Family and Community

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Love and dharma are the flower and fruit of family life.

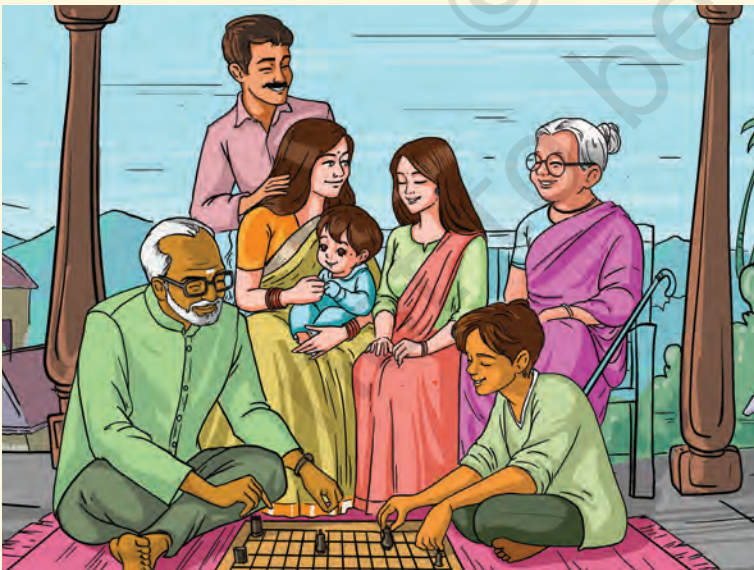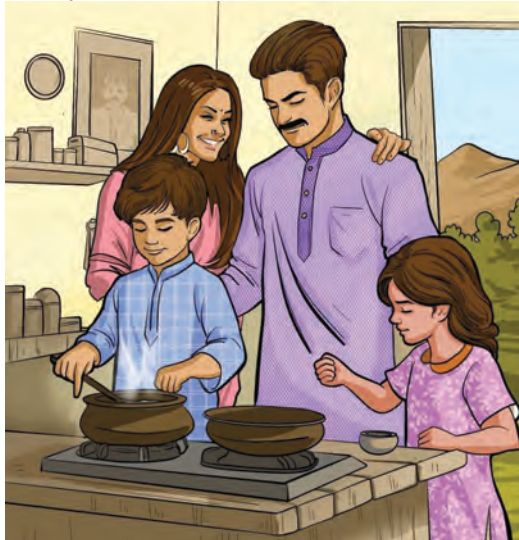*— Tiruvalluvar*

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Family

Almost all of us live in a family. The family is the fundamental and most ancient unit of any society. In Indian society today, there are several types of families — from joint families to nuclear families. A joint family has several generations living together — grandparents, parents, uncles and aunts,

Examples of joint families

Examples of nuclear families

brothers, sisters and cousins. A nuclear family, on the other hand, is limited to a couple and their children, and sometimes one parent and children.

LET'S EXPLORE

→ What types of families do you see in your neighbourhood? List the type with the number of households for each type.

→ What types are more frequent? Why do you think this is so?

→ As a class activity, compare with your classmates' findings and discuss.

In English, there are not many terms to describe family relationships; we saw some of them in the first paragraph. Indian languages have many more terms. For example, in Hindi there is *bua, tau, tai, chacha, mausi, nana, nani,* and many more. Some languages, such as Tamil, also have different terms for elder brother / sister or younger brother / sister. But what is the word for 'cousin' in an Indian language? In most Indian languages, you will find that there is no such word! That is because cousins are only 'brothers' and 'sisters'. This emphasises the deep bonds among all the children in the family.

→ Make a list of all the members of your family you can think of, including a few distant relatives. List their terms in your mother tongue or regional language and try to find the equivalent in English. Two examples are below for Hindi:

Name	Term in Hindi	Description / term in English
Rani	बहन	mother's brother's daughter (cousin) (among other possible meanings)
Sameer	चाचा	father's younger brother (uncle)

→ Notice how, quite often, a single word in your mother tongue or regional language requires several words in English to give a precise definition.

Roles and Responsibilities

Relationships among family members are based on love, care, cooperation and interdependence. 'Cooperation' means 'working together'. Each member of the family has a role and responsibility towards other members. For instance, parents are responsible for raising their children to become happy individuals and responsible members of the society. But also, as children grow up, they take on more responsibilities in the home to help other family members — whether parents or a sister or a brother, etc. Through daily practice, children learn to participate in the life of the household. In many homes, children also learn some of the traditions and practices their family has been following for generations.

Answer these questions and compare your answers with a few classmates:

→ Who in your family decides what is to be bought from the market?

→ Who cooks food in your home?

→ Who is the oldest person in your family?

→ Who cleans the floor in your home?

→ Who washes utensils in your house?

→ Who helps you to do your homework?

Following our dharma, or doing our duty, has been an important principle of Indian culture. The family is also a 'school', where children learn important values such as ahimsa, *dāna* (giving), *sevā* (service) and *tyāga* (sacrifice). Individuals in the family often give up their own needs to take care of the family's needs.

Let us see one such story.

Shalini lives with her family in a town in Kerala. Her father runs a small business and her mother is a teacher in a nearby school. Shalini has a younger brother. Her grandmother, Acchamma

(father's mother), Chittappa (father's brother or paternal uncle) and her Chitti (aunt or uncle's wife) live with them. They have a daughter, Shalini's cousin, who she calls Chinni. Shalini's uncle has just lost his job and her aunt is a homemaker. The whole family was preparing for the festival of Onam. Acchamma told Shalini's father that his brother was having financial difficulties, so they were not able to buy new clothes for the festival. When Shalini's parents took her and her brother shopping, they bought new clothes not only for themselves, but also for Chittappa, Chitti and Chinni. As a result, Shalini did not get the silk dress she had expected; she had to settle for a simple cotton one. Acchamma explained to Shalini that this is how families support each other and share what they have. Shalini did not mind her simpler dress. She was happy that everyone could get some new clothes.

LET'S EXPLORE

→ Draw a simple tree of this family of seven members.

→ Why do you think Shalini's parents bought clothes for everyone?

→ What would you have done if you were in Shalini's place?

That story was set in Kerala. Let us now travel northeast, to a village in Meghalaya.

My name is Tenzing. I love the mountains we live in, though life is sometimes hard. My father runs a small grocery store. After my mother became busy in a local handicraft cooperative, making our beautiful traditional fabrics, wood carvings and other items for sale to tourists, my father joined in cleaning the house, taking care of our small vegetable garden

and other household chores. Often, he helps my grandmother prepare food for us all.

Grandmother always has all sorts of interesting stories to tell me, with humour and wisdom; no one seems to understand people better than her! Grandfather helps me with my homework and takes me to the school bus stop. He is also actively involved in social work in our colony and is always offering his help to others. For example, when there is a power failure in our area, he goes and registers a complaint at the nearby office. When our neighbours' house got damaged in a storm, he collected some money from the whole neighbourhood to help with repairs.

We are lucky that my parents can take care of our basic necessities like food and clothing. When any special expenses come up, I have often seen that they discuss them together. Mother says that we should always try to save some money for any unexpected needs that may arise in the future.

💡 **THINK ABOUT IT**

❖ Why does Tenzing's father consult his wife for special expenses?

❖ How do you feel about his participation in household chores?

❖ What roles do the grandparents fulfil?

→ Create a story of a family somewhere in India, where we see some family values practised. Share it with your class either through writing or drawing.

→ Stage a small drama with all your classmates around two or three families. The play you write could include some challenging situations that the families faced, and show how they are resolved.

→ In the stories of Shalini and Tenzing, we see examples of joint families. What do you think are the aspects of modern living that make some couples opt for a nuclear family (i.e., living apart from older generations or other relatives)? What could be some advantages as well as disadvantages of the two kinds of families?

Community

Families are connected not only within themselves, but also with other families and the people around them. Such a group of connected people may be called a 'community' (there are other meanings for 'community', depending on the context). Members of a community come together for various reasons, like celebrating festivals and organising feasts, weddings and other events. In some villages, people come together to support each other with agricultural practices like land preparation, sowing and harvesting. Over time, communities often agreed upon some practices on the use of shared natural wealth and resources such as water, grazing lands and forest produce. This is the case with many tribal communities. To some extent, this remains the case in village communities in rural India today. Such practices — we may call them 'rules', though they were rarely written down — have provided communities a secure access to resources. But it also means that all families and

individuals within the community have specific duties to perform. Otherwise, the community will not function smoothly.

DON'T MISS OUT

◈ Year after year, the region around the town of Jhabua, in Madhya Pradesh, suffered from an acute water crisis. Following their *halma* (see facing page) tradition of coming together to support any individual or family in times of crisis, the Bhil community decided to plant thousands of trees in hundreds of villages. The Bhils also dug many trenches to conserve rainwater and created other water harvesting structures. They did not get paid for this work but did it as their duty towards their community and the environment. In the *halma* tradition, the objective is to serve Mother Earth. In 2019, Shri Mahesh Sharma of the Shivganga movement was honoured with the Padma Shri award for his transformational work with the Bhil communities.

◈ During the Chennai floods of 2015, roads turned to rivers and people could no longer move around. Almost all shops were closed and services interrupted. Many private groups, in particular spiritual and religious organisations, cooked large quantities of food and distributed it to people who needed it.

◈ There are many more such examples of people coming together to do something for the benefit of the community without expecting anything in return. Have you heard of any?

The real-life stories above illustrate community in a rural context. Community is also present in an urban context, although it may function a little differently. Let us see an example from another real-life story.

halma

More than 20 years ago, in an area of Ahmedabad (Gujarat), Kamal Parmar, owner of a small auto-fabrication workshop, noticed a group of underprivileged children on the street. Some had dropped out of school, while others had never been to school. Kamal started giving them tuition from 5:30 to 9:30 pm every day, after his regular work hours. He also provided the kids with a free dinner. Soon, 150 children were attending those classes regularly and were deeply interested in the lessons!

A few teachers from a local school noticed the classes and joined the teaching for a while. One of them observed, "These children don't get proper benches to sit on, have no 'silence zone' classrooms and the vehicles passing by make lots of noise, yet they pay all their attention to what the teachers tell them. This touched my heart. The love and affection I got from them was unbelievable." Some older children who were attending regular schools also joined as volunteers to teach in Kamal's classes. One of them remarked, "We went there to teach, instead we learnt a lot from them."

- Discuss this story in your class. What kind of attitude towards the community does it reveal?
- What values get reflected in Kamal Parmar's initiative?
- Think about those underprivileged children. Do you think society has been unfair to them?

- What should society do to make sure that all children get access to education?

New types of communities have also emerged in the last 30 or 40 years. Residents' Welfare Associations in many urban areas are examples of communities that make their own rules and regulations. Those could be rules about waste management, cleanliness of common areas, taking care of pets, and so on. People living in the community participate in making such rules and regulations.

Communities are ultimately interdependent. The same Residents' Welfare Associations, for instance, will depend on the trading community for supplies and also on municipal workers to handle waste. In our complex societies, everyone depends on a number of other people and communities.

LET'S EXPLORE

Make a list of all people outside your family that are supporting you through their work in one way or another.

We now understand that 'community' is a flexible concept. A few more examples:

- A *jāti*, or a subdivision of it, is also often called a community.

- A group of people of a particular religion, region, common work or interest, especially a smaller group, may also be called a community; for instance, 'Mumbai's Parsi community', 'Chennai's Sikh community', 'America's Indian community', 'Kerala's scientific community', 'our school's art community', 'the village's farming community', and so on... The list is endless!

- In your school, you may be part of different communities — your class, of course, but also the sports community, the National Service Scheme, the National Cadet Corps, a science or drama club, etc.

LET'S EXPLORE

→ What types of communities are you part of?

→ Is there a club that you are a part of in school? How does it function?

Before we move on ...

→ Family is the foundation of human society. Ideally, members of a family support each other in their many duties and tasks.

→ Community, a bigger unit, also implies that people do their best to support each other. 'Community' can be defined in several ways and there are many kinds of community.

→ Ultimately, communities are interdependent.

Questions, activities and projects

1. What are some of the rules you follow in your family and neighbourhood? Why are they important?

2. Do you think some rules are unfair to a few people in the family or community? Why?

3. Describe several situations that you have observed where community support makes a difference. You can draw or write about these.