Singh's modernizing tradition fits this mix.

Introduction

The urban Indian family is changing in size and daily authority, not disappearing. Nuclear households grow, while kinship duties and caste marriage still bind people across flats.

Body

Structural change

- Urban work, migration, and housing costs favour nuclear and stem households over the classic co-resident joint family.
- Dual earning, delayed marriage, and live-in arrangements appear in the **new middle class**, a heterogenetic push in Yogendra Singh's terms.
- Ageing parents may live apart yet remain economically tied, a **modified joint family** rather than a Western break.

What is slower to change

- **Karve's** regional marriage rules and jati endogamy continue through matrimonial markets.
- Dube's Seed and Earth honour still shapes who inherits and who cares for elders, even when daughters earn.
- Srinivas treated the joint family as a process; festivals, property, and crisis still activate it.

Urban specificity

- Slum and informal households show crowding and female-headed units after male circular migration, including **COVID** shocks.

- **Beteille's differentiation:** office roles equalise a little; household rank often does not.

Flow diagram

Urban work housing -> Nuclear stem households
Kinship caste endogamy -> Ties across flats
Nuclear stem households -> Modified urban family
Ties across flats -> Modified urban family

Conclusion

Urban family structure is moving toward smaller co-residence and more negotiated gender roles, while kinship, caste, and elder duty persist. The change is recombination of tradition, not the death of the Indian family.

Facts & figures

Modified joint family

Separate residence with shared property, ritual and elder support.

Karve

Regional kinship forms that urban marriage still largely follows.

New middle class

Site of delayed marriage, dual earning and still-caste matrimonials.

COVID

Crisis that pulled migrants home and reactivated urban-rural family claims.