

### **Investigating Families**

Family has always been a serious research concern primarily for the sociologists. Family sociology has established itself as a strong branch of the discipline. However, revolutionary changes in the nature, structure and functions of family and the bewildering variety of families make it mandatory that the study of families is not the sole responsibility of sociologists. In fact, the significance of this institution is such that a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach alone can make some sense and direction out of the changes in the institution of family.

The need to investigate families arises out of a major crisis that is affecting families all over the world. There is a crisis of structure, functions and the values involved. The classical model of family where a man and a woman enter a legally and culturally sanctioned union with the purpose of establishing a family and having children is no more the only option. Alternatives developed include cohabitation living, single-parent families, same-sex marriages, and even communal living. The alternatives have not delivered their promises. Social life all over the world is facing crises, including lack of world peace, which are traced to the lack of a proper familial background.

As a socialising agency and as a workshop of human civilisation, human family has a unique role, unrivalled in human history. Hence, a search for the deeper dynamics of family life and consequent interventions remains a major challenge to the social scientific enterprise.

What then are the major concerns that need to be investigated on family? Conventionally, sociological research has focused on issues of interpersonal relationships, parenting, some theoretical explorations, status of women, reproductive health, sexual discrimination, poverty and family, life-cycle issues, security of the elderly and so on. In that sense the coverage has been vast. However, one question that remains unanswered is whether substantive issues regarding family have been addressed.

We are afraid that they have not been. Family as a unit of power is a major concern that needs to be looked upon. Family is a deeply political reality. Discourses on family do not treat it so. The extreme powerlessness of women, which is rationalised in most societies through the idealisation of motherhood, gender based roles and increasing violence against women are all manifestations of a political dominance by the male authority. Feminist perspectives on family had also highlighted the intertwining of economy and family. Increasing labour force participation of women even to levels of equality, though not recognised, creates new power equations. All these make it mandatory to look at the family as a political reality. For most people this paradigm shift itself will give new insights and new energies for transforming families into effective institutions of human society.

The role of governmental legislations is also significant in this context. Take the instance of single-child norm, or two-child norm, the legislative policy measures will decide the very structure and value base of families. Legislation on domestic violence is often toothless, especially in the developing countries and as a consequence families suffer. Enlightened advocacy for effective legislation has become a must for saving the families.

Finally, the quality of family defines the quality of human living. The world over, there is such a massive crisis in the family structure, functions and values that those in the caring professions are baffled by the enormity of the problem. Serious investigations into the institution of family have become the need of the hour.

**Chief Editor**