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## **SOME ASPECTS OF HOUSEHOLD ORGANIZATION AND FAMILY STRUCTURES IN CALCUTTA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Although the system of kinship and family in India has drawn considerable attention of social scientists of various disciplines, not much emphasis has perhaps been given as yet on analysing the household formation and family structures in the Indian metropolis. The researches conducted earlier on city families are mostly by-products of other studies on urban communities, and hence lack proper representation and coverage (Ross 1961, Sharma 1964, Bose 1964, Gore 1968). We have, of course, some excellent works on town families, e.g., Navsari (Kapadia 1955), Mahuva (Desai 1964), Dharwar (Conklin 1976) etc., but the extent to which the family patterns observed in these towns conform to that of the large cities cannot be ascertained from these.

Family studies in India stunted, by and large, confusing concepts and definitions. While reviewing the literature on the subject a number of scholars (Dube 1974, Shah 1974, Desai 1980) have pointed out how our understanding of this basic social unit has been restricted by the subjective procedures adopted by the individual researchers. The controversy lies also in the levels of interpretations and generalisations made in individual cases. For example, while a group of scholars (Goode 1963, Ross 1961) assert that the family in a metropolitan complex individualistic society is shorn of its all other functions and attributes, and is reduced to

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mean a 'group defined by a sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and upbringing of children' (c. f. Kulkarni 1962), others hold an entirely opposite view. For example, Desai (1980 : 44) notes that the present economic system is unable to provide basic conditions for a 'small-nuclear family', and thereby it generates a process which compels families to depend on traditional social kin-groups, as well as to evolve justifications for older values and norms'.

Many researchers, on the other hand, strongly assert a rural-urban difference in household organisation and family structures according to their locale; but Conklin (1976), from his study of Dharwar finds in contrast a homogeneity in the family patterns of the two locations. It appears, therefore, that our knowledge of Indian family structures, particularly in urban locations, suffers from both methodological and conceptual limitations. An understanding of the composition of urban households in metropolitan areas is of crucial importance because under the economic and housing conditions in which the families have to live in metropolitan areas, family life is bound to be affected and would differ from what it may be in smaller towns and villages. This calls for a systematic study and appraisal of the patterns and structures in urban areas of different sizes and categories. This paper makes an attempt in this direction by analysing household organisations and family patterns in Calcutta.

The main objective of the paper is to examine the variations in family structures and study their interrelationships with certain socio-cultural and economic variables. It seeks to show how family in a metropolitan urban complex adapts itself to different societal situations while retaining its basic structural characteristics.

#### THE STUDY

The study is based on the data collected in connection with a survey on some aspects of family planning in Calcutta by the Indian Statistical Institute during 1973-74. A two-stage stratified sample design was adopted with block as the first stage and the household as the second stage of sampling. The sample frame consisted of 3870 Urban Frame Blocks of Calcutta city. The blocks were stratified into 4 strata on the joint consideration of locality, type and religious composition of the area. A sample of 64 blocks was selected with probability proportional to number of sample households in 1970 from the master sample of 304 blocks. A total of 1417 households were so selected randomly from 64 blocks as to make the design self-weighted (for details of sampling design see : Sarkar 1977). All households of sample blocks were stratified into three strata according to certain demographic characteristics, like presence or absence of married

females belonging to the age upto 49 years, incidence of live birth, and so on. The households referred to were mutually distinguished, coresident commensal kin group who usually lived together and ate from the same kitchen.

For the present analysis, a systematic classification of the households was made in relation to kinship ties which bound the constituents together in locally functioning family units. Ultimately, a sample of 1573 family and non-familial units were identified from the surveyed households by the criterion of kinship relation.

On the basis of intra-family relations the family units were next grouped into two types: (1) nuclear and (2) extended. The nuclear type includes members who are related with one another by conjugal, parental or sibling relationships. But those containing members who are related among themselves lineally or affinally, with or without the simultaneous presence of nuclear relations in the unit, had been labelled as extended. The extended family type was again classified into three sub-types: (i) lineal joint, and (ii) collateral joint and (iii) 'complex', from the point of view of 'inclusiveness of membership'. The criterion of collaterality had been ascertained in terms of the 'heads' (or Ego) of the family, and 'complex' through 'adhesions' i.e., those kins or affines who cannot trace their lines of descent among themselves and do not belong usually to the basic structures according to the patri-virilocal norm of residence (Mukherjee 1962, Pakrashi 1962, Chakrabarti 1981).

We have examined the internal variations in the family structures by nature of intra-familial relations, couple, and generations, and the external variations by state of origin, community, education, occupation, and age. Since the data were of secondary nature having very little qualitative information, no attempt was made for any causal explanation of the variations noted in course of this analysis.

#### FINDINGS

From the analysis of the sample households in Calcutta, the following characteristics of the city families have been noticed :

##### *General*

(1) The single-number households, i.e., the non-familial units account for 18.11 per cent of the city households in 1973-74.

(ii) Compared to extended families, the incidence of nuclear families was relatively higher for 45.33 per cent of the city families were nuclear while the percentage of extended families was 36.56.

(iii) The difference between the nuclear and extended family units gradually narrowed down when the non-familial units were excluded. The ratio of the two types was 13 : 12.

(iv) Among the extended families, the lineal joint type outnumbered the 'complex' type which was followed by the collateral type. The respective percentages of the three types of extended families were 16, 11 and 9.

It has been noticed that the non-family units are constituted mainly by the male immigrants. Most of them are married and thus living away from their female consorts. The female non-familial units comprising one-third of the total, on the contrary, are mostly composed of widowed or divorced persons in the older age-groups.

#### *Characteristics of Nuclear Families*

For examining the nature of formation of nuclear families, we have classified these units according to the presence or the absence of conjugal, parental, and sibling relations. This would provide us not only an indication of completeness or incompleteness of nuclear family structures but also with their internal variations in the city (Table 1).

The overwhelming majority of nuclear families in Calcutta are complete as they contain all the three possible kinship relations. These are formed by parents with their unmarried children. The incidence of incomplete nuclear families is noticed in 12 per cent cases only, three fourth of which are formed by the conjugal relations i.e. husband and wife. There are very few families formed by parental and sibling relations, and those containing sibling relations only, occur in rare cases. These families, therefore, tend to register a partial disintegration of nuclear families.

#### *Characteristics of Extended Families*

An examination of the characteristics of the extended family structures shows that the majority of these families contain all the five intra-familial relations: lineal, affinal, conjugal, parental and sibling (Table 2). Nearly 81 per cent of them are formed by these 5 specific relations. Despite the fact that 24 combinations are possible as per the five relations, only 17 combinations have been discerned, among them 10 occur in less than

1 per cent cases. In fact, about 95 per cent of the total extended structures have been accounted for by five combinations only. This indicates that the extended families in Calcutta are not unpatterned. They conform to a pattern that does not suggest their structural disintegration.

The structural variations in extended families can be examined in the light of number of couples, generational depth, membership size, and many other variables. Since we did not find much variations by size, and as we lacked other variables like head's familial role, status, etc., the present analysis has been made in terms of two variables: (i) number of couples and (ii) generational depth (Table 3).

It is noticed that 2 or more couple families are preponderant in the lineal joint structures whereas the majority of one couple families go to form the collateral joint structures. The 'complex' families, however, show a tendency to accommodate more than one couple in them. Generationally also three varieties of extended families differ with one another. The collateral variety, for example, is restricted by 2 generation structure in depth while greater depth can be marked in the lineal variety. Though few in number, the 4-generational structures occur more in the 'complex' families.

#### *Some Inter-relationships*

Having thus analysed the internal characteristics of the non-familial and family units, we may now examine their nature of relationships with some socio-cultural and economic variables.

#### *State of Origin and Family Type*

To begin with, we shall ascertain whether the people of various states who have come to the city differ in their family organisation. For this we have examined the state of origin of the heads of units by their family types (Table 4).

Apparently, there seems to be very little difference between the West Bengal and the non-West Bengal people in respect of the percentage distribution of broad family units, except in the case of having a relatively higher proportion of nuclear families by the former group and of 'complex' families by the latter group. But within the immigrant section, there is some difference that deserves our notice. For example, the non-familial unit appears to be fairly high among the people who came from Bihar and Orissa while it is distinctly low among the Bangladesh and Uttar Pradesh people

living in Calcutta. Similarly, the nuclear family occurs relatively more among those coming from Assam, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh whom we have included in the category 'others' and among the Bangladesh, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa immigrants, whereas its incidence is found to be relatively less among the Bihar and Orissa people. The percentage of lineal joint family again is distinctly lower among the Orissa and Bihar households in Calcutta compared to the households from other States of India and Bangladesh. The incidence of collateral joint family, however, is relatively higher among the former than the latter groups. The 'complex' family occurs none or very insignificantly among the households from Orissa and other States. The table, therefore, confirms the view that family structures vary by region (Kolenda 1968) and it can be noticed even in a metropolitan setting.

*Community: Religious-caste/group and Family Type*

Community-wise also we notice, a variation in the structural articulations of the city families (Table 5).

It is among the Muslims that the non-familial units are minimum and the 'complex' families are maximum in number. Among the Christians and other non-Hindu communities, the nuclear families occur in the maximum, with the corresponding minimum occurrence of extended families. Compared to the high and the scheduled caste Hindus, the incidence of patrilineal joint families appears to be high in the other Hindu group which includes mainly the clean castes.

*Education and Family Type*

Education is usually assumed to play an important role in shaping the structure of a family. As such, to what extent it is related to the formation of different types of families in the city may be worthy of note. For this purpose, the maximum levels of education attained by the members of the families have been categorised broadly into three categories: (a) low—having education below the level of primary or none, (b) medium—covering primary and above but below the level of school final, (c) high—including the education level of school final and above. The family types have been examined in the light of these education levels (Table 6).

It is found that low education is highly pronounced among the non-familial units. The nuclear families, on the other hand, are characterised mostly by the medium level education, while the converse relationship holds good for the extended structures. The table tends to suggest that education and extended structure have a positive relationship and this appears true for all the sub-types of extended structures.

### *Occupation and Family Type*

On the basis of nature of principal household occupation, the non-familial and family units were examined in terms of four categories: (i) professional-managerial and technical, (ii) clerical, (iii) trade and commerce, and (iv) manual, semi—and unskilled type of jobs (Table 7).

The non-familial units are mainly engaged in the manual activities, while the majority of the nuclear families are employed in the clerical, technical, and other non-manual jobs. The trading commercial activities occur relatively more in the extended families irrespective of their types. Occupationally, therefore, the city families show a positive association.

### *Age of Head and Family Type*

In every family, it is the 'head' who plays a vital role in its decision-making, management and organisational process. The variations in family structures, as Mukherjee (1977) noted earlier, 'can be accounted for by the kind of family organization sponsored by the 'heads' of families in course of their life-spread'. The structure of family, therefore, depends considerably on 'head's' characteristics of which the demographic variable, 'age', is one. Consequently, we have examined the interrelationship of age and family structure to assess the nature of variations (Table 8).

We find that the non-familial units are mostly represented by the young aged people, while the 'heads' of the city families are the older people. But compared to nuclear families, the incidence of older 'heads' (in the age-group of 60 years or above) in the extended structure is maximum. Within the extended structure, the patrilineal joint families have more elderly 'heads' relatively, than the non-patrilineal families. And within the joint families, the 'heads' of collateral joint families are comparatively young in age.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the preceding pages, we have examined some internal characteristics of Calcutta families and analyzed their structures in terms of certain socio-cultural and economic variables.

We noticed that the single-member households account for only about one-fifth of the total households in Calcutta. This indeed is a very low figure compared to what one finds in Sen's survey of 1954-55 which revealed that 57.4 per cent households in the city are single-member households (Sen 1961 : 164).

Such a reduction in the proportion of single-number units, even after a period of two decades, seems impossible because of the fact that there has not been any foreseeable reasons, like improvement in the living condition during these years which might have inspired these individuals to bring their left-out members from their places of origin to this city. If we attribute this reduction to urban-rural migration that would also be a far-fetched assumption for urban-rural migration, so far as the available literature shows, has not acquired such a proportion at any period during this time due to improvement of village economy which could draw these people back and to alter the content of any location. The large difference in the proportional incidence of single-number households needs, therefore, some other explanation.

One reason that can perhaps explain the phenomenon is differential nature of the design adopted for the study. We mentioned earlier that the data that have been used here were meant originally to study the fertility behaviour of Calcutta couples. Hence, it is not unlikely that those areas or blocks in the city where the single-member households were concentrated, have been excluded from the scope of the sampling, resulting therefore to an underestimation of such households. But Mukherjee's (1977) study of family structures conducted more or less in the same period (in the city of Calcutta and Howrah) also revealed a figure much below than what we notice in Sen's survey. The study showed that 33 per cent of the total non-familial and family units of the city were single-member units. From the census reports of Calcutta and reports from other metropolitan cities like Delhi (Rao and Desai 1965), Bombay (Bulsara 1970), Madras (Balakrishna 1961) etc., we find the percentages of single-member households vary in the range of 11-16 only. These findings while tilt the balance in our favour and also suggest that Calcutta has a relatively large percentage of single-member households, it is certainly not to that extent which might give an impression that it is a city of lonely individuals!

So far as the family units are concerned, the study has not revealed any indication that can suggest the incompatibility of the city environment for sustaining extended kinship ties. The majority of the families, as we have noticed, are complete in their structural articulations and do not lead us any indication of their structural possible disintegration. The variations, that we notice, occurred possibly due to demographic process of birth, death and marriage. Considering the internal characteristics of Calcutta families, can it be said that the existing physical, economic and social systems create such a situation that induce more and more families to get attached with



their traditional social kins? Otherwise, how can we explain the formation of so many 'complex' structures in the city ?

Enough evidence has been given to indicate that there is a close connection between family structure and nature of the ethnicity, occupation, education and religious community. We have seen that the single-member units occur relatively more among those who came from Orissa but less among the immigrants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Orissa being relatively closer to Bengal and as majority of the people from Orissa engage in unorganized sector like plumbing, cooking, small trade etc. (Bose 1964) they possibly find no interest in setting family life in the city in view of the acute shortage of accommodation and high cost of living. The people from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are employed mostly in factories and manufacturing concerns and also in other manual jobs. Being employed in organised sectors, they usually get quarters from their employers where they usually live with their family members in security. This is, however, not to suggest that they always set up families with wives and children. In many cases, we found several married brothers without wives lived together with nephews or cousins.

Among all communities, however, the incidence of nuclear families is maximum among the Christians, Muslims, and scheduled castes. The white-collar, technical and professional job holders seem to favour this type of family. The motive and reasons, however, could not be investigated in the present study. For the community-wise variation in family organisation we may guess that cultural and economic factors have a role to play. With regard to the extended families, we noticed that the middle caste Hindus having education School Final level and above, and pursuing business and independent non-manual occupations show a tendency to form this type families. This is a finding which corroborates with the experience of Gore (1968) from Delhi and Balakrishna (1970) from Madras. The higher incidence of non-patrilineally extended families among the Muslims seems to have taken place due to the prevalence of cousin-marriage and the higher rate of divorce among them—as discussed in a separate paper (Chakrabarti 1981).

To sum up, the present study has shown that the households in Calcutta follow a cyclic process of growth and the internal variations in family structures are less prominent and most of the external variations can be accounted for by age, education and ethnicity and occupation.

TABLE 1  
Intra-family Relations in *Nuclear Families*

Completeness (1)	Intra-family relations (2)	Composition (3)	Percentage to total (4)
Complete	Conjugal, parental, sibling	Husband, wife, unmarried children	69.43
	Conjugal, parental	Husband, wife, unmarried child	18.37
Incomplete	Conjugal	Husband, wife	9.26
	Parental, sibling	Father/mother, unmarried children	1.12
	Parental	Father/mother, unmarried child	1.12
	Sibling	Brother(s) and/or sister(s)	0.70
	Total (Sample)		100.00 (713)

TABLE 2  
Kinship Relations in *Extended Families*

Kinship relations (1)	Type of extended family			Total (5)
	<i>Patrilineal joint</i>		<i>Non-patrilineal joint</i> — 'complex'	
	<i>Lineal</i> (2)	<i>Collateral</i> (3)		
Affinal, lineal, conjugal parental sibling	82.29	84.26	75.43	80.70
Affinal conjugal, parental, sibling	7.48	4.79	4.57	5.92
Affinal, lineal, conjugal, parental	3.54	0.68	5.72	3.48
Lineal, conjugal, parental, sibling	0.39	0.68	4.57	1.74
Affinal, lineal, conjugal, sibling		0.68		0.17
Affinal, lineal, parental, sibling			0.57	0.17
Affinal, conjugal, sibling		6.86	2.29	2.44
Affinal, lineal, conjugal	3.54			1.57
Affinal, conjugal, parental	1.97		0.57	1.04
Lineal, parental, sibling		1.37	1.71	0.87
Conjugal, parental, sibling			2.29	0.70
Lineal, conjugal, parental			0.57	0.17
Lineal, conjugal, sibling			0.57	0.17
Lineal, sibling	0.79			0.35
Lineal, conjugal			0.57	0.17
Lineal, parental			0.57	0.17
Affinal		0.68		0.17
Total (Sample)	100.00 (254)	100.00 (146)	100.00 (175)	100.00 (373)

TABLE 3

Per cent Distribution of *Couple and Generation in Extended Family*

Number of couple/ generation (1)	Lineal (2)	Type of extended family		Non-patrilineal 'complex' (5)	Total (sample) (6)
		Patrilineal joint Collateral (3)	Total (4)		
Couple					
0				100.00	100.00 (1)
1	10.74	52.07	62.81	37.19	100.00 (121)
2	56.68	16.61	73.29	26.71	100.00 (337)
3	45.57	18.99	64.56	35.44	100.00 (79)
4 or above	37.84	32.43	70.27	29.73	100.00 (37)
Generation					
1		73.33	73.33	26.67	100.00 (15)
2	18.33	50.56	68.89	31.11	100.00 (180)
3	59.13	11.99	71.12	28.88	100.00 (367)
4 or above	30.77		30.77	69.23	100.00 (13)
Total	44.17	25.39	69.56	30.44	100.00 (575)

TABLE 4

Per cent Distribution of Households by *State of Origin and Family Type*

Family type (1)	State of origin					
	West Bengal (2)	Bihar (3)	Orissa (4)	Uttar Pradesh (5)	Bangla Desh (6)	Others (7)
Non-familial unit	18.89	30.69	38.24	13.60	11.50	12.82
Nuclear family	42.51	37.57	47.06	50.00	49.20	58.12
Lineal joint family	15.38	10.58	2.94	16.95	21.39	16.24
Collateral joint family	8.91	12.70	11.76	9.32	8.29	8.55
'Complex' family	14.31	8.46	—	10.17	9.62	4.27
Total (Sample)	100.00 (741)	100.00 (189)	100.00 (34)	100.00 (118)	100.00 (374)	100.00 (117)

TABLE 5

Per cent Distribution of Households by *Religions-Caste Community and Family Type*

Family type	Religious-caste community					
	High caste	Hindu Scheduled caste	Other caste	Total	Muslims	Christian & Others
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Non-familial unit	21.16	16.67	20.51	20.23	5.93	27.27
Nuclear Family	42.76	48.10	42.31	43.56	51.48	51.96
Lineal joint family	16.48	16.19	18.27	16.88	14.44	10.30
Collateral joint family	10.37	9.05	9.62	9.95	7.41	5.19
'Complex' family	9.23	10.00	9.29	9.38	20.75	5.19
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
(Sample)	(704)	(210)	(312)	(1226)	(270)	(77)

TABLE 6

Per cent Distribution of Households by *Maximum Level of Education and Family Type*

Family type	Maximum level of Education		
	Illiterate or below primary	Primary or below School Final	School Final or above
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Non-familial unit	44.28	7.80	5.87
Nuclear family	34.75	51.02	48.53
Lineal joint family	9.53	18.98	18.98
Collateral joint family	3.81	10.68	12.72
'Complex' family	7.63	11.53	13.89
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00
(Sample)	(472)	(590)	(511)

TABLE 7

Per cent Distribution of Households by *Nature of Occupation and Family Type*

Family type	Nature of occupation			
	Professional /technical	Clerical	Trade/commerce	Manual & allied
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Non-familial unit	11.90	7.27	11.64	30.94
Nuclear family	51.14	57.46	46.86	34.87
Lineal joint family	14.18	12.73	21.38	16.24
Collateral joint family	12.91	11.27	7.23	7.01
'Complex' family	9.87	11.27	12.89	10.94
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
(Sample)	(395)	(275)	(318)	(585)

TABLE 8

Per cent Distribution of Age of Head of Households and Family Type

Family Type	Age-group of head of households (in years)			
	29 or less	30-44	45-59	60 or above
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Non-familial unit	56.43	12.77	9.92	8.48
Nuclear family	21.90	54.24	51.22	21.22
Lineal joint family	7.47	12.93	15.18	44.85
Collateral joint family	7.47	12.04	7.69	5.45
'Complex' family	3.73	8.02	15.99	20.00
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
(Sample)	(211)	(673)	(494)	(165)

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