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CHANGING ROLE OF FAMILY STRUCTURE IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

As we approach the third millennium, people all around the world show signs of being scared. They may be fearful about their safety, worried about their families or full of uncertainty about the future. Our families give us an identity. They provide us with a moral, social and economic support. Today, however even in rural areas the idea of the family itself is changing and is sometimes being replaced by other groups whose links are based on confidence, mutual support and a sense of common destiny. Religious groups, office colleagues and homosexuals are now sometimes seen to operate as 'family'. This new way of thinking about the family is radically different and is not based on correct biblical teaching. Many forces shake our homes and can cause our families to crumble. What are the most important ones?

Literature on family studies in India has grown to a large extent in the last two decades, although such studies are scattered. This article presents socio-demographic data on families in India aiming to provide bases for analyzing research, particularly in the area of family development. Indian families are classified as patrilineal and matrilineal according to the lineage or descent by father or mother. The family structure is conceptualized as the configuration of role, power, and status and relationships in the family which depends upon the families' socio-economic background, family pattern, and extent of urbanization. Marriage practices are emphasized covering subjects such as marriage patterns, selection of marriage partner, age at marriage, and age at consummation of marriage, marriage rituals, financial exchanges and divorce. In spite of urbanization and industrialization in the contemporary Indian society, the family institution continues to play a central role in the lives of people.

KEY WORDS: *Indian families, Family Legislation, Indian Constitution, Family Relations, Family Pattern, Family Structure, Family System, Family Composition.*

INTRODUCTION

The family is a complex and dynamic institution in India. For many decades, several studies were carried out to understand this complexity. In India, people learn the essential themes of cultural life within the bosom of a family. In most of the country, the basic units of society are the patrilineal family unit and wider kinship groupings. The most widely desired residential unit is the joint family, ideally consisting of three or four patrilineal related generations, all living less than one roof, working, eating, worshiping, and cooperating together in mutually beneficial social and economic activities. Family patterns are conceptualized in terms of family composition. A household is one of the dimensions of the family pattern. It is a residential and domestic unit composed of one or more persons living under the same roof and eating food cooked in a single kitchen. The family has been and continues to be one of the most important elements in the fabric of Indian society.

The family is the first line of defense especially for children and a major factor in their survival, health, education, development, and protection. It is also a major source of nurturance, emotional bonding and socialization, and a link between continuity and change. It has the major potential to provide stability and support when there are problems. Human development can, thus, be enhanced by enriching family life. Families in India are undergoing vast changes like increasing divorce and separation rates, domestic violence, inter-generational conflicts, social problems of drug abuse, juvenile delinquency etc. These changes indicate the inability to cope with the pressures of the modern life. Yet, the majorities seems to have survived and are able to modify, adjust and adapt to changing social norms, values and structures, and have demonstrated a unique strength in keeping together despite the growing stress and strain. In recent decades family studies have undergone several developments. Family studies in India are viewed within the institutional framework of particular society. In each society, families vary in their extent of adjustment to accept norms owing to the family interaction pattern and external forces.

The present article reviews the rapidly changing family. The family in India is often understood as an ideal homogenous unit with strong coping mechanisms. It is a basic, cohesive, and integral unit of the larger social systems. Moreover, families in a large and culturally diverse country such as India have plurality of forms that vary with class, ethnicity, and individual choices. Its members are bound by interpersonal relationships in a wider network of role and social relations. It is considered a link between

community and change. The family is the basic and important unit of society because of the role it plays in generation of human capital resources and the power that is vested in it to influence individual, household, and community behavior. It is, therefore, a basic unit of study in most social sciences disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, economics, anthropology, social psychiatry, social work or human development.

The bond that ties the individual to his family, the range of the influence and authority that the family exercises make the family in India not merely an institutional structure of our society, but accord give it a deep value. The family has indeed contributed to the stability to Indian society and culture. Today, the Indian family is subjected to the effects of changes that have been taking place in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres of the society. In the economic sphere, the patterns of production, distribution and consumption have changed greatly. The process of industrialization and the consequent urbanization and commercialization have had drastic impacts on the family. Migration to urban areas, growth of slums, change from caste oriented and hereditary occupations to new patterns of employment offered by a technological revolution, the cut-throat competition for economic survival and many other economic changes have left their impact on the family.

Briefly speaking, these changes in the socio-economic political-cultural milieu of our society have led to changes in the structures, functions, roles, relationships and values of the family. Family is the foundation stone of society. It teaches us to be social. It teaches us to digest the fact that there is a common interest, which may be more important than individual interest. Thus, it may require to be given up in favour of family interest. It modifies individual behaviour and cultivates tolerance, patience, respect for others, love and affection, dedication, care and sacrifice. It checks selfishness and restrains rigidity. In fact, a family is the first institution that cultivates social values and social behaviour among individuals. Social values are basically family values written at large. Had the family been absent, concepts like nationalism could never originate. Traditional Asian societies have survived for thousands of years mainly because there has been a consistent emphasis on enforcing family values. Collapse of the family system simultaneously leads to social breakdown.

In India, the old traditional joint family system no longer continues. It was patriarchal in nature, its size was large, status of women in the family was very low, members of family had no individual identity, and the decision-making power lied exclu-

sively with the eldest male member of the family. The members were the blood relations, and had property, residence and hearth, and even worship, in common. The members in a joint family could be of three or more generations, and were morally bound to one another by rights and duties.

Indian family system has undergone drastic change in response to development in terms of industrialization, education and urbanization. Industrialization and urbanization, leading to accelerated rate of rural-urban migration, diversification of gainful economic activities and individual-friendly property laws, have had consequential impact in terms of drastic reduction in the size of family in the country. Most families, particularly in urban areas, have only one or two generation members (i.e., parents and their unmarried children). But, it does not mean that the Indian family is becoming nuclear. Actually, the existence of nuclear family in India is only circumstantial.

The culture and attitude of people is still in favour of the joint family system. Existing nuclear families in the country (whatsoever is the number) are only a temporary phase. In reality, the joint family has been a tradition of India. The nuclear families also existed though it is not an Indian tradition. The family in the country is no longer patriarchal in true sense of the term; it exists as a patria-local household. There is a lot of individual autonomy and no longer is decision-making the exclusive right of the eldest male member of the family.

The family is now essentially democratic and most of the decisions in the family are taken collectively. However, the extent of autonomy and democracy may vary from region to region, community to community and caste to caste, depending upon the degree of its adaptation of the modern values and the urban way of life. The family in India is passing through a contradiction. Even educated males, though are in favour of modern education for their girl children, continue to expect them to remain inside homes and have their decisions be taken by the elder male members, particularly their parents. They also wish them to be working women but continue to expect them to work in the house and, in some cases, observe purdah.

As most people have now started taking up jobs in different parts of the country leaving their parental family behind, they are having separate households. Such small households look forward to maintaining relationship with the parental family and extending help and support to it. Changes in the structure and function of joint families in India are thus following a reconciliatory pattern, a pattern common in the structural changes in the Indian society. In mate selection, the principle of personal choice, especially

in urban families, is today increasingly reconciled with parents' approval; the wife's freedom in middle-class homes to work outside in offices and schools operates within the traditional framework of the husband's approval and sometimes the approval of husband's or even wife's parents. Such reconciliations are, however, not without tension which is an inalienable aspect of social change. Despite these changes, traditional views on joint family still prevail.

Passing away of the traditional joint family system and not being replaced by nuclear family system has resulted into a new kind of family set-up in the country. Today, most families form as nuclear kind of households and continue to exist as constituents of joint families. Therefore, today, it has become more relevant to study households rather than joint or nuclear families.

With the advent of urbanization and modernization, younger generations are turning away from the joint family form. One of the most striking features of contemporary societies is the presence of a range of family variations, from the most traditional, extended families with strict, gender based sex roles to the modern dual career families based on liberal, equal sex roles and to adults cohabiting without marriage. The term "alternative family patterns" suggests family patterns that result from personal circumstances outside one's control (death of a partner, infertility) or from socioeconomic conditions (male migration, work participation of women). In the Indian context, most family variations are a result of personal or socioeconomic circumstances. Experimental or chosen lifestyles like living without marrying, and being childless voluntarily are restricted to an extremely small group of people. The following are the most commonly observed family variations in India. Single parent families, Female headed households, Dual earner career families, Childless families, Adoptive families. Thus this study was planned assess changing family composition, structure and practices.

CHANGE

Change in itself does not have to be bad. It can often be good. When it is expected and wanted, most of us handle it well and welcome the variations it brings – like the arrival of children, starting a new job or growing old. Though at the time we may struggle with these changes, we soon regain our balance and move on with life. However there are other kinds of change that threaten to destroy our family life. These can come from the modern world of discoveries and technology – continuously updated televisions and computers. Good technology, designed to help us, can steal from our families their peace.

There are also changes in values, economics and government policies. These changes are making unfaithfulness and divorce more acceptable, homosexuality more 'natural', marriage more temporary, and child rearing more confusing and stable relationships more difficult. These changes go against correct biblical teaching. We need to learn to control and cope with this rate of change. While not agreeing with such practices, we can still care for the people involved.

PRESSURES

War and disaster can bring great pressures. So can lack of money and financial instability. The precarious financial situation of many poor people in urban and rural areas of developing countries becomes a tremendous force of pressure as family members – both parents and children – are forced to work out how to survive. Everybody has to work, regardless of age, education or emotional maturity. Lack of time for precious family life affects both the well-off in regular employment and the poorest alike. This forces the disintegration of family life. This can affect us all. As families try to run their lives and satisfy their desires, life may become emptier instead of fuller.

With the increase in women's participation in the labour force, a growing proportion of Australian families face new challenges combining family and paid work responsibilities. The proportion of traditional 'sole breadwinner' families, where the husband works full-time and earns money for the family and the wife undertakes unpaid household work and child care, is decreasing in Australian society. While some couples still choose this arrangement, in many families both parents continue working after the birth of children, either out of choice or necessity. In addition, one-parent families have become more common over the last 20 years. Many lone parents face the challenge of earning sufficient income and finding child care without the support of a resident partner.

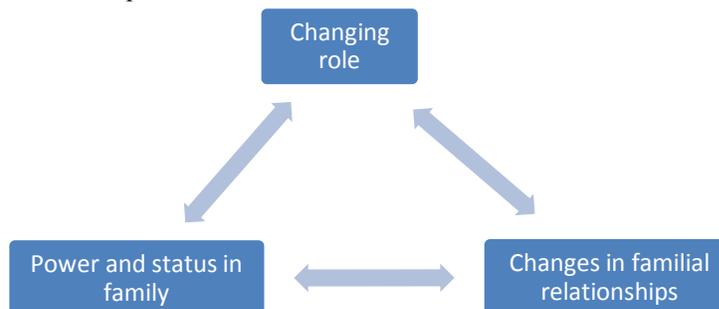
Balancing family and paid work is a challenge for both men and women. Despite men and women

sharing domestic tasks more equitably than in previous generations, men still spend longer hours in paid employment than women, while women continue to take on a greater proportion of child care than men. Women aged 25-34 years are in their main childbearing years, but it is also during this period that employed women are likely to be gaining promotions and taking on greater responsibilities at work. Competing aspirations for family and career may result in women delaying having children until later in life or not having children at all. 'Family friendly' arrangements are available in an increasing number of workplaces to support families either for a set period of time (e.g. maternity/paternity leave) or in an ongoing way (e.g. flexible working hours). While some parents (usually mothers) leave the labour force for an extended period of time to raise children, many continue to work, using 'family friendly' provisions where possible. "Family life is the foundation on which our communities, our society and our country are built." Yet in the UK there are increasingly divergent views on what actually constitutes 'the family', and there is now widespread acceptance of different forms of family life: cohabitation, lone parenthood, same sex partnerships as well as heterosexual marriage. It is estimated that the total adult population will rise by 10% between 1996 and 2021, yet the total number of single and divorced people will both increase by around 50%. In comparison, it is predicted that the married population will fall by 10%. As a result, married people may become a minority of the adult population within the next 10 years.

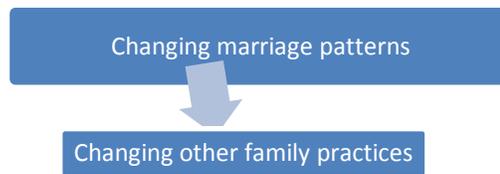
OBJECTIVES

This paper aims to study the changing role of family and family structure in India.

- ❖ To assess the changing family composition in urban area.
- ❖ To assess the changing family structure in urban area with respect to following:



- ❖ To assess the changing family practices in urban area with respect to following:



PROBLEMS OF INDIA’S CHANGING FAMILY

The family has been and continues to be one of the most important elements in the fabric of Indian society. The bond that ties the individual to his family, the range of the influence and authority that the family exercises make the family in India not merely an institutional structure of our society, but accord give it a deep value. The family has indeed contributed to the stability to Indian society and culture.

Today, the Indian family is subjected to the effects of changes that have been taking place in the economic, political, social and cultural spheres of the society. In the economic sphere, the patterns of production, distribution and consumption have changed greatly. The process of industrialisation and the consequent urbanisation and commercialisation have had drastic impacts on the family. Migration to urban areas, growth of slums, change from caste oriented and hereditary occupations to new patterns of employment offered by a technological revolution, the cut-throat competition for economic survival and many other economic changes have left their impact on the family.

Briefly speaking, these changes in the socio-economic-political-cultural milieu of our society have led to changes in the structures, functions, roles, relationships and values of the family. In the context of the changes in the economic system more and more members of the family are moving away from the larger family circle and living as individuals or members of a nuclear unit in urban areas. The patterns or loyalties, obligations and expectations have changed. The cases of the child and the aged in particular have become a problem for many due to structural changes in the family.

The rapid structural changes in family life have been caused by a number of factors, including:

- The declining influence of the ‘traditional’ religion;
- Increasing individualism;
- Changing attitudes to marriage and its commitment;
- The consequences (often unintended) of divorce reforms;
- The wide availability of reliable contraception and abortion;

- The liberalisation of sexual and moral values and attitudes;
- Changes in the roles of women;
- Economic trends in female and male employment;
- Increased mobility and the disintegration of community life;
- Changes in legislation such as the introduction of Civil Partnership Act in 2005.

MARRIAGE

Marriage is still very popular today: in 2004, 66% of all dependent children in the families headed by a married couple, compared to 11% of dependent children in families headed by a cohabiting couple. Importantly, 70% of children born within marriage will live their entire childhood with both natural parents. Surveys reveal that most teenagers intend to marry – 9 out of 10 under 16 year olds want to ‘tie the knot’ in the future, and 9 out of 10 young women dream of a white wedding.

The number of marriages in the dipped to 286,100 in 2001, but there have been successive annual increases ever since to 311,180 in 2004. 52% of these marriages were first marriages for both partners and 18% were remarriages for both partners. The mean age at first marriage in 2004 was 29 years for women and 31 years for men, which continues the trend of marrying later in life. In 1991 the average ages were 25.5 years for women and 27.5 for men. There has been a steady shift away from religious marriage ceremonies to civil over the past 35 years. In 2004, 68% of marriages were civil marriage ceremonies, compared to 41% in 1971.

The benefit of marriage for children, adults and society is now well documented. Marriage is associated with better health and well-being, increased wealth and greater commitment for adults, as well as being one of the most effective safeguards for women and children from violence, poverty and neglect. “A new branch of research is finding that marriage has powerful and beneficial effects on human beings...its findings deserve to be read by everyone in Western Society.”

COHABITATION

There has been a great rise in the popularity of living together before, or instead of, getting married. In 2004 in the UK, a quarter of non-married people were cohabiting: “Cohabitation is the most common form of first partnership for young adults today.”

Childbearing within cohabiting unions has become vastly more common, with 42% of children being born into such unions in 2004, compared with 9% in 1976. Out of those children born outside of marriage, 64% are born to cohabiting parents, 29% to parents living separately and 7% of births outside marriage are registered solely by the mother. However, "Cohabitation may be the start of a long-term or life-long partnership but the cohabitation period itself is rarely long-term." Only about 5% of cohabitations last 10 years or more. Instead, 3 in 5 cohabitations will turn into marriage while the remainders are most likely to break down. Cohabitation is also more likely to turn into marriage with age - 36% of cohabitations of those aged 20-24 do not end in marriage, compared to 8% of those aged 30-34 years. Cohabiting couples split up at three times the rate of married couples.

If a cohabiting couple have a child, they are still much more likely to split up than a married couple with a child: only 36% of children born to non-married couples will live their entire childhood with both natural parents compared to 70% born within marriage. "Three quarters of family breakdown with children fewer than five comes from the separation of non-married parents. In stark contrast, the breakdown rate of marriages with children under five has actually declined between 1991-2003. After parental separation, children are more likely to lose touch with and/or less likely to be financially supported by their fathers if their parents had not married than if they had.

"The rise in cohabitation is implicated in the increasing prevalence of lone parenthood and hence in the growth of child poverty." There is also evidence that pre-marital cohabitation can actually increase the chance of marriage breakdown later.

LIVING APART TOGETHER

The Office for National Statistics has carried out research on the number of people with a regular boyfriend/ girlfriend/ partner with whom they do not live and to whom they are not married, a relationship that has been termed 'living apart together' (LAT). It is estimated that around two million men and two million women are currently in this form of relationship, which is 32% of men and 34% of women between the ages of 16 and 59. This form of relationship is most prevalent in the 20-24 year old age group and is often a transitional period before marriage or cohabitation. Many people in a LAT relationship may live with parents, be in full time education or live in a house-share.

DIVORCE

Divorce rates increased sharply in Great Britain during the 1960s, doubling between 1961 and 1969, and rose even more sharply after the Divorce Reform Act 1969 to 124,556 divorces in 1972 (Great Britain) once the Act was in place. In 2004 there were 167,116 divorces granted in the UK. In 2004 the average length of a marriage ending in divorce was 11.5 years, although men and women in their mid to late twenties experience the highest divorce rates. 69% of divorces in 2004 were between couples where the marriage had been the first for the man and the woman.

Of couples divorcing in 2004, a half (53%) had at least one child under the age of 16. The number of children under 16 experiencing divorce of their parents in 2004 in England and Wales was 149,275, of whom 21% were under the age of 5. Two thirds (69%) of the divorces were granted to the wife, with the most common reason cited being the behaviour of the husband. In most cases of divorce and separation children remain with the mother.

The effect of divorce on children has been well documented. It is estimated that adverse outcomes are roughly twice as prevalent among children of divorced families compared with children from intact families. Furthermore, people who experience parental divorce are more likely to experience partnership and marriage dissolution themselves.

Some of the demographic causes of increased marital breakdown may be linked to the following trends: "The earlier a partnership is formed, the more likely it is to breakdown. Other demographic factors that have been implicated in marital breakdown include having a pre-marital birth, cohabiting prior to marriage and having a spouse who has previously been married."

LONE PARENTHOOD

There is constant movement in and out of lone parenthood. The main inflow is still through divorce or separation. One in four dependent children now lives in a lone parent family. In 2004, 7% of households in Great Britain were headed by a lone parent. This has more than doubled since 1971. Out of the 3.08 million children living in lone parent families in the UK, 92% live with their mother.

The main obvious concern to policy makers is that this group makes up a substantial and growing proportion of families living in hardship. Concern also extends to the health of lone mothers and their children, which is often affected by the hardships that lone parenthood can bring. Children of lone parents are less likely to be in good health (79% compared to 85% of children in couple families). The behaviour and performance of children can also be affected by

family structure. Children from lone parent families are more likely to have special educational needs (15% compared to 10% of children from two parent families), and achieve fewer GCSEs at A to C grades, with 48% of children from lone parent families gaining 5 or more compared to 66% of children from two parent families. However, lone parenthood is often a stage in life and on average lasts for 5 years, ending either through the children becoming independent or through the lone parent engaging in a new relationship.

STEP FAMILIES

Step families are the most rapidly growing family type in modern society. In 2001 step-families (married or cohabiting) accounted for 10% of all families with dependent children. Cohabiting couples with dependent children are more likely to be step families, 38% compared to 8% of families headed by a married couple. There is a tendency for children to remain with their mother after a partnership breaks up and stepfathers often play a larger role in the care and upbringing of dependent children than their biological fathers. Step families are generally larger than natural families, as both partners may bring children from their previous relationships to the new partnership, and may go on to have further children together. Most stepfamilies however are made up with children from the mother's previous relationship.

THE ELDERLY

In 2000 there were an estimated 3.6 million persons over state pension age living alone, compared to 1.1 million in 1961. In 2002 29% of men and 60% of women aged 75 and over were living alone. Population studies predict that fewer elderly persons will be married or cohabiting than is the case today: "Over 10% of women and 16% of men from the 1960s cohort will not have formed a marital or be in a permanent cohabiting union by the time they reach the age of 50. This compares with 4% of women and 8% of men born in 1946". Furthermore, among those who have married, a greater proportion will have experienced divorce which will add to the numbers living alone. It is predicted that nearly half of the 1960s cohort will be living solo by age 75: "This has policy implications for both health and social care. Older people living alone are more likely to enter an institution than those living with other people."

Most people acknowledge the importance of grandparents, according to data from the 1998 British Social Attitudes Survey. Only 1 in 10 people aged over 18 agreed that grandparents 'have little to teach the grandchildren of today' and about three-quarters agreed that 'families with working mothers needed grandparents help more and more'. Indeed, many

elderly people continue to provide support for adult children and the provision of a home for one's children can extend well beyond middle age: "Given the trend towards greater marital and economic instability it is likely that the phenomenon of 'boomerang children' (the return of adult children) to live with parents) will continue into the future".

CONCLUSION

Family has been recognized as a basic unit of society and is a link between individual and community. The structure of the family continues to be patriarchal. A number of changes have been observed in the patterns of marriage such as age at marriage, inter-caste marriage, etc. A relative increase is noticed in divorce cases in urban areas. It was quite common in the past but at that time families were more stable and provided adequate security in terms of physical, social and emotional needs. Current trends indicate that there is a definite change in the basic system of family, especially the role of elders and disharmony in husband-wife relationship. Divorce rates are testimony to the increasing fragility of husband-wife relationship. Migration has major implications on women and children.

The basic unit of the Indian society is patrilineal family unit and wider kinship groupings. The most widely desired residential unit is the joint family, ideally consisting of three or four patrilineal related generations, all living less than one roof. Due to the continuous and growing impact of urbanization and westernisation, nuclear family has now become the characteristic feature of the Indian society. The phenomenon of male headed households has now been transforming into female-headed ones. Another noticeable change in the Indian family system is dissolution of marriages and the number of divorce cases is slowly mounting day by day. Increasing domestic violence has been reported in India, as a result of family fragmentation and loss of social support systems in marriage. The major influence that has been cast by the changes in all spheres of the society is on children leading to child labour, trafficking and other forms of abuse. Poverty is the main factor among all the reasons behind all such negative occurrences making their lives miserable. At the same time, children of well-to-do families are also experiencing several problems in terms of lack of attention from their busy parents and a great strain from high expectations to excel in the competitive world.

Although children in several set-ups, women, and the elder lies have been the subjects of various studies, investigations on the family as a whole are clearly very limited. There seems to be a general paucity of applied family research in India. Thus it is

important to deliberate whether these studies can be considered applied in nature – applied research is oriented towards outcome, rather than concepts, and it begins on the premise of usefulness and application. There is, therefore, a need to bring together under one umbrella, all research efforts which focus on specific aspects of family with the aim of influencing family practices and family policy development.

In light of present study and other research review it can be concluded that majority of families of middle socio-economic status are has brought about radical changes in family composition, family structure (role, power and status and familial relationships) and family practices (marriage patterns and other family practices). Urbanization of families is continuously causing for change in structure, composition and practices of family but still family ritual care for younger and older in family, supporting working/non-working member and some other family practices are untouched even modernization has been added to families. Evil like financial exchange during marriage is also present in most of the families. Their needs create awareness among families regarding importance of joint families, family structure and practices.

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