

Paradigm Shift In Family Dynamics Of Tribal Households In Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract:

The traditional joint family system has long been a defining feature of Indian society, promoting unity, oneness, and a sense of familial interconnectedness. However, with the advent of urbanization, globalization, and changing socioeconomic factors, nuclear families are increasingly taking precedence. This shift towards nuclearization of family has significant implications for the tribal households of Arunachal Pradesh. In this article, we will explore the changing dimensions of family structures from joint to nuclear, probing the reasons behind this transition and its impact on the tribal society. We will also discuss the challenges and benefits associated with both types of family setups. By employing a mixed research design, primary and secondary data, including interviews and existing publications have been taken into consideration to delve into the personal experiences, opinions, and reflections of different respondents on the subject and sheds light on the erosion of familial bonds and values, the rise of individualism, and the need to fortify the basic social unit known as the family. Prime factors found to be facilitating this paradigm shift were economic burden to sustain large family and rural to urban migration for higher educational and job opportunities and achieving a better standard of living. While this transformation brings certain advantages, such as increased autonomy and flexibility, it also poses challenges to the traditional fabric of society. The erosion of familial bonds, the rise of individualism, and the influence of technology require a proactive and collective response.

Keywords: Arunachal Pradesh, Family Dynamics, Joint Family, Nuclearization, Paradigm Shift, Socialization

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I. INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing world, the concept of family has undergone a significant transformation. Traditional joint families, where multiple generations lived together under one roofⁱ, have given way to nuclear families consisting of parents and their children. In this article, we will explore the evolution of family structures from joint to nuclear, examining the reasons behind this transition and its impact on individuals and society. We will also discuss the challenges and benefits associated with both types of family setups.

The joint family system has been a cornerstone of Indian society, wherein, more than one generation live together in a singular household fostering unity and collective responsibility. This arrangement substantially functions as an agency of socialization by exposing an individual to an array of social units and systems (Sooryamoorthy, 2012). However, in recent years, there has been a noticeable shift towards nuclear families, particularly in urban areasⁱⁱ. The traditional family system in India is disintegrating and nuclear families are taking the front seat in urban societies. This transformation has not been limited to mainstream Indian society but has also affected tribal households, such as those in Arunachal Pradesh. These tribal communities, with their rich oral traditions and cultural manifestations, have traditionally placed great emphasis on the unified family system. Fragmentation of this setting into nuclear units dissuades a person from understanding and appreciating the ethos of unity and oneness. How an individual perceives and functions in the world is an outcome of both their natureⁱⁱⁱ and nurture (D'cruz and Bharat, 2001). And the growing distance and disconnect in between and across families in contemporary times is something to be reckoned with heightened alarm.

Various socioeconomic factors such as migration, globalization, urbanization, modernization, changing societal norms and advent of information technology (Sooryamoorthy, 2012) is paving for a generation that is increasingly apathetic to the clarion call of oneness, solidarity, and connectedness. The 'changing dimensions' of

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family and the implication of nuclearization on the causative agents as well as the society calls for a collective endeavour to understand the increasing prevalence of nuclear households. The Arunachalee tribal household has become porous with transition of nuclear family into basic residential unit and this shift in paradigm compels us to revisit the vary fabrics of this society and reimage the way forward. This article explores the nuclearization of tribal households in Arunachal Pradesh, the changing dynamics of family structures, its causes, and implications for the society.

Understanding the joint family system

The joint family system, also known as the extended family system, is a social structure where several generations and their spouses live together as a cohesive unit. This arrangement typically includes grandparents, parents, siblings, and their respective families^{iv}. In joint families, members share resources, responsibilities, and emotional bonds, fostering a strong sense of unity and support. Nuclear family has steadily surfaced as the dominant form of residential unit, especially in urban areas^v. The study on the subject matter brings into light that with the rise in the levels of education and spirit of individualism, population mobility, urbanisation, and the onset of demographic transition and increasing occupational differentiation, extensive changes have occurred in the Indian family (Singh, 2003). In these families, childhood was characterized by close-knit relationships and a strong emphasis on family values and traditions. Children grew up in a nurturing environment surrounded by multiple role models and received love and guidance from various family members. They often engaged in group activities, games, and celebrations, fostering a sense of belonging and togetherness.

Advantages and challenges

Joint families provided several advantages to their members. Firstly, they offered a robust support system, with family members readily available to provide emotional, financial, and practical assistance when needed. This support proved particularly beneficial during times of illness, childbirth, or economic difficulties^{vi}. Secondly, joint families promoted cultural preservation and the passing down of traditions from one generation to the next. Elders played a crucial role in imparting wisdom, values, and knowledge to younger family members, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage. Thirdly, the economic burden was shared among family members, pooling resources, and reducing individual financial strain (Hager and Schaffer, 2013). This cooperative approach allowed for a better standard of living, as expenses were divided among several earners.

While joint families had their advantages, they also presented certain challenges. One of the primary challenges was the potential for conflicts and disagreements among family members (Hager and Schaffer, 2013). Differences in opinions, lifestyles, and aspirations could lead to tension and discord within the household, creating a less harmonious living environment. Additionally, joint families often struggled with issues related to privacy and personal space (D'cruz and Bharat, 2001). With multiple generations residing together, individuals had limited privacy and autonomy, which could sometimes lead to feelings of suffocation and a lack of independence.

The nuclear family system: concept and structure

A nuclear family, in its simplest form, consists of a married couple and their children living together as a unit. This structure often emphasizes self-sufficiency and independence from extended family members. It is a departure from the traditional extended family model, where multiple generations, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins, coexist in one household. The nuclear family is typically seen as a self-contained unit responsible for its own well-being and upbringing of children (D'cruz and Bharat, 2001).

The structure of a nuclear family is centred around the immediate family members. The parents assume the primary caregiving roles for the children, with the father often being the breadwinner and the mother taking on the responsibility of raising the children and managing the household^{vii}. This structure allows for flexibility and adaptability, as decisions can be made quickly without the need for extensive consultation with extended family members. Additionally, the nuclear family often prioritizes the nuclear family unit's interests and needs over those of the extended family.

The rise of the nuclear family can be traced back to the industrial revolution and urbanization^{viii}. As societies transitioned from agrarian to industrial economies, families moved from rural areas to urban centres in search of employment opportunities. This migration often led to the fragmentation of extended families, as members dispersed across different regions. Nuclear families became the norm due to practical considerations such as limited living spaces and the need for mobility in a rapidly changing society.

Extended families vs nuclear families: a comparison

When comparing extended families and nuclear families, it is essential to understand the key differences between the two structures. Extended families provide a strong support system, as multiple generations live together and share resources, burdens, and joys. There is a sense of communal living, where responsibilities and decision-making are distributed among family members. In contrast, nuclear families prioritize individuality and

self-reliance. Decision-making is concentrated within the immediate family unit, allowing for more autonomy but also potentially increasing the burden on individual family members. There has been an ongoing debate regarding whether the shift towards nuclear families was a mistake or a natural progression. Critics argue that the nuclear family structure has contributed to the breakdown of community bonds and the erosion of social support systems (Magarey, 2014). They argue that the nuclear family's emphasis on individualism and self-sufficiency has led to increased isolation and decreased resilience in times of crisis. However, proponents of the nuclear family point out that it has provided opportunities for personal growth, individual freedom, and the ability to adapt to changing social and economic circumstances.

II. OBJECTIVES

With this backdrop, the author has endeavoured to explore a trifold objective through this research study that is mentioned below:

1. The pursuit of understanding the shifting paradigm of the family system in the tribal household of Arunachal Pradesh is the numero uno aim of this study.
2. The second purpose is to comprehend the factors attributing to the changing facets and its impact on the individual and the society.
3. Furthermore, this study intends to render recommendations to fortify and re-establish the connectedness in the era of a nuclearized generation.

III. METHODOLOGY

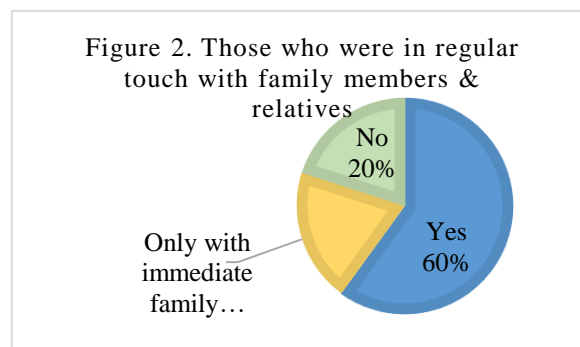
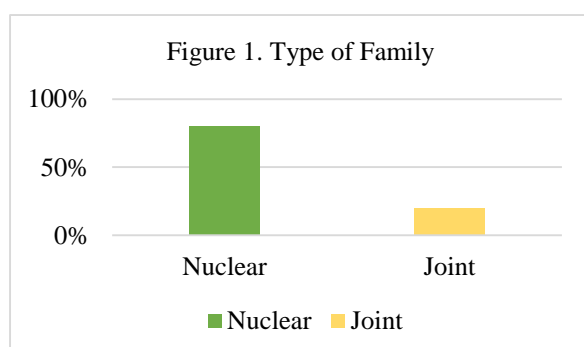
To gain insights into the changing dimensions of tribal households in Arunachal Pradesh, a mixed-method research approach was employed. Primary data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with different stakeholders which included 31 (thirty-one) respondents for the categories of people who have migrated due to prospects of better job opportunities and education, people who prefer small families owing to better distribution of household resources etc to ensure a diverse representation. The interview guide included questions to ascertain whether they lived with their family, what is the primary motivation to choose the preference of household, do they feel a shift in their childhood to the current generation's, whether they maintain closeness with family and kith & kin etc. Additionally, a thorough review of existing publications and empirical evidence was conducted to supplement the primary data. This combination of primary and secondary data provides a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Upon through analysis of the gathered data which consisted of semi-structured interviews with 31 respondents, empirical knowledge of the authors and through review of literature, a thematic style to reflect both qualitative and quantitative findings have been employed.

The rise of nuclear families: embracing change

80% of the respondents acknowledged a significant transformation in the family system due to intergenerational shifts. The shifting paradigm of the familial structure in India and the northeastern regions is further attested by Shah (2014) who opines that 'the joint family is disintegrating. It is being replaced by the nuclear family' in the landmark study 'The Writings of A. M. Shah: The Household and Family in India'. He has put forth the division of the traditional family, the transition processes, and the contributory aspects, which the study at hand tries to validate.



Communication and connection with relatives

Maintaining regular contact with relatives is essential for nurturing family bonds. However, the respondents' experiences varied in this regard. 60% of the total 31 respondents expressed a strong connection with their parents but a diminished relationship with other relatives. 20% outrightly stated that they were not in neither direct or cordial contact with kith and kin, whereas, 20% of the remaining respondents agreed that they were only concerned with their immediate family members only. Troubled experiences, geographical distances, and the changing mode of communication were cited as factors contributing to this disconnect. While technology has made communication easier, it has also created a bridge and gap between generations.

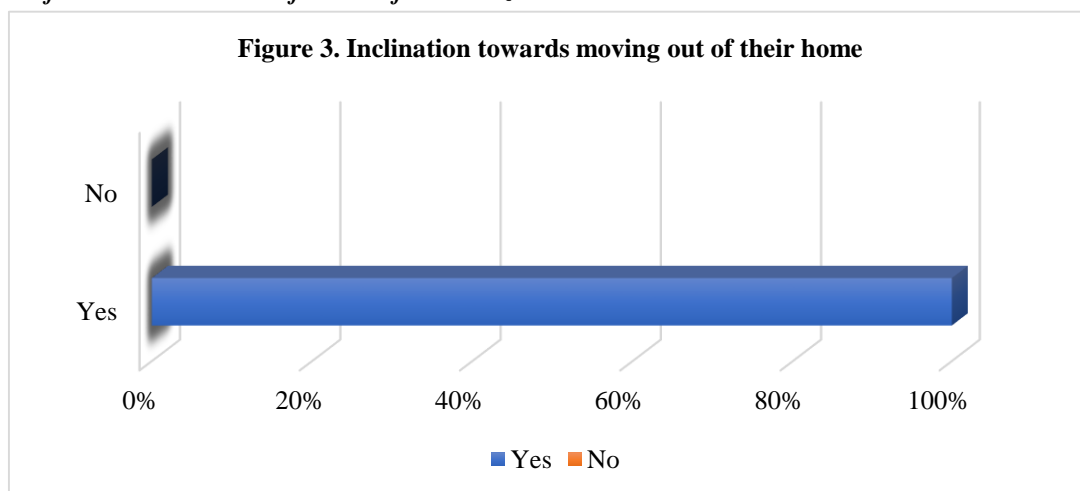
Maintaining closeness in nuclear families

In nuclear families, maintaining a sense of closeness and connection becomes crucial. Majority of the respondents highlighted the importance of family gatherings, phone calls, and celebrating festivals together. They emphasized the need for parents to connect with their children and reduce their exposure to gadgets. Genuine respect, care, and open communication were identified as essential elements for fostering good bonding within nuclear families. Effective problem-solving practices and understanding each other's emotions were also mentioned as important factors for maintaining closeness.

Changing childhood experiences

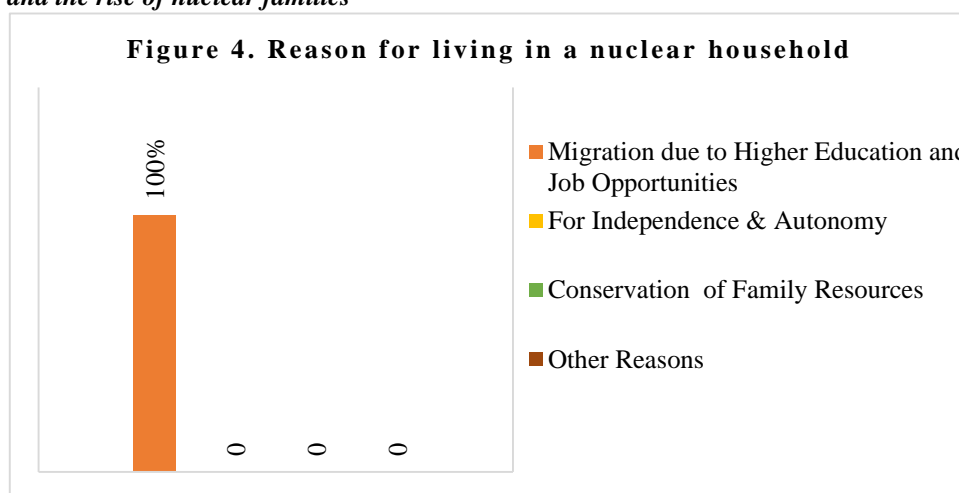
The respondents' childhood experiences varied, but they all acknowledged the impact of modernization on their upbringing. While some reminisced about spending time with family, engaging in outdoor activities such as hunting and fishing, and cherishing moments of merrymaking, others described innovative ways of playing and the importance of group interactions. However, the emphasis on better education, lifestyle changes, and the economic burden associated with larger families also emerged as common themes. The downward motion of these changes was attributed with increased academic pressure upon children in today's competitive world.

Reasons for the transition: a reflection of modernization



100% of the respondents opined that there is a massive change in family system as they are motivated to move out of their current household for various reasons. The influence of modernization on societal values and norms has shaped the way individuals perceive and experience childhood. The respondents highlight the pressure on today's children, the decreased emphasis on physical activities, and the exposure to gadgets as key differences between their own childhood and that of the current generation. These changes reflect the broader societal transformation and the impact of technology on daily lives.

Migration and the rise of nuclear families



The transition from joint families to nuclear families can be attributed to several factors. One significant reason is the pursuit of better educational and employment opportunities as confirmed by 100% of the respondents. As individuals sought higher education or career advancements, they often had to relocate to urban areas or even different countries. This geographical separation made it impractical to maintain a joint family setup. This claim is further attested by Singh (2003) that ‘migration of young adults from rural to urban areas, or from small town to a metropolis, to earn their livelihood is also an important cause of dissolution of the family’. This establishes that even two decades back nuclearization of household emerged to be pertinent in the country; modernization and globalization have propelled familial distancing and premature disintegration of the traditional system. This trend is particularly prevalent among the younger generation, who seek to break away from traditional norms and embrace the opportunities created by modernization and globalization.

Social and economic implications of the paradigm shift

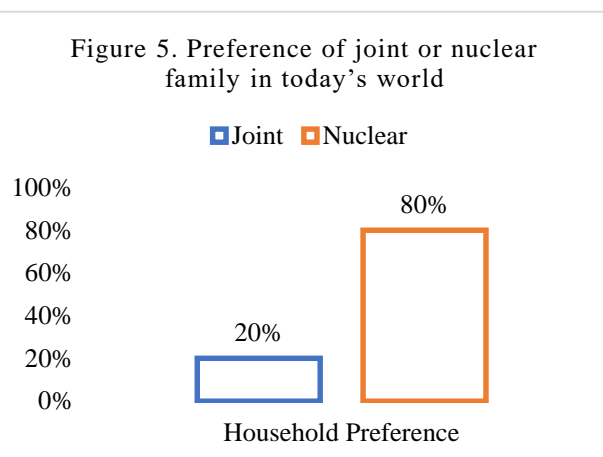
Regardless of economic and social status, people prefer nuclear to joint family and 40% of the respondents contemplated having a joint family only if they have financial liberty. The shift to nuclear families within tribal households has had both positive and negative social and economic implications. On one hand, nuclear families have been associated with increased gender equality, as women have greater opportunities for education and employment outside the traditional family structure. This has led to a more equitable distribution of resources and decision-making power within households. On the other hand, the shift to nuclear families has also resulted in increased economic pressure on individual families, as they are solely responsible for meeting their financial needs without the support of extended family members.

Impact on individual and society

The shift towards nuclear families has had a profound impact on society. The traditional joint family system, once seen as a source of social security and power, has given way to smaller, more independent units. This change has been driven by factors such as modernization, economic considerations, and lifestyle changes. The nuclearization of families has influenced societal structures, with implications for social support systems, healthcare, and the overall well-being of individuals. Nuclear families are not without their criticisms and challenges. One of the main criticisms is the potential for increased social isolation and lack of support networks, particularly for single parents or families living far away from their extended relatives. Balancing work and family responsibilities can also be a significant challenge for nuclear families, as the burden of childcare and household management often falls disproportionately on women. Furthermore, the lack of intergenerational interactions in nuclear families may lead to a loss of cultural knowledge and traditions within tribal communities.

Nuclear vs. Joint families: preferences in today's world

When it comes to family structures, 80% of the respondents showed a preference for nuclear families, while only 20% showed interest for living in a joint family. Practicality and individual perspectives were the key factors influencing this choice. While some respondents expressed a desire for joint families, they acknowledged the challenges and contradictions that arise due to differing family members' perspectives. Economic considerations and the opportunity to serve parents were also mentioned as influencing factors. Ultimately, the practicality of nuclear families in urban settings was a prevailing sentiment.



V. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings and discussions, several recommendations can be made to address the challenges posed by the nuclearization of tribal households in Arunachal Pradesh.

1. Firstly, there is a need for parents and support systems to prioritize emotional connections and actively engage with their children, even in the face of career-oriented demands. Monetary indulgence should not replace genuine emotional bonding. Absence of parents and guiding figures in a family especially in urban setting was the foremost issue brought forward by the data gathered and a need and scope of reconnecting career-oriented parents with their children in a deeper level. The practice of monetary indulgence and lack of emotional connection is adding to the issue.
2. Secondly, the responsible use of technology should be promoted, ensuring that it enhances rather than hinders familial relationships. Technology and gadgets are two sides of the same coin and the space for the same has been on the rise especially in the era of COVID-19. Subjecting the children to smartphones and web of virtuality is accounting for a living space where human interactions are judicious and relationships increasingly hollow. Limiting children's exposure to smartphones and virtual interactions can create space for meaningful human connections.
3. Thirdly, fostering social gatherings and community events can help bridge the gap between nuclear families and the larger society, reinforcing the importance of collective responsibility and social interconnectedness. There's a need for deliberate and proactive participation in keeping the societal ties intact and in that very pursuit, this study is of the opinion that people must come together to enjoy social gatherings.
4. Finally, leveraging technological advancements can provide opportunities to rejuvenate familial connections, allowing families to stay connected despite physical distances. A chain reaction or a society taking a course of direction could hardly be contained, so this point puts forth the benefits of technological advance and the use of which can be made in order to rejuvenate one's connection with family and kin.

VI. CONCLUSION

The nuclearization of tribal households in Arunachal Pradesh represents a paradigm shift in family dynamics. By prioritizing emotional connections, promoting responsible technology use, and fostering social gatherings, tribal communities can navigate this change while preserving the values of unity and oneness that have long been cherished. The transformation of tribal households from extended to nuclear families has been a complex and multifaceted process. As society continues to evolve, understanding and adapting to these changes become essential for fostering healthy and fulfilling family relationships. While the nuclear family structure has its advantages and disadvantages, it is essential to recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to family life. The future lies in embracing diversity in family structures and fostering a sense of community and support within tribal communities. By understanding the factors that have influenced this transformation and the implications it carries, we can navigate the challenges and opportunities that arise from evolving family dynamics. The journey towards balancing the benefits of nuclear households with the need for connectedness and collective responsibility is a shared endeavour that requires continuous adaptation and fortification of the basic social unit we call the family.

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