

A STUDY ON THE FAMILY SYSTEM AMONG THE HARIJANS OF GUWAHATI CITY, ASSAM.

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Abstract: Family is the simplest and smallest social institution. Family is found in almost all societies of the world and will survive as long as human society exists in the world. Family with its social grouping carries out the different function assigned to them. In Harijan society also family plays an important role. Harijans follows patriarchal system and most of the decisions in a family are taken by male members. It is through the family that values, tradition; customs are passed on from one generation to next. The families found among the Harijan community maintain harmonious bonds among the members. In this bond love and affection are very important. In the same way emotional and social security are provided in the family.

Keywords: Family, Harijans, tradition

Introduction: Two main types of families are found in the Harijan colonies. They are nuclear family and joint family. Most of the families of the colonies under study have medium sized (6-7) members and small (2-5) members. Only a few families have members between nine and thirteen. Out of the total families that were being surveyed most are nuclear families (70%) while the remaining 30% are joint families. Mutual cooperation and help exist among each other in a family. The relatives of a family members come to each other homes in festival, rituals etc to share their happiness. The presence of the close relatives in a family ceremony like marriage, 'annaprasana', death rituals, birth ceremony is considered very important. For instance, the presence of maternal uncle in marriages and other important events is very important without which the ceremony is not complete. The unmarried daughter helped her parents in household chores while the sons are to earn and support the family. The girl after marriage also comes to visit her native home and her husband is given special place in her native home.

OBJECTIVE OF STUDY:

- 1) To study the family system among Harijans
- 2) To study the changes in the family system among the Harijans.
- 3) To analysis the different customs and traditions in the family system among the Harijans

STUDY AREA:

The present study was made among the Harijans of six selected Harijan colony of Guwahati that is in Morisali Harijan colony, Rupnagar Harijan Colony, Uzanbazar Harijan Colony, Maligaon Harijan Colony, Panbazar Harijan colony and Fatasil Ambari Harijan colony.

METHODOLOGY:

The paper presented is based on data collected in the course of fieldwork undertaken among the Harijan (Dalits) inhabiting in the six selected Harijan colonies of Guwahati city in Kamrup (metro), Assam. Mixed method approach is being applied for collection of data. Focused is given to primary data collection. Primary data were collected based festivals that were celebrated, rites and rituals, both cyclic and crisis rites, changes in tradition, causes of religious conversion. Data were collected by structured household schedule through interview method and participant observation. Sample of 529 household were randomly selected for study purpose. Data from secondary source such as papers, journals are also being taken.

The father is the head of the family and his decision is accepted by all. Mother in their society also has equal right and her decision is always given special value. Women in their society maintain avoidance with father-in-law and other senior male members. The restriction becomes lesser with the increase of age of women in a family. In most cases wearing of '*payal*' and nose ring for a girl is a compulsory. The relationship of a newly married bride to the members of the groom's family who were younger than her is not much formal or rigid. They share much friendly relationship with each other. The same is the case with male members. When a newly married groom visits the bride's house then he maintains a distance with mother-in-law and others who are senior to him, but the groom maintains friendly relations with the younger ones. The sons even after living separately do not keep distance with their parents and consult and take suggestions from them in every matter. The girl after marriage is not highly welcome to stay for long in her native marital house. This is considered as bad for these people. Gift giving to the daughter's husband ('*Jamai*') is very important and sometimes it becomes compulsory for them.

Joint Family though few in numbers in the colonies under study, the reasons behind its dissolution is many. Generally, it was found in most of the cases that sons after marriage want to live separately in the same compound or sometimes move out of his parental house to a new area. As it was found in most cases that when there is only one or two earning members in a joint family it becomes difficult to run the whole family. This leads to frequent quarrel and misunderstanding among the family members. It was found from most of the cases studied from the colonies that number of families living separately maintains more cordial relationship than in joint way. In most of the cases the son's wife demands to live separately saying that she wants time for herself. There are also separate reasons such as better job in a new place, non-availability of a good educational institution in that area and sometimes the younger generation wants to move to a new place and their parents want to stay in their colonies. This also leads to separation of joint family. Madhu Basfore 22 years (Case: 1) of Uzanbazar Harijan colony who is a sweeper under Guwahati Municipal Corporation, is a tenth passed lady. Before her marriage she stayed with her family in her parental house. Her mother, Ranu Basfore (48 years) who is VII passed, worked as sweeper in Guwahati Medical College, her father Ram Basfore (57 yrs) is X passed and works as a sweeper in Guwahati Medical College. Her elder brother, Rajesh Basfore (30 years), completed his class 12 and is working as a peon in Irrigation department. His wife, Reemi Basfore (28 years) another

class XII passed is working as Supervisor in Guwahati Medical College in cleaning department. Madhu Basfore got married to Ranjan *Singh* (28 years), a Punjabi Harijan of the same colony on 14 February 2012. The marriage took place in their own residence. They followed both the customs and traditions of Punjabi and Bihari community. But Madhu failed to adjust to the new family of Ranjan. Ranjan lives with his father Gajen Singh (58 years), who is class VII passed, and works as a sweeper in Guwahati Medical College. His mother Jasmindar Kaur 47 years educational qualification class VIII passed, sweeper in a private office, his elder brother Ranjeet Kaur 33 years B.A passed worked in Private office as a Clerk and his wife Harpeet Kaur 27 years class XII passed housewife. So soon after the birth of their first child Deepak Singh 1 year, Ranjan and Madhu decided to live separately. As said by the informer due to difference in culture the family of Ranjan did not accept Madhu and slowly this conflict situation became worse. So in order to live in peace they discussed the matter in presence of all the family members and decided to live separately. But Ranjan assured to his parents that he will give a part of his salary to them and he has been doing so till present day. Rabin Singh (36 years) B.Com passed, clerk in Railway department of Maligaon Railway his wife Sonali Kaur 26 years ,HS passed housewife (Case: 2) colony informed that when his younger brothers Neeraj Singh 30 years B.Com passed, technician in Railway department got married to Preety Kaur 26 years B.A passed housewife on 25th November 2017 in their own residence and after few days when all the customs and ceremonies were over the newly married couple were allowed to live separately in a separate quarter within the colony with the consent of their parents. This is due to shortage of room in the colony quarters. Before marriage Rabin and Neeraj stay with their parents in a small Quarter .Their father name is Hari Singh 63 years, class X passed, retired as Peon in Railway Department in Maligaon and now a pensioner, his mother Rani Kaur 52 years sweeper in a private school, their two younger sister name Neemo Kaur 17 years studying H.S and Priyank Kaur 14 years, studying in class IX. When the couple shifted to the other quarters of the colony the joint family separated but they said that every weekend they used to go to their main quarter where their parents lived with their two sisters and his elder brother.

TABLE1: Type of family among the Harijan of Panbazar Harijan colony, Guwahati city, Kamrup, Assam. 2017-19.

SL NO	TOTAL NO OF FAMILY	NUCLEAR FAMILY	%	JOINT FAMILY	%	TOTAL	%
1	100	82	82	12	12	100	100%

TABLE2: Type of Family among the Harijan of Maligaon Harijan colony, Guwahati city, Kamrup, Assam.

SL NO	TOTAL NO OF FAMILY	NUCLEAR FAMILY	%	JOINT FAMILY	%	TOTAL	%
1	100	78	78	22	22	100	100%

TABLE 3: Type of Family among the Harijans of Morisali Harijan colony, Guwahati city, Kamrup, Assam 2017-19.

SL NO	TOTAL NO OF FAMILY	NUCLEAR FAMILY	%	JOINT FAMILY	%	TOTAL	%
1	100	78	78	22	22	100	100%

TABLE 4: Type of Family among the Harijans of Uzanbazar Harijan colony, Guwahati city, Kamrup Assam. 2017-19.

SL NO	TOTAL NO OF FAMILY	NUCLEAR FAMILY	%	JOINT FAMILY	%	TOTAL	%
1	100	89	89	11	11	100	100%

TABLE 5: Family type among the Harijans of Fatasil Ambari Harijan colony, Guwahati city, Kamrup, Assam. 2017-19.

SL NO	Total no of family	Nuclear family	%	Joint family	%	total	%
1	100	88	88%	12	12%	100	100%

TABLE 6: Type of family among the Harijans of Rupnagar Harijan colony, Guwahati city, Kamrup, Assam. 2017-19.

SL NO	Total no of family	Nuclear family	%	Joint family	%	Total	%
1	29	22	75.86	7	24.14	29	100

The above tables is about the types of family. It is found that majority were nuclear families and minority were joint families and this picture is same in all the six colonies.

M.Rajesh 42years education qualification class IX passed sweeper in Guwahati Medical College living in Morisali Harijan colony(Case:3) informed that he separated from his joint family because of the social environment where their quarter is situated is not suitable for his daughter. Rajesh lived with his wife name M.Supriti 38 years, class X passed, sweeper in Guwahati Medical College He said that frequent quarrels in their localities and use of foil language compels them to be separated from his younger brother M.Sankar 40 years class XII passed, supervisor in cleaning work in Guwahati Medical College, his wife M. Laxmi 36 years ,housewife and their son name M.Ram 17 years studying in class XII. Rajesh decided to live in a rented house outside the colonies near Ulubari. But the entire partition wall collapsed in time of need.

Regarding division of labor in a family it was found that most of the males and females share equal responsibilities of earning and supporting the family. It was found that male members while sharing some of hard work of cleaning the female members do the works of sweeping the roads, offices and sometimes work as helpers of their husbands. It is interesting to find that many members of both male and female even after their retirement age do not sit idle at homes. They keep themselves busy in earning income for their family. Many females go to work in absence of their male counterparts. It was found that each member contribute part of their income to the senior most member of the family. The females in addition to working outside also do all the domestic chores including looking after their children. There is no such compulsion that females have to go out and work but it depends upon their financial conditions.

As Harijans were living in a patriarchal society they follow the rules and regulation of it .In their society property is shared by the male members of a family and it is usually divided by father and in his absence it is divided by the mother .But at present a girl gets equal share of property from her parents and if she is a widow she also gets the part of property which used to belong to her husband. *Gharjowai* (resident son-in-law) also gets a part of property of his wife's parents but it depends on the wish of bride's parents or guardians. Nina Kaur (36years), a housewife of Panbazar Harijan colony (Case: 4) informed that her husband Omkar Singh (38 years, class X passed), a sweeper in Guwahati Medical college stays with her in her paternal house in Panbazar Harijan colony. Their marriage ceremony took place on 2011, 14th April in their own residence. After few years of their marriage Nina's father-in-law and mother-in-law expired. Both of them expired within a difference of few months. After that *Nina* and Gobind decided to stay with Nina's parents. Nina informed that her husband agreed to stay in her parents' place as she is the only child of her parents and they were both seriously sick with no such relatives to look after them. Nina informed that her husband is the only child of his parents and so it was not difficult for her husband to come and stay in his wife's home after both his parents passed away. She also informed that though some people make fun of them for staying in her parental home as in their society it is a matter of shame to become a '*Garjawai*', but gradually the people could understand their situation.

In every family there is a *Kuldevi /Kuldev* which they consider as very sacred and holy. They do not like to tell the names of their *Kul Gods*. On special occasions each and every person of the society offer puja to the '*Kul dev*' and '*Kul Devi*'.

Conclusion: Family being the smallest social institution plays an important role in every household. Joint family system and nuclear family are the two basic division of family. Nuclear family which mainly consists of married couples and their children own or adopted is a very common feature of urban society and this is same in case of Harijan community. But in contrast to urban society joint family predominates in rural society. Joint family is formed when several related nuclear families lies in one household constitute a joint family. Compared to nuclear family in joint family culture and tradition are preserved more thoroughly. Cooperation and mutual support is significant feature of joint family. Today in urban setting and even in rural setting the original form of joint family is not found as we can see many families living in a common household but have separate kitchen with separate living and bathrooms. But in crisis situation they help each other. Such types of new form of Joint family are more frequent among the Harijan colonies.

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