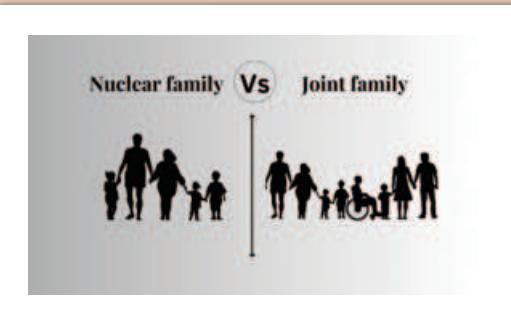


#RELATIONSHIPS & FAMILY

Nuclear vs joint family: FREEDOM OR BELONGING

Being surrounded by many loved ones is like sharing a busy home kitchen; there is warmth, laughter, and support, but there is also crowding, noise, and the occasional clash. This, in essence, captures the experience of the traditional joint family system in our culture.

Legend has it that the joint family system in South Asia has roots in ancient and medieval agrarian societies, where extended families living together made economic and social sense. Nowadays, the traditional joint family, though increasingly rare, is part of our cultural legacy — something many families take pride in. It represents a tradition where multiple generations live together in the same household, where grandparents, uncles, aunts, or cousins continue living together under one roof, a practice not



commonly seen in the Western part of the world.

A nuclear family, on the other hand, usually consists of just two parents and their children, living together. As someone from a nuclear family, I have the first-hand experience of cherishing the nights with my cousins during occasional visits. As they say, absence teaches you its value.

The warmth of a family, being surrounded by so many people who love and care about you, can make you feel that you are important in so many people's lives. However, as reflected by different perspectives, this closeness often comes at a cost.

Sadiql Haque, a final-year engineering student, finds his skills at conflict resolution inadequate when he visits his extended family in his hometown.

"In a joint family, you

have to be extra cautious about what you say to any person. One wrong word, and chances are at least someone can feel offended," remarked Haque.

As someone who occasionally visits a joint family, I feel this pressure too. You don't always have the social energy or the time to visit all the uncles and eat at every one of their places. One has to be extra careful not to inadvertently hurt anyone's sentiment, which can be tiring for anyone, especially if they have to endure this hypervigilance round the clock.

Haque also shared that concentrating on studies during exam nights can be challenging in a joint family. "I can ask my mum and dad to keep the volume down, but I cannot say the same to my uncle or aunt, for fear of offending someone," he lamented.

Many argue that joint families can silently take away your freedom. In retrospect, Haque stated that the thing he cherishes most about living in a nuclear family with just his parents is the freedom he enjoys.

However, a joint family is not all about invisible constraints. Many argue that in a joint family, there is always someone for you if you need help.

Safkat Zahir, a final year undergrad student who is currently living with his nuclear family, pointed out that children need to share their emotions with trusted persons. "A nuclear family is okay, but if the children do not get to speak with their parents or they do not get enough interactions, they run the risk of being isolated, which can have a long-term effect on the child's mental health and behaviour," he asserted.

In a nuclear family, children may feel isolated if their parents do not spend enough time with them or

create a safe space for them to open up. In that case, a joint family can come to the rescue, as there usually is someone the child can trust, maybe a grandparent, a favourite aunt, or a cousin.

When one member of the family falls sick, another takes care of them and handles the important household responsibilities for that interim period. It is this built-in support system that makes joint families resilient during tough times.

Amina Rahman Aishwarya, a first-year university student living away from her family, highlighted that the joint family experience can be fun during festivals like Eid and New Year's. "Staying by yourselves in a nuclear family during these festive times can be very depressing. You need your extended family to enjoy these festivals," she expressed.

For those who have lived in joint families once and moved to become nuclear ones, the memories stay forever.

Fardin Taharim, a first-year university student living away from his family, finds himself reminiscing about his best childhood memories with his cousins. Born in a joint family, Taharim was around five years old when his family moved out to become nuclear.

Referring to the sense of belonging he found in a joint family, Taharim reflected, "I don't have a big friend circle. My world revolves around only a few people. My extended family members are among them. I love spending time with my cousins. I have sweet uncles and aunts. Family nights are the best."

Janifar Kamal, an international student currently pursuing her master's in the US, grew up in a joint family for 14 years of her life. Reflecting on her experience, she emphasised, "Living in a brown family can make you used to being surrounded by chaos."

A nuclear family can be peaceful and offer more freedom, but a joint family, despite the chaos, comes with connection and belonging that is hard to find elsewhere.

By Minhazur Rahman Alvee
Photo: Collected

