

THE ROLE OF FAMILY AMONG THE HARIJANS OF GUWAHATI CITY, KAMRUP (METRO), ASSAM: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY

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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. It is through the family that values, tradition, customs are passed on from one generation to next. The family among the Harijan community maintains 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. Marriage get social recognition only from the family and the society where they lived. The parents of both the couple had to call their relatives or other member of the society in order to get sanction from the society. Marriage creates family and help in its future continuation. It is an important institution without which society cannot maintain its existence. Thus family plays an important role among the Harijan community and almost every decision were taken only on approval by the elders of a family. Breakdown of Joint family is seen in their community but even then their family bonds remain stronger.

Keywords: Family, Harijan, role

INTRODUCTION:

The family is one of the most important social institutions in every society and acts as the primary unit of social organization. Among the Harijans (Dalits/Scheduled Castes) of Guwahati city, the family system reflects both traditional caste-based cultural values and the influence of rapid urbanization. The present study attempts to examine the structure, functions, authority patterns, marriage practices, and changes occurring in the family system among the Harijan community residing in Guwahati city of Kamrup (Metro), Assam. The study reveals that while the traditional joint family system existed in earlier generations, the nuclear family has become more common due to urban living conditions, occupational mobility, and economic pressures. The study also highlights gender roles, kinship relations, and intergenerational transformations in family life.

Two main types of families are found in the study 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.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY:

1. To study the family structure patterns among the Harijans of Guwahati city.
2. To know the impact of modernization in family structure among Harijan community the authority and decision-making pattern within the family.
3. To understand the roles and responsibilities of a family among Harijan community.

METHODOLOGY:

This study is based on mixed method procedure. Mixed methods research has evolved a set of procedures that developers can use in planning a mixed method study (Creswell 2011: 203). Data were collected mainly through primary sources such as case studies, interviews and observation methods. Data were also collected through secondary sources such as journals, books, etc.

THE STUDY AREA:

The study was conducted mainly in six Harijan colonies of Guwahati city. They are Morisali (near Nehru Stadium), Uzanbazar Harijan colony, Fatasil Ambari Harijan colony, Rupnagar Harijan colony, Panbazar Harijan colony, and Maligaon Harijan colony. Among these Harijans people from Bihar, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh form the majority.

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.

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 are 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. Case 1: Separation of joint family *Madhu Basfar* 22 years of age, 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 Basfor* (48 years) who is VII passed, worked as sweeper in Guwahati Medical College, her father *Ram Basfor* (57 yrs) is X passed and works as a sweeper in Guwahati Medical College. Her elder brother, *Rajesh Basfor* (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 years, *Ranjan* and *Madhu* decided to live separately. As said by the informer due to differences in language and certain cultural aspects, 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.

Case 2: Separation of joint family

Rabin Singh (36 years) B.Com passed, clerk in Railway department of *Maligoan* 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.

Case 3: Separation of joint family

M .Rajesh 42years education qualification class IX passed sweeper in Guwahati Medical College living in *Morisali* Harijan colony, 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.

Case 4: Resident son-in-law

Nina Kaur(36years) , a housewife of *Panbazar* Harijan colony, informed that her husband *Omkar Singh*(38 years, class X passed) , a sweeper in Guwahati Medical college stays with her in her maternal 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 passed away. 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

The study reveals that the family system among the Harijans of Guwahati city is undergoing significant transformation. While traditional patriarchal and caste-based family norms continue to exist, urbanization, education, and economic change have encouraged nuclear families and modern Among the Harijans of Guwahati City, the family serves as the primary unit of socialization, emotional support, economic cooperation, and cultural transmission. This anthropological study seeks to understand the structure, functions, and changing role of family within the Harijan community in the urban context of Kamrup (Metro), Assam. The study focuses on family organization, authority patterns, gender roles, kinship relations, child upbringing, and support systems. It also examines how urbanization, education, and occupational changes have influenced traditional family roles and values. The findings indicate that while the family continues to remain the backbone of social life, significant changes are visible in family size, decision-making, and intergenerational relationships due to the impact of modern urban life.

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