Role of Family in Social Control

Although other social institutions, like school, peer group, and mass media, have taken over many of the roles of family but still the family, one of the most important social institutions, plays a vital role in personality formation of individuals through socialization. The individual spends much of his time with institutions other than the family, specially in his adult age, but still the individual spends a considerable time with his family enabling the family to influence him. It has now been established that family is the most important agent of socialization, a process of personality formation through which one internalizes socio-cultural norms, values, and attitudes and learns important roles in order to integrate himself with the social groups as their functional member. These learned personality attributes contribute a lot towards social control and in turn this social control helps maintaining social order and integrity. Thus in this way family has a pivotal role in maintaining social order.

Family begins its social control function right after the birth of a child. In the age of infancy parents, siblings, and other family members socialize the infant with the help of gestures. The infant learns what are the actions which please his family members and what are which annoy them. This symbolic interaction reinforces behavior patterns for future life. In childhood family also uses language to impart socio-cultural heritage to the child. Then the child has peers who have a very strong influence but still the child spend most of his time with the family, thus the family has ample time to play its social control role. As the child grows up he has diverse interaction, with teachers, with playmates, with school mates, and most of them with the media. Although all of them have a tremendous effect on the child’s personality but still it is the family who is most responsible for the child’s moral behavior.

Adolescent and later on adult life not only brings more responsibilities for an individual but also increases his sphere of activities where he has different sets of behavior. In adult life, after marriage individual’s family pattern changes as he or she achieves the status of a husband or wife, respectively, and is assigned with a role of spouse. A great sense of responsibility follows when he or she achieves the role of parenthood. This new family pattern brings a positive change in the individual’s orientation towards social responsibilities and he follows social normative pattern which induces various taboos and sanctions regarding asocial as well as antisocial behaviors. He is supposed to act as a role model for the coming generation thus he try to avoid behaviors which are not approved by the society. In this way again the family plays its social control role.

Old age is characterized with dependency and physical frailty but a rigid and well established set of norms and values. The elders in the family try to uphold their own values which normally substantiate the social order. They set examples of socially acceptable behaviors for the younger members of their family. In this way they not only persuade the younger generation for maintaining social order but also psychologically commit themselves to refrain from disruptive behaviors.

The prerequisite for a family to function as a source of social control in any society is that the family should be intact and functional as an institution. The family should be a source of affection for its members and it should give them an identity and a sense of belongingness. In Pakistan, the institution of family seems fulfilling all these prerequisites. Now the question is that while family is intact as an institution in Pakistani society why we have an overgrowing problem of law and order, social disruption, and lawlessness. May be that today individual in our society is confronted with such a diverse social normative patterns presented by different social institutions that he finds himself in an \textit{anomic} situation (when the society have many sets of norms but not a single one strong enough to be followed). In this situation there is a strong need for tuning all the social institutions in line with the family so that the family could play its social control function properly. Moreover the institution of family today needs more strengthening, especially when almost all the institutions are under a rapid change due to media induced cultural invasion. We need a “Pakistani family” if we need an integrated and ordered society.