

An Analysis of Hindu Families

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This essay presents characteristic elements of the Hindu family, and the process of its development and disintegration, based on the analysis of my field data: namely Nandi and Chakrovati families from West Bengal, and Amin family from Gujarat. These three large families belong to the upper sector of their respective local community. Though such large families are rather rarely found in contemporary Hindu society, they offer a configuration of various important elements, which the most of Hindus share as their ideal, not always materialized in their actuality.

It is normally said that the process of modernization rapidly disintegrates the traditional large family institution. However, it is also the fact that a large family institution is formed in the process of modernization, and offers a certain advantage for modern men in India, as in the case of Nandi and Chakrovati families. Certainly today there are almost no cases of the classic Hindu joint family consisting of several married brothers and cousins, where the incomes of the family are pooled into one common stock and the all family members eat together, living on entirely the common stock. The predominant residential pattern of the present Hindus is of an elementary family. However, in their conception, the word 'family' is not meant only for their own elementary family who live together, but is applied to a wider group than the domestic family, which may consist of a number of domestic groups whose heads are brothers or paternal cousins. I tentatively call such a group as a 'family group'.

There are still many cases in which such a family group maintains a common ancestral property; and its members, grouped into different domestic units, live in the quarters of a large house built by their forefathers, though each domestic family forms an economic and resi-

dential unit, depending on mainly its members' income, such as in the form of father's salary, or land or bussiness owned by themselves. Nandi family of this essay, is a good example of such large family groups. This particular family group, owing to its largeness (consisting of about 1,200 members altogether) presents a highly complicated configuration of elements, and the structural orientation of the working of the Hindu family. In the case of Chakrovati family, five of the total ten domestic families live in the same house in Calcutta, and share the food, to the expenses of which each domestic unit contributing from individual income. The fifteen domestic units of Amin family group, in spite of the partition of domestic quarters and the ancestral property, live in the same old house and maintain the atmosphere of what is called the large Hindu joint family

There are wide range of variations in the forms of family groups, as I discussed in Chapter I, according to residential arrangements and the ways of the management and ownership of the property. In all cases, interdependences and familial attachments among the members are extremely strong. Frequency in their contacts and mutual helps after the residential separation would not be easily lessened. Naturally the degree of social (and often economic) independence of a domestic family is very low in comparison with Japanese families in which actual economic and residential factors play far more important role in the social organization, than kinship factors. In stead, among the Hindus, the function of the wider kin group to which they term 'family', has still important social and economic implications. In this manner, the ideal of the traditional Hindu joint family is strongly adhered, in spite of the disintegration of its actual form.