

Book Review

Aditi Dasgupta (2015). *Family: Maladies and Melodies*. Kolkata: Baulmon Prakashan, Pp. xii+243. Price Rs. 295/-.

This book is based on the author's Ph.D. dissertation and is both philosophical as well as sociological. It discusses the multi-faceted problems associated with the term 'family'. The author notes that the increasing rates of divorce, single motherhood, sperm banks, childcare units, old age homes, etc., have raised questions. Besides, family stability faces new hazards like maladjustments, crime, juvenile delinquency, alienation and other complexities. These and other issues have been covered in this book.

The author begins with a discussion of the commonly accepted concept of family and its difficulties. Even the general form of marriage cannot guarantee any long-term relationship between a man and woman. She observes, "We may say that it is not the period of relationship between the mates that constitutes a typical feature of family. Rather, it seems to be the legitimate reproductive function within the family that is more important. But can we say that legitimization is necessarily connected with biological parentage?" (P. 9.) She rightly points out that a family is a multifaceted unit which has a complex texture. The factors which feature in it are biological/natural, cultural, social, economic, legal, political and emotional. Some of them are treated as central, while others peripheral.

Chapter 2 deals with the search for a non-essential general account of family. She raises a question regarding the use of inductive method, i.e., on the basis of experienced family forms can we move ahead or go beyond experience and claim that all familial formations which we have not yet experienced will display the same characteristics which the experienced families display? She argues, "The current approach of pluralism which comes from the postmodernist camp demands that there is no rational explanation of human behaviour. An utmost sensitivity to individual feelings and emotion leads postmodernists to drop any demand for commonality. A singularist says that there may be various interpretations of family, but among them one and only one is ideally admissible. The postmodernist goes to the opposition direction. She will insist that each of those interpretations is equally acceptable." (Pp. 52-53.)

In Chapter 3 she discusses family from the pluralistic view. In this context she writes about the taken for granted image of family which is to be discussed with respect to (i) the taken for granted account of family, (ii) other familial organizations, and (iii) entire family system itself.

In Chapter 4 she deals with the two opposing viewpoints of family. They are pro-family and anti-family. The first regards family in its conjugal form as a 'heaven' which provides stable relationships among individuals as well as support for both young and old. She talks about the views of Plato and Marx about the family. While the former suggests communal life, Marx insists upon the abolition of family as an 'economic unit of society.' In the Marxist point of view, the task of caring and rearing is neither any exclusive task of women, nor it is to be performed only by any private institution such as family. As the society is responsible for the lives of the people, the so called private responsibilities of the family are also the responsibilities of the society. Thus in this chapter, though she mentions that though socialism advocates for taking care of familial responsibilities, but does not want to destroy the institution of family altogether, rather it tries to ease the responsibilities supposed to be taken up by the family. Thus in this chapter, she succinctly presents a critical appreciation of the views of different philosophies about family as an essential and integral institution of society.

Chapter 5 presents a critique of family. The feminists think that family is not an essential part of the society. The latter is divided into two classes and family serves the interests of the

dominant class. The author adds, “Patriarchy has entrusted women only with two roles – the chaste wife and the sacrificing mother. Glorifying these roles, patriarchal culture makes a woman believe that her appropriate place is not in the public world but in the private household where she has to obey her husband and has to sacrifice for her children.” (Pp. 116-17.) Here, the author discusses in detail the viewpoint of John Rawls and Susan Okin who consider family as an obstacle to a perfect egalitarian society and the author seems to hold that view.

The last chapter summarizes the findings of earlier chapters and besides covers comments on the alternatives to family like communes, co-habitation, gay and lesbian relations, etc. She also refers to the children’s right to individual autonomy and also question of the abolition of family in this context.

These are the contents of the book in brief. It contains a philosophical interpretation of the institution of family. Hence, it is likely to attract the attention of those wish to explore the philosophical foundation of family as an institution. Besides, there are some inexcusable printing errors. For example, on p. 11, in reference 76, the author refers to Arundhati Roy’s book *The God of Small Things* but in the very next line it is printed as *The Good of Small Things*.

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