**THE FAMILY: GLOBAL VARIETY**

The family is a social institution that unites individuals into cooperative groups that oversees the bearing and rearing of children. Marriage may be one of the important rituals that are instrumental in uniting individuals. Whereas the marriage and family appear to be universal there is a global variety in this institution. Let us look at some of the basic concepts related to family and marriage and see some global diversity in each.

*Family:* A social group of two or more people, related by blood, marriage, or adoption who usually live together. In other words it is a group of persons directly linked by kin connections, the adult members of which assume the responsibility for caring for children.

This is a conventional definition of family. In the technologically advanced societies, today, some people object to defining only married couples and children as “families” because it implies that everyone should accept a single standard of moral conduct. More and more organizations are coming to recognize *families of* *affinity*, that is people with or without legal or blood ties who feel they belong together and wish to define themselves as a family.

*Household:* It consists of all people who occupy the same housing unit – a house, an apartment, or other living arrangement.

*Kinship:* A social bond, based on blood, marriage, or adoption that joins individuals into families. Connections between individuals established either through marriage or through lines of descent that connect blood relatives (parents, siblings, children, cousins, in-laws).

*Nuclear family:* Two married adults living together in a household without their children. This is also called a *conjugal family.*

*Extended family:* When close relatives other than a married couple and children live either in the same household or in a close and continuous relationship with one another. It may include grandparents, brothers and their wives, unmarried sisters, aunts, uncles, nephews, and cousins. It is also called a *consanguine family.*

*Family of orientation:* A family in which an individual grows up, usually born in it as well. This family is central to a child’s socialization and orientation.

*Family of procreation:* Family formation by the individuals themselves. It is the family that you create through marriage or remarriage and then procreate as well. This family is formed when a couple has their first child.

**Marriage Patterns**

*Marriage:* A legally sanctioned relationship of two or more people, usually involving economic cooperation as well as normative sexual activity and child-bearing that people expect to be enduring. Marriage is the appropriate context for procreation that is how the concept of illegitimacy comes in. It is a socially approved mating arrangement – usually marked out by a ritual of some sort (wedding) indicating the couple’s new public status.

*Cultural norms, as well as laws, identify people as suitable or unsuitable marriage partners.* Incest taboos prohibit marriage between certain close relatives. Who is a close relative may vary from society to society. For example in Pakistan the marriage between first cousins is allowed but in most of the industrialized societies it has prohibited by law.

*Endogamy:* The practice of mate selection from the same social category. It limits marriage prospects to others of the same age, race, religion, or social class.

*Exogamy:* The practice that mandates marriage between different social categories. It could imply an incest taboo, which could also be transformed into written law.

*Monogamy:* A form of marriage joining two partners. At a time the two partners are only in “one union”. The two partners may divorce and enter into a new union at a time, which may be referred to as *serial monogamy.*

This practice is mostly followed in technologically advanced societies.

*Polygamy:* A form of marriage uniting three or more people. It could take different forms of many unions.

Polygamy exist in three specific forms, including

*Polygyny:* A form of marriage uniting one male and two or more females. Islamic nations permit men up to four wives, though they have to fulfill certain conditions.

Polyandry: A form of marriage uniting one female with two or more males. This pattern appears only rarely (often quoted example of Tibet).

*Group marriage: A group of men marrying a group of women. It is an odd situation.*

**Residential Patterns**

Just as societies regulate mate selection, so they designate where a couple resides after marriage. In preindustrial societies, most newlyweds live with one set of parents, gaining economic assistance and economic security in the process.

*Patrilocal:* A residential pattern in which a married couple lives with or near the husband’s family.

*Matrilocal:* A residential pattern in which a married couple lives with or near the wife’s family.

*Neolocal:* A residential pattern in which a married couple lives apart from the parents of both the spouses.

**Patterns of Descent**

Descent refers to the system by which the members of a society trace kinship over generations. Most preindustrial societies trace kinship through only one side of the family – the father or the mother. It is also an orderly way of passing property and other rights to the next generation.

*Patrilineal:* A system tracing kinship through males. Children are related to one another only through their fathers and fathers typically pass their property on to their sons. It is mostly found in agrarian societies.

*Matrilineal:* A system tracing kinship through women.

*Bilateral*: (two sided descent) A system tracing descent through both men and women. One may come across this system in industrial societies portraying gender equality.

**Patterns of Authority**

*Patriarchy:* A system in which authority is vested in males; male control of a society or a group. This is the most prevalent system all over the world.

*Matriarchy*: Authority vested in females; female control of a society or group. True matriarchy rarely found in history.

*Egalitarian*: Authority more or less equally divided between people or groups (husband and wife). In reality patriarchy continues – typical bride takes the groom’s last name; children are given the father’s last name.

**FUNCTIONS OF FAMILY**

Structural-Functionalists suggest that family performs several vital functions. In fact in this perspective family has been considered as “The backbone of society”. At the same time the social conflict paradigm considers the family central to the operations of society, but rather than focusing on societal benefits, conflict theorists investigate how the family perpetuates social inequality. The important functions are:

1. **Regulation of sexual activity.** Every culture regulates sexual activity in the interest of

maintaining kinship organization and property rights. One universal regulation is the incest

taboo, *a cultural norm forbidding sexual relations or marriage between certain kin.* Precisely which kin fall within the incest taboo varies from one culture to another. Mostly marriage with close relatives like parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, is prohibited.

The incest taboo may have medical explanations as reproduction between close relatives of any species can mentally and physically impair off springs. Yet it has social reasons. First the incest taboo minimizes sexual competition within families by restricting legitimate sexuality to spouses. Second incest taboo forces people to marry themselves outside their immediate families, which serve the purpose of integrating the larger society. Third, since kinship defines people’s rights and obligations towards each other, reproduction among close relatives would hopelessly confuse kinship ties and threaten social order.

2. **Reproduction.** Perhaps the only function that seems to have been left to a great extent untouched is reproduction. Without reproduction the continuation of society is at stake and the legitimate births take place only within the wedlock. Yet even this vital and inviolable function has not gone unchallenged. A prime example is the number of single women in the Western society who have children (about one third of all births in US).

3. **Socialization of children.** The family is the first and most influential setting for socialization.

Ideally the parents teach children to be well-integrated and participating members of society. In fact, family socialization continues throughout life cycle. Adults change within marriage, and, as any parent knows, mothers and fathers learn as much from raising their children as their children learn from them.

The conflict sociologists try to find fault with the outcome of this socialization through which there is likely to be the transmission of cultural values. There is the continuity of **patriarchy,** which subordinates women to men. Families therefore transform women into the sexual and economic property of men. Most wives’ earnings belong to their husbands.

4. **Social placement.** Parents confer their own social identity – in terms of race, ethnicity, religion, and social class – on children at birth. This fact explains the long-standing preference for birth to married parents. This is more like ascription of social status to the children,

Nevertheless, racial and ethnic categories shall persist over generations only to the degree that people marry others like themselves. Thus endogamous marriage shores up the racial and ethnic hierarchy of a society.

Conflict sociologists traced the origin of the family to the need to identify heirs so that men (especially in the higher classes) could transmit property to their sons. Families thus support the concentration of wealth and reproduce the class structure in each succeeding generation. Therefore family plays an important function in maintaining social inequality; hence it is a part and parcel of capitalism.

5. **Care of the sick and elderly.** Family has been a big insurance against the old age as well as

during sickness. As the society moves towards the industrialization this function is likely to be

taken over by institutionalized medicine and medical specialists. Care of the aged is likely to

change from a family concern to a government obligation. In Pakistani society, by and large, it remains to be an important function of the family.

6. **Protective function.** Family provides some degree of physical, economic, and psychological

security to its members. Attack on a person is considered to be an attack on the family.

Similarly guilt and shame are equally shared by the family. People view the family as a “haven in the heartless world”, looking to kin for physical protection, emotional support, and financial

assistance. People living in families tend to be healthier than living alone.

7. **Economic production.** Prior to industrialization, the family constituted an economic team.

Family members cooperated in producing what they needed to survive. When industrialization moved production from home to factory, it disrupted this family team and weakened the bonds that tied family members together. In Pakistan family still performs an important function at least in helping its members in establishing their careers and obtaining jobs.

**FAMILY AND MARRIAGE IN TRANSITION**

There is a great diversity in the family and marriage arrangements. The globalization of societies, and with the emerging chances in Pakistani society one could expect further variations in this institution. Pakistani society is certainly experiencing the changing trend toward industrial-urban way of life. Every third person in Pakistan is presently living in a locality, which has been declared as urban; thereby these urbanites are likely to experience diversities around. A variety of social and economic forces become instrumental in the erosion of traditional family and marriage values. We are trying to hold on to the sacred values of this institution, though we cannot ignore the secular inroads that are already taking place. Are these positive developments or are these threatening? Nevertheless, the dramatic changes in the social norms and values have transformed the family life. Though we do not have empirical evidence to support the observed changes yet it may be worth mentioning and it might generate curiosity for future research. Therefore, let us look at some of the changes that are being experienced by the family and marriage nationally and internationally.

**1. Family is losing functions.** Except for procreation of children, for all other functions it

appears that other institutions are taken over the traditional functions of the family. In the

developed countries families have accepted such a take-over whereas in Pakistan such a change

is fast coming. For example educational institutions and mass media of communication are

becoming powerful agents of socialization of children. Health care, matrimonial arrangements,

maternal services, and many other family responsibilities are being taken over by professionals.

We are heading towards a situation where right from the birth till our burial the whole of our

life is likely to be handled by the professional functionaries.

**2. Families are exerting less influence over the lives of their members.** Modern society is an

“other directed” society where the behavior of a person is much influenced by the peer group

(contemporaries) who is found outside of the family. Of course the families try to have a

control on the kinds of friends their children are likely to have but the variety of peers the

children come across while out in school may be beyond the limits of families. Nevertheless,

these very peer groups might become strengths for the socialization of children. Such a

situation might be well experienced by the families where both the parents are working. Even

these parents are likely to pick up many of their styles of life from outside.

**3. Shift toward nuclear/conjugal families.** As an outcome of empirical regularity, there is a

postulated universality of nuclear family. As the traditional family systems break down, though

with different speed, in industrial society hiring is on the basis of competency; efficiency is

measured by individual performance; job market requires mobility; none of these requirements

need strong kinship network. Industrializing societies create their other formal agencies to

replace help from kinship networks. Individuals have independent careers, and “go their own

way” ignoring extended kinship ties. Even in stress nuclear family appears to be quite

responsive to provide emotional support.

**4. Kin networking fading and being replaced by friends networking.** People either depend

on their own self or on their social capital of friends.

**5. Declining size of families.** With the societies moving towards modernization, there is a

decline in the fertility of women. In Pakistan from 6.3 children per woman in the 1970 we have

come down to around 4 children per woman in 2004. Some of the reasons could be: the rise in

age at first marriage; decline in infant mortality (140/1000 live births in 1970 to around

85/1000 in 2004); increasing number of women especially older women not desiring to get

pregnant and younger wanting to space births; decline in desired family size; use of

contraceptives. All these reasons may have strong link with the education of families.

**6. The rise of symmetrical families.** There is an increase in dual earner families. One could find

a trend in the families where both husband and wife are working and sharing the household

work. Or if the wife is busy in the second shift at home, the husband might also be having a

second job.

**7. Patriarchy on the decline.** As the proportion of dual earners marriages continues to increase,

women’s financial dependence on their husbands declines, leading to a decline in patriarchy. In

the changing scenario instead of centralized decision making, families are moving towards

shared decision making. Hence patriarchy gives way to egalitarianism.

**8. Arranged marriages are being replaced by ‘marriages of inclination’.** Traditionally

marriages of children were arranged by their parents, but now youngsters are trying to exert

their personal choices in their matrimony.

**9. In the Western societies alternative marriage arrangements are on the increase.** For

example common law marriages (a marriage without marriage license) are on the increase.

**10. Women empowerment.** There is a changing status of women due to increase in literacy and

in the levels of literacy, financial independence, and in their decision making power.

**11. Divorce rates have been increasing.** There could be many reasons like:

• Individualism on the increase. People are looking for personal happiness.

• Romantic love often subsides. Marriages of inclination are relatively more vulnerable to

conflict and divorce.

• Women now are less dependent on men.

• Many of today’s marriages are stressful. Since both husband and wife are working, their

jobs consume most of their time and energy, then, if they have to raise the children, there

is not enough time and energy left for each other.

• Presently divorce is becoming more socially accepted. It is no more considered a stigma.

• From legal stand point, divorce is becoming easier to obtain. Couple may not have to

resort to mud throwing on each other, so the couple decides and the court allows.

**12. Lone old parent families on the increase.** The institution of family as the shelter for the

aged is gradually eroding. As the children grow up they, in search of their livelihood, head for

new destinations leaving their senior citizens in the empty nest. Here one could find a big gap

between the real and ideal value about caring the old people. Even the alternatives like the

community support, nursing homes have not emerged. The plight of single women, widows, and the sick persons is high. We have added years to life but not life to added years.

**13. Awareness of family violence has increased.** May be in the changing situation family

violence has also increased.

**14. The number of elderly marriages and remarriages is increasing.** The people deciding to

get married in their old age don’t feel shy anymore. Rather than leading a lonely life in case of

their being divorced or widowed, the elderly decide to get married. Since divorce does not

appear to be a stigma, therefore, divorcees don’t feel hesitant to remarry.

**15. Monogamy presumably becoming universal.** There might be an increase in remarriages

but the individuals are restricting themselves to one union at a time. So people marry, divorce,

and remarry, but at time a person is married to only one partner, which may be called as serial monogamy.

**GENDER: A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION**

What is the origin of the differences between men and women? How is the gender identity formed? How are the identity based social roles performed? There are competing explanations to these questions, which have connections with physical (sex) or social (gender) differences.

Sociologists use the term **sex** to refer to the anatomical and physiological differences that define male and female bodies. **Gender,** by contrast, concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females. Gender is linked to socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity; it is not necessarily a direct product of an individual’s biological sex. The distinction between sex and gender is a fundamental one, since many differences between males and females are not biological in origin.

Three broad approaches to behavioral difference between men and women:

1. Biological basis.

2. Importance of socialization and the learning of gender roles.

3. Both gender and sex have no biological basis, but are entirely socially constructed.

**Gender and biology: natural differences in behavior**

How far are the differences in the behavior of men and women the result of sex rather than gender? Some authors hold that aspects of human biology – ranging from hormones to chromosomes to brain size to genetics – are responsible for innate differences in behavior between men and women. Researches to identify the physiological origins of behavioral differences between men and women have been unsuccessful. The role of social interaction in shaping human behavior is vital.

**Gender socialization**

Through socialization, children gradually internalize the social norms and expectations, which are seen to correspond with their sex, hence differences in their behavior. Therefore it is the society that determines the appropriateness of behavior relevant to male and female. Also, through the process of socialization, the society makes a concerted effort that males and females internalize the culturally appropriate relevant patterns of behavior. Hence gender differences in behavior are not biologically determined, but they are culturally produced.

**Social construction of gender and sex**

Both sex and gender are socially constructed products. Not only is gender a purely social creation that lacks a fixed ‘essence’, yet the human body itself is subject to social forces, which shape and alter it in various ways. Individuals can choose to construct and reconstruct their bodies as they please- ranging from exercise, dieting, piercing and personal fashion, to plastic surgery and sex change operations. Human body and biology are not ‘givens’, but are subject to human urgency and personal choice within different social contexts. Genetic technology appears to have further facilitated the realization of socially desirable characteristics of males and females.

The theorists who believe in the social construction of sex and gender reject all biological bases for gender differences. Gender identities emerge in relation to perceived sex differences in society and in turn help to shape those differences.

These approaches try to explain the gender difference in the behavior of men and women either in biology or in social construction. In reality it could also be possible that the gender differences in behavior may be placed on a continuum, **biological determinists** could hold one end of which and the other end could be held by **social constructionists.**

**Biological determinists** highlight similarities in male behavior across different environments. They argue that male traits have their roots in chromosomal differences or in hormonal differences or in some other natural characteristic that distinguish men from women. It is a simple causal, reductionist approach that explains human behavior in terms of biological or genetic characteristics.

**Social constructionists** contend instead that gender differences derive from social and cultural process. These processes create systems of ideas and practices about gender that vary across time and space.

Through this process ‘natural’, social processes mediate instinctive forms of behavior and the sociologists would argue that most forms of human behavior are socially constructed. It is argued that every society has gender order, composed of a historically specific division of labor, and the structure of power. The gender order generates a variety of masculinities and of femininities.

**Masculinities** refer to various socially constructed collections of assumptions, expectations and ways of behaving that serve as standards for forms of male behavior. Look at the word ‘*mardaangee’.* One could find colloquial substitutes in different cultures. The process of indoctrination of the characteristics associated with ‘*manliness’* starts right from the childhood. For example take the little boy who got hurt and starts crying. He is told not to do so because crying is not considered an appropriate behavior for men.

Femininities cover various socially constructed collections of assumptions, expectations and ways of behaving that serve as standards for female behavior.

The mere fact that men and women across the societies are not characterized by identical behaviors is suggestive of the fact that these differences are not caused by biology but by socialization. Hence **masculinities** and **femininities** are subject to change across cultures and over time.

Global comparisons show that, by and large, societies do not consistently define most tasks as whether feminine or masculine. As societies industrialize, which gives people more choices and decreases the significance of muscle power, gender distinctions become smaller and smaller. Gender, then, is simply a too variable across cultures to be considered a simple expression of biology. Instead, as with many other elements of culture, what it means to be female and male is mostly a creation of society.