INDIAN FAMILY AT THE CROSSROADS

Victor S. D'Souza

PREFACE

The Centre for Social Studies has created an endowment fund to honour late Prof. I.P. Desai, the founder-Director of the Centre. As part of the programme, we have instituted the I.P. Desai Memorial Lecture series. Prof. Victor S. D'Souza delivered the thirteenth lecture entitled 'Indian Family At The Crossroads'. It gives us great pleasure to make this lecture available to a wider academic community.

We are grateful to Prof. Victor S. D'Souza for having readily responded to our invitation to deliver the lecture. I must thank my colleague Dr. Babasaheb Kazi for preparing the copy for the press.

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I am beholden to the Centre for Social Studies for inviting me to deliver the Thirteenth I.P. Desai Memorial Lecture, especially because it has provided me with an opportunity of offering my tribute to the memory of a person whom I had known since the early 1950's. It was our mutual professional interests that had brought together Professor IP Desai and me, and our common participation in academic affairs and informal meetings flowing from them, enabled me to know him intimately and confide in him freely. I thus began to regard him as my friend, philosopher and guide. Like his other close associates, I too used to address him affectionately as IP. I shall therefore use this appellation in referring to him further in my lecture.

IP displayed a remarkable skill of expressing profound ideas in a simple language despite the methodological rigour of his writings. One such case is illustrated by his writings on the Indian family. On this occasion I could do no better than use as the point of departure of my lecture IP's contribution to our understanding of the nature of the Indian family, as this study like several of his other works, is noted of its originality. His views on this matter were first expressed in a Symposium on Caste and Joint Family, published in the Sociological Bulletin in 1955 (Desai, 1955). Subsequently, in 1964, he brought out a monograph entitled *Some Aspects of Family in Mahua*, in which he has not only clearly enunciated his views on the family, but also verified them with a systematically conducted survey of a pre-industrial town.

In the very first IP Desai Memorial Lecture, Professor Ramakrishna Mukherjee has this to say about IP's approach to the study of Indian family: "Whichever subject he dealt with, IP considered alternative valuations whether or not there was a conventional and popular one. This was noticeable in all his writings and is clearly manifest, perhaps for the first time, in his studies on the Indian family... he drew our attention to the kinship network of family units in place of considering only their insular attributes of co-residence and commensality, which is the valuation

prevalent in the West. I.P. thus laid in 1955 the foundation for the kind of investigations presently pursued" (Mukherjee 1986:1-2). Let me, first of all, summarize the main points of IP's approach from his major work on the Indian family, *Some Aspects of Family in Mahua*, referred to above.

IP was dissatisfied with the prevailing trend of classifying census households either as nuclear or joint, according to the kinship pattern of the residents. Because in India, the nuclear household of husband, wife and unmarried children, invariably displayed the tendency to develop into a joint household consisting of multiple married couples who lived together with other relatives. In the matter of their relationship pattern, the designated nuclear and joint families, both have a similar network of relatives and a similar pattern of rights and obligations among those relatives. Therefore IP emphasized that what constitutes the family in India is not necessarily the kinship structure of the household, or its commensal character, but the normative pattern of behaviour among the different kin-types, whether they live together or separately. Therefore, in order to determine whether a household consisting of husband, wife and children is nuclear or joint, one has to ascertain whether or not the relationships of obligation existing within members of the household, also exist with relatives living outside the household. If yes, a household that is nuclear in kinship structure is, in fact, joint in its family-orientation. It is the particular rights and obligations implied in the relationships that give content to the pattern of interaction in the family, rather than the fact of living together.

Thus according to IP, the normative pattern of behaviour among a set of relatives has to be regarded as the central defining feature of the family. If the orientation of action is confined to the nuclear unit of kinship, the family is regarded as nuclear, but if it embraces a wider network of relatives, then the type of family is to be regarded as joint family. In either case the mere kinship structure of the household ceases to be the defining feature. IP has also recognized some of the distinguishing marks of the nuclear family as compared with the joint family. In the nuclear family, the role expectations of husband and wife imply a certain degree of equality, and all the members of the family, including children, are considered to exist as individuals in their own right. In this manner, IP shows that the nuclear kinship unit has different meanings in different cultures. Hence his objection to the then prevailing practice of defining the joint family as the household with a plurality of nuclear kinship units.

IP, further points out that in the traditional Indian society the concept of nuclear family did not exist and that the Hindu law did not recognize such a unit for the inheritance of property. On the other hand, every Hindu male within a recognized degree of kinship was reckoned as the joint owner of the family property by the fact of his birth, and the coparcenary or the group of which he was the member was larger than the nuclear group. Therefore, IP was of the view that the common practice among scholars to define joint family as a conglomeration of nuclear families had befogged their understanding of the joint family. Such a definition gives one the wrong impression that conveys that the break up of the joint family implies a change in the family system. According to him fundamental change in the family takes place only if there were a change in the role relations and normative pattern of behaviour among different relatives. Judging from some of the important markers of the nuclear family he has identified, it can be surmised that the role relations and normative pattern of behaviour among kin in the nuclear family would be radically different from what they are in the joint family.

IP's systematic study of the families in Mahua was aimed at investigating the factual grounds, as he has conceived them, in order to draw conclusion whether the joint family is radically changing. He has done separate analyses according to two different schemes of classification of families. In the first scheme, the families are classified on the basis of generations of lineal descendants living in the same house. Families with members up to two generations are referred to as nuclear, and with three or more as joint. By this criterion, 61 per cent of the families formed the nuclear units and 39 percent joint. But when the pattern of the family-development-cycle of all the families, is examined in three phases, it is found that except for two percent of all the families, which were nuclear in all the phases, the remaining had either assumed both nuclear and joint forms in one or the other phases, or had continued to be joint in all the three phases. Such an evidence points to the conclusion that even when a joint family breaks up because of exigencies of circumstances, the nuclear families so formed would still have the capacity to develop into joint families in due course of time. It is because such nuclear families still carry the normative pattern or the germ of the joint family.

In the second scheme, the families are classified according to the criteria of joint-ness as manifested in the joint ownership of property and fulfillment of mutual obligations among relatives irrespective of the residential pattern. In this classification, joint-ness could be established even in the case of families with the nuclear household composition. In terms of the degree of fulfillment of mutual obligations among the kin who are related even beyond the nuclear composition, families are arranged in five gradations forming a continuum from a zero degree of joint-ness at the one extreme, to the highest degree at the other. In this gradation, the percentage of families in the first grade with zero degree of joint-ness is only five, and in the highest grade, 21, the rest falling in the intermediate grades.

Analyses of families by various other criteria also showed that the normative pattern of joint-ness was the rule in Mahua at the time, rather than the exception. IP also adduces evidence to show that even though the percentage of households with nuclear kinship pattern may increase because of urbanization and migration, the nuclear households invariably display the tendency toward development into the joint forms.

IP was foremost among the sociologists and anthropologists in India, who have maintained that the kinship structure of the family is influenced by its normative pattern, and that, accordingly, the Indian family is oriented toward the joint family norm, whether it is nuclear or joint in its household-composition. Several scholars who have studied the Indian family following IP's lead have corroborated his conclusion that there has not been much qualitative change in the Indian family. By reviewing a number of such studies, T K Oommen takes exception to such a line of inquiry itself. He avers that social obligations beyond the nuclear family can be noticed, to a larger or smaller degree, in most societies, and is not a novel feature of India alone. Therefore, in his opinion, most investigators of the Indian family are unnecessarily bogged down by questions such as whether the joint family is breaking down into the nuclear type under urbanization, and whether even with its nuclear household structure, it still embraces the joint-family ethic of kin-orientation. Such a line of inquiry, according to him, tends to blind scholars to other kinds of significant differences, say, between rural and

urban families and among families in different classes of society, which he has identified (Oommen 1982: 51-93).

The usefulness of studying differences in the different categories of families, which are taking place as a result of the changes in various factors as described by Oommen, is well taken. But the results of such studies acquire added meaning if they were seen in a theoretical frame. That is what IP's approach is all about. Therefore, if we are to advance our theoretical understanding of the Indian family, we have to deal with such existing approaches either by rejecting them with suitable evidence and reasoning, or build on them with further reasoning and taking advantage of the growth of knowledge. In the present lecture, I am making an attempt to build on IP's approach of viewing the family from its normative or moral perspective.

IP, it must be pointed out, has not employed the term 'moral order' to denote the normative pattern of the family. Yet all the terms and phrases that he has used for describing the normative pattern - for example, social obligations, role relations, family sentiment, and so on - are akin to those generally used in describing the features of the moral order of an institution or society. What is termed family bond or sentiment is the same thing as the moral commitment, which is the core element of the moral order. IP has emphasized that "what distinguishes a joint family from a nuclear group would be the difference in the role relations and the normative pattern of behaviour among different relatives". Therefore, according to him "the appropriate points of a fruitful line of attack on the problem of determining the nature of the family group will be the role, the relational norms governing them and the values and beliefs governing them." The peculiar configuration of such features is linked with the family sentiment or the moral commitment, which is different in nature in the joint and the nuclear types of families. Therefore if we substitute the term 'normative pattern' with the term 'moral order', then change in the Indian family would imply a change in the moral order of the joint family to that of the nuclear family. For purposes of my analysis I would be using the term moral order for its greater currency and analytical advantages.

Ever since IP wrote, both the tempo of socio-economic change in India and our knowledge about the analytical kit for a sociological study of the moral order have markedly increased. Therefore, from our present

vantage point, I believe, it is possible for us to design a suitable theoretical format for detecting radical changes, if any, in the moral order of the Indian family.

The importance of the moral order for the stability of the society has been recognized by sociologists, notably by Emile Durkheim, from the beginning of their discipline. It is also well known that the moral order embraces all the three major sociological domains of society, culture and personality. It is, in fact, the moral order that maintains the intricate balance between society, culture and personality. But what exactly is the mechanism by which the moral order accomplishes such a task was not understood until relatively recent times. Thanks to the contributions of scholars such as Robert Wuthnow, now we have some clue as to how the moral order accomplishes its delicate function. Therefore, I should like to make use of Wuthnow's analytical model of the moral order for shedding light on the changing moral order of the Indian family.

First, a brief summary of the analytical model of Wuthnow, which has been elaborated in his important work Meaning and Moral Order: Explorations in Cultural Analysis (Wuthnow 1987: 66-120), is in order. Wuthnow has analyzed the moral order in terms of its three interrelated processes: 1. Construction of a structure of moral codes, 2. Emission of rituals, and 3. Appropriate ideology.

The structure of moral codes, has been defined as "a set of cultural elements that define the nature of commitment to a particular course of behaviour". Six cultural elements have been chosen as being uniquely significant for characterizing the nature of commitment and so they are regarded as the core elements of the structure of moral codes. Further, these elements are arranged in three pairs in such a way that the elements of a pair are closely related yet separable. Also each element has been chosen for its symbolic meaning and hence the six elements can be regarded as symbols. Thus the three pairs of cultural symbols are
- moral objects vs. real programmes
- core self vs. enacted social roles, and
- inevitable constraints vs. intentional options

The six symbols relate to areas in which problems of moral obligations may arise. In this connection it is important to note that that the boundaries of any two pairs of cultural elements are not rigidly fixed since they are based on their meanings which are capable of being changed. Therefore, the proper functioning of the moral code would depend upon a precise cultural definition of such a system of moral codes. If the boundaries between the related cultural elements become opaque, due to a change in their meaning content, as it usually happens in case of fundamental changes in society or culture, the moral order would be in jeopardy until an appropriate meaning is acquired by the cultural symbols.

The six key symbols forming the structure of the moral codes are linked to the three main domains of society, culture and personality, and hence the moral order becomes an important factor in the integration of the three major systems. That being the case, radical changes in any one of the domains are likely to affect the moral order; also a change in the moral order has consequences for the other systems it tends to integrate.

The second process in the moral order namely, ritual is defined as "a symbolic expressive aspect of behaviour that communicates something about social relations, often in a relatively dramatic and formal manner." Ritual is thus a symbolic way of communication that can at once combine cognitive, emotional and volitional elements. As symbolic way of communication, it is not so much the external form of the ritual as the meaning it embodies, that is significant. A moral ritual dramatizes collective values and demonstrates individuals' responsibility for such values. In this manner rituals contribute to the maintenance of the moral order according to its structural pattern with its three pairs of cultural elements referred to above.

Rituals can be embedded in the normal course of everyday activities and interaction as well as in more elaborate collective ceremonies; and they can be privately or publicly performed. Religious rituals have a sacred dimension because of which they are particularly effective in the evocation of meanings charged with emotion and commitment. Even the secular ritual has an aura of solemnity about it.

It has to be emphasized that the main function of ritual is to support the structure of moral codes especially in areas where uncertainty and ambiguity always exist, as in the case of the boundaries between the

cultural elements of the related pairs in the structure of moral codes. In normal circumstances, uncertainties exist in situations of transition in personal and collective lives, which are therefore, usually sanctified by rites of passage.

The third process in the moral order namely ideology, is similar to ritual in as much as the both consist of symbols that express or dramatize something about the moral order. But they dramatize different things: whereas a moral ritual dramatizes collective values and demonstrates individual's moral responsibility for such values, ideology dramatizes certain disturbing conditions about the social environment, thereby motivating individuals to act in order to cope with them. Ideology presents knowledge about the environment in such a way as to impel the individual to commit oneself to a particular course of action.

Keeping in view the broad contours of the moral order as summarized above and the fact of the intricate interrelationship of the moral order with society, culture and personality, it becomes obvious that the perspective of the moral order is of strategic importance for understanding the dynamics of social change. Now, therefore, we can better appreciate IP's emphasis on the moral order of the family as a critical variable for studying change in the Indian family. IP has also indicated that the joint family is collectivity oriented whereas the nuclear family is individual oriented, and significantly, collectivity and individuality also happen to be the markers of the different types of moral orders.

We may recall that in his study of families in Mahua, IP did not find any appreciable degree of change in the joint-ness of the family in terms of its moral order. And by implication, he presumed that similar was also the case with the Indian family at large, even though, at that time too, the country had been undergoing fundamentally different kinds of economic and political changes. IP may well be right in reaching such a conclusion, for, in the earlier phases of changes in society and culture, a strongly entrenched moral order with centuries of history behind it, would be able to channel changes in its own image. The persistence of the joint family ethos despite its growing tendency to split up into nuclear households may be due to the tenacity of the traditional moral order. Or it could also be due to the possibility that analytical model used by IP could not detect the fundamental changes taking place in the family even at that time.

But a given moral order cannot last for too long if factors inimical to it keep on piling up. I venture to say that in any case, ever since IP wrote such has been the case, especially among the families of the burgeoning urban middle classes, in which the joint-ness is coming under severe strain. Facts thrown up in recent times, points to such a situation. I am not able to cite evidence of the dimensions of such growing trend in the compass of this lecture. For the present, I should like to make some observations about the analytical model that could be used with advantage in making such studies. It is in that light that I should like to show how and why joint family is changing in a fundamental way.

For present purposes first, I should like to describe the moral order of the joint family on the pattern of Wuthnow's analytical frame, showing how such type of moral order was brought about. Then I should like to throw light upon some of the changes that are taking place in recent times that tend to dismantle the foundations of the joint family and favour the moral order of the nuclear family. The usefulness of such a presentation would lie in its capacity to generate suitable hypotheses useful for making systematic studies of change in the Indian family.

In terms of the structure of the moral codes suggested by Wuthnow, I would be using the three pairs of the six symbols referred to above, as applied to the moral order of the family. The six symbols stem from the moral commitment within the family. The members of the family to whom the rights and obligations are applicable constitute the "moral objects" and the type of actions flowing from their rights and obligations are the "real programmes". Each individual in society or the family performs several social roles that influence one's self image, yet one normally is able to distinguish between one's "core self" and the "enacted roles". In a family, as in a society, it is obvious that in the performance of a role much of one's behaviour is subjected to "inevitable constraints", though one also has some "intentional options". We may now see how the moral order of the joint family differs from that of the nuclear family in terms of the relationships between the symbols or cultural elements in each of the three related pairs.

With regard to the symbolic pair of moral objects and real programmes, the moral objects or members in the ideal-typical joint family have a much

wider spread beyond the nuclear unit, whereas in the nuclear family, they are confined mainly to the nuclear unit. Also, in the joint family the rights and obligations of each member or moral object are precisely spelled out as compared with the nuclear family, in which they are often negotiable. As regards the second pair of closely associated symbols, core self and the enacted roles, in the joint family, the roles of the various members are assigned to them, and they come in a package right from their birth. Therefore, a member is hardly able to distinguish between one's core or real self and the roles one has to perform. On the other hand, in the nuclear family, the roles are not assigned at birth, and the individual members have much freedom in achieving roles according to their abilities and aspirations. Here members are able to make clear distinctions between core self and enacted roles, and are, in fact, even able to improve their self image by trying to achieve roles of better status.

Finally as to the third pair of linked symbols, inevitable constraints and intentional options, in the joint family the inevitable constraints are severe and options are very limited, whereas in the nuclear family, the constraints are limited and options are liberal. Thus we can see that the patterns of the structure of moral codes in the joint and the nuclear families are radically different from each other. A moral order, however, cannot operate only on the basis of the structure of the moral codes but it has to be buttressed and sustained by appropriate rituals and ideology. For the efficient functioning of the moral orders of the two types of families, the rituals and ideologies of the two types have to be different.

In order to comprehend changes in the moral order of the joint family in India, we should be able to fathom the nature of the forces and factors that fashioned such a moral order in the first instance, and what are the present circumstances that militate against those factors. I shall therefore give a brief description of the ideal-typical joint family in India in terms of its salient features and the bases of their origin and functioning. The joint family is typically a corporate unit of economic, commensal and religious activities. For greater part of India, its core members consist of males belonging to the male lineage and spread over three or more generations. The daughters of the family are all married outside the locality, and the wives of the males are all outsiders. The family property is inherited only by the males on a coparcenary basis devoid of the individual right of separation. Therefore the family residence is of the patrilocal or patrilateral pattern. The most senior male member is the head of the household and family.

There is well-articulated authority structure in the family, which is basically derived from the rights of inheritance and management of property, that flow from positions in the lineage hierarchy. The women derive their standing according to the positions of men they are linked with either as wives or mothers. Thus a widow without a son is rendered the most abject person in the family. Hence the great anxiety among Indian women about bearing a male child. Women in general are considered inferior to men and more so the wife in relation to the husband. The superior authority of the males is further buttressed by the division of roles in the family according to the gender difference. The major economic roles are the preserve of the men, the women being relegated to childcare and miscellaneous household chores. Men are more mobile whereas the women are mostly confined within the homestead. Thus the inequality of women is writ large on the structure of the joint family. At this moment I would not like to stray into the discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the inequality of women, but would content myself with bringing out its significance for the joint family.

From the several important characteristics of the family described above, I should like to suggest that two basic factors contribute to the structure and survival of the joint family. First, the nature of the economy such as agricultural farming that combines the place of residence and place of work, enabling relatives in large families to live and work together. Second, the unilineal kinship system that forges closer ties with one of the genders of the lineage, in this case, the male, ignoring the other gender, the female.

At the time of marriage the woman is uprooted from her natal family and planted in the husband's family and lineage, where she undergoes a thorough process of re-socialization as a subordinate of her husband. The conjugal function of marriage is underplayed and sexual adjustment is treated as a byproduct of the reproductive activities. Whereas the husband's sexual escapades may be winked at, the wife is expected to be eternally faithful to her husband even after his death. In order to render the woman pliable to be molded in such a fashion, the couple was married early and care is taken to see that the husband is older and

better qualified. Already there is a sharp distinction between the roles of men and women and that goes between the roles of husband and wife as well. Thus the quality of marriage of members is hardly a concern for the stability of the joint family and this result is achieved at the expense of the equality of women.

Within the collective identity of the family, the specific roles of the members are thrust on them by predetermined social-cultural criteria, leaving little freedom for individuals to differ from them. Such a stifling situation is, no doubt, fraught with constant revulsion. It is to overcome such a problem a wide variety of religious ceremonies and rituals are designed; and the family rituals form the greater part of the religious practices of the Indian people who are specially noted for their elaborate ritual and ceremonial observances. Such religious practices dramatize and render sacred the meaning and importance of the various roles in ways that impel the individuals to regard them as natural and divinely ordained. The ceremonies and ritual are further backed up with ideologies of the religious scriptures and mythologies of the epics. Indra Deva and Srirama (1986) in their volume, Traditional Values and Institutions in Indian Society, have provided relevant historical glimpses into some of the important ideological concepts supporting the ethics of the traditional social structure and family.

It was through such a complex and meticulous process such as the above, the core self of the individual in the joint family, was fused with his or her role in a manner which was meaningful to the individual as well as conducive to the collective identity of the family. The type of personality that is developed by the socializing process of the joint family is what is termed the authoritarian personality. An authoritarian person is one who is overbearing toward one's inferiors but subservient to one's superiors - just the type of behaviour needed for successful adjustment in the joint family. In such a social atmosphere, self-actualization and self-fulfillment only meant the fulfillment of the obligations of one's ascribed roles. There was hardly any room for striking out on one's own. There is no such a thing as individual freedom than what is permitted by the authorities in the family. An individual's moral commitment extends to all the members of the family, but in different measures as prescribed by the family ethic. In this case too individuals' conduct is much restricted, leaving them very few options.

The foregoing description of the ideal-typical joint family would show that the traditional Indian family had a consistent moral order with a structure of moral codes in which the moral objects included relatives beyond the nuclear household and the moral obligations and privileges of one another were rigidly prescribed. A member's core self was hardly distinguishable from his or her roles, and in carrying out one's moral obligations, one had very few intentional options. The peculiar structure of the moral codes is suitably supported by appropriate ritual and ideology, which impregnated the symbols of the moral codes with the cognitive, emotive and volitional impulses necessary for their being internalized by the members. All the same, this moral order is constructed on the basis of a number of social, economic, political and cultural factors, all of which have begun to change.

It is neither possible nor necessary here to dwell on all the changes that are taking place, which have a bearing on the joint family. I shall only focus on the forces that have impacted the main foundations on which the moral order rests. I have already identified two major pillars of the joint family, (1) the pre-industrial agricultural economy that rendered the family a unit of production which facilitated the living and working together, of a relatively large number of members in one family, and (2) the patrilineal kinship system that disinherited women who were, therefore, obliged to live with their husbands in a subordinate relationship. I shall therefore indicate how these two props of the joint family are being dismantled.

The changes in the economy from the pre-modern to the modern pattern is distancing the place of residence from the place of work as well as depriving the family of its production function. Such a process has rendered the joint family living pattern nonviable. The spatial mobility generated by such a process is bringing about a dispersal of the members of the joint family in nuclear household units. However, as rightly observed by IP, nuclear household units by themselves do not give rise to the moral order of the nuclear family, because the structure of the moral codes does not automatically get altered. In the initial phases, male authority and dominance continues, and the gender role difference between the husband and wife becomes even more sharply defined, the former as the breadwinner and the latter as the homemaker. The

authority of the husband results in a virilocal residential pattern in which the location of the household is determined by the needs of the working husband.

The male-dominated authority also facilitates the fulfillment of the moral commitment one owes to one's joint family, especially that relates to the participation in the religious ritual and ceremonies that are usually held in the patrilineal ancestral home of the husband. And in such circumstances, the nuclear household retains the potentiality of developing into a full-blown joint family in due course of time. The virilocal pattern of the nuclear household continues so long as the gender division in the nuclear unit lasts. Such a situation was brought about mainly because of the wide disparity in the educational qualifications and occupational skills of husband and wife. At an earlier point of time, the disparity always tilted in favour of the husband, and as a consequence the wife could not secure a job consistent with the occupational prestige of the husband (D'Souza, 1975: 129-141).

The basic characteristic which induces the nuclear household to take on the moral ethos of the nuclear family is the growing individuation among the members; and economic independence within the family unit is the root cause of increasing empowerment and autonomy, which in its turn nourishes self identity and individuality. First, the husband as the sole breadwinner of the family gets the chance to build up his individuality. In contrast to his occupation in the joint family, which was thrust on him according to the family tradition, he would have achieved his occupation outside the family by acquiring new skills according to his aspirations. The newly acquired role makes him conscious about the difference between his core self and role, and now he even aspires for a better job which is suited to his ability and would enhance his self-fulfillment. On the other hand the wife has to be satisfied with her role as wife which may become even more attractive now that she has a home of her own away from the joint family residence. She would be more than willing to help the husband in his ambitions since as a homemaker she is prone to enjoy the vicarious satisfaction derived from the self-actualization and self-fulfillment of her husband.

However, in the subsequent generations, in the new location, the children, both boys and girls, who have no chores to perform in the home,

get opportunities of education and skill-formation in their urban locations, and eventually both men and women find avenues of employment. It is then that women begin to secure relative autonomy in their homes. In the beginning, in the male-dominated employment, they get secondary positions. Years ago when such a wave surfaced in England, the famous British writer, G.K.Chesterton quipped: "Thousands of women rose up and said that they would not be dictated to in their homes, and went to offices and became stenographers". So in the beginning women's earnings are regarded as supplementary to the income of their husbands who are still considered to be the main breadwinners in the family, and the wife gets saddled with two jobs, the homemaker and breadwinner. All the same, she now finds opportunities of interacting with the outside world and enjoys relative autonomy in her home. Nowadays more and more women are able to have equal opportunities of education and employment, and there are increasing instances in which both husband and wife are equally matched in education and occupation. The gender role division within such couples begins to melt down.

More and more educated women are now taking to employment outside the home as career options, de-linked from marriage prospects, and they relish their freedom for self-actualization and self fulfillment and emerge with fully developed self identity and individuality. More than ever before women are able to make a clear distinction between their individual self and their role as wife. These women while entering marriage are able to weigh the sacrifices they would be willing to make for their career and marriage. Here we are talking about two equally accomplished and economically independent man and woman freely choosing each other - may be with some indirect help from friends - getting married. We can imagine how the family commitment changes. Such a couple does not relish starting their married life in the home of the husband's parents. Even if the husband has a house, the wife would not be willing to move with him in a virilocal arrangement, unless the location were convenient for her also to pursue her career. The home set up by both husband and wife for their mutual convenience is termed neolocal residence.

In a virilocal residential arrangement, even if the wife were working, she would be expected to adjust her career according to the needs of the residential mobility demanded by the husband's career prospects. Whereas in the case of neolocal residence, any residential move

demanded by the career prospects of one of the partners has to be adjusted to the residential needs of the other partner. In either case one of the partners is required to make a sacrifice by way of some adjustment; but in the virilocal arrangement, it is always the wife who is expected to make the sacrifice, whereas in neolocal arrangement, it could be either wife or the husband. Equality between husband and wife is a high watermark of the ideal-typical nuclear family.

Thus, the nuclear family comes into its own when the woman is able to overcome the handicap imposed on her by the kinship system. The changes brought about through our republican polity have removed the legal supports of the kinship system. But changing the existing reality would take a long struggle. In the meantime let us see what is the rising nuclear family trend is doing to the kinship system. In the nuclear family, the moral commitments of husband and wife are focussed on each other and upon their children. The traditional commitment to the wider circle of relatives goes out of practice. There are even chances of interacting with relatives either on the husband's or the wife's side or both sides. The emphasis on the patrilineal lineage of the husband declines. The close kinship ties will always be remembered, but the salience of those ties would depend upon circumstantial factors and on reciprocal basis, and not on the positions on the kinship structure or lineage connection.

The conjugal tie and sexual adjustment, which are sidelined in the joint family, come to the central position in the nuclear family. The marital tie in the nuclear family rests on equality and mutual compatibility between husband and wife in all respects. Gone are the days of double standards of marital fidelity tolerated in the joint family, along with the dualism of the husband's dominion over the wife. The maintenance of the stability of marriage in the nuclear family, therefore, becomes a skillfully balancing act. This is in contrast to the marital stability in the joint family, in which marriages rarely failed, if not for any other reason, because the wife had nowhere to go in case of divorce. Therefore even unsuccessful marriages lasted for the lifetime of the woman. It is like the medical case in which the operation is successful but the patient is dead. What I should like to emphasize is that in case of the nuclear family, the very stability of the family revolves round the stability of marriage. This I think is the most crucial difference between the joint and the nuclear family types. Why it is so will be made clear presently.

With the changing economy and the increasing degree of empowerment of women, the structure of the moral codes of the joint family begins to yield to that of the nuclear family. We have seen that the family commitment, which, earlier included a wider circle of relatives, is now being limited to the relatives within the nuclear unit, and that within the nuclear families the ways of fulfilling those commitments have also undergone a change. The members of the nuclear family are undergoing a greater degree of individuation and are attempting to achieve roles they desire in order to improve their self-image. The traditional constraints of the joint family have been loosened in the nuclear unit giving the individual greater freedom and more options.

But these changes, however, do not mean that the moral order of the nuclear family is fully established. As we have already noted, the structure of the moral codes needs to be supported by its other complements, ideology and ritual, to highlight and dramatize the meaning and importance of the emerging structure of the moral codes, in order for the moral order to function smoothly. On the other hand, the functioning of the moral codes of the emerging nuclear family has to contend with the ideology and ritual of the traditional family. If the traditional moral order were too rigid, the strongly individualized persons may leave the community with disastrous consequences for the survival of the community. A case in point is that of the Parsi community of Mumbai, which has been experiencing a steep decline in its population, which is not mainly because of migration.

In a recent study, quoted in India Today, of December 4, 2000 (Mahurkar and Baria, 2000: 87-89), Dr. D P Singh of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, has come up with an odd pattern of demographic parameters of the Parsi community, which presages a further steep decline in its already tiny population. As compared with the India's population which has 35 percent under 15 years and 5 percent above 65, in the Parsi population, only 10 percent of persons is below 15 years and a whopping 28 percent above 65. These parameters agree with the facts that there are 36 percent of Parsi adults who are never married and out of whom 70 percent males and 40 percent females are in the 'reproductive group', aged 25-29. Significantly, Singh attributes such pattern of demographic variables among the Parsis, which is unusual for an Indian community, to

a greater degree of modernization and gender equality in the community. He has emphasized that the average Parsi woman is highly career oriented, marries at an average age of 25 and gives birth to only 1.54 children. This explanation agrees with the process of transformation of the Parsi family into the nuclear type. .

Reduction in the size of family because of the individuation of women, by itself may not pose a danger for the survival of the community. But such a danger is imminent because of another important piece of evidence in the study, which states that 25 percent of the Parsi women marry outside the community. These women and their progeny are excluded from the community because of its primordial value of the purity and precedence of the male lineage. Apparently the individuated Parsi women who marry outside the community care a twopence for the male pride, but unfortunately for the community, a relatively larger proportion of men remain unmarried as a result of it. This predicament of the Parsis is clearly due to their inability to correct their male bias that is inconsistent with the moral order of the nuclear family. Since the community has resisted any compromise in its traditional family values, despite its wholehearted acceptance of the modern way of life, it is faced with the dilemma of the threat to its very survival.

The example of the Parsis illustrates my earlier statement that in order for the newly established moral codes to become fully functional they would have to be buttressed with the appropriate ideology and ritual. Further, because of the inconsistency between the moral orders of the joint and the nuclear families, the transition from one pattern to the other is apt to cause various other kinds of problems also. At the transitional phase, since both the joint and the nuclear families would exist side by side, relatives of the nuclear families, who live in joint families might not give up their expectations from the separated members, resulting in unwanted interference. So also within the nuclear family itself the husband and the wife may entertain different conceptions about their roles, one leaning toward the joint family and the other toward the nuclear family. All such situations resulting from the lack of a clear definition and hence the lack of common understanding of the unfolding family system, give rise to a wide variety of problems involving role conflict. Professional family counselors come across hosts of such problems. Professor Ranbir S Bhatti, of the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurological

Sciences, Bangalore, has drawn our attention to it with his authoritative insights. By reviewing some of the studies done on this subject by him and by others, he has given an insightful and systematic overview of the peculiar nature of the family problems which result from the changes in the traditional Indian family (Bhatti, 1998).

I should also like to indicate some of the problems in the generation of the moral order of the nuclear family, especially as regards forging the family bond. The joint family has its own mechanism of holding the members together. One can see two important types of ties binding the members together. One is the filial tie that may be termed affiliation, which unites the males of the family, and the other is the tie of power that unites women members who are outsiders. But what are really integrated in the family are the roles since the members do not have well developed self-identities which are fused with their roles, and hence the family has a collective identity. The stability in traditional societies is based on the institutionalization of such primordial ties of affiliation and power, be it in the family, the caste system or the local communities.

In the nuclear families on the other hand members would have well formed self-identities and in their case the traditional roles play a secondary part. In fact, the gender role division loses its significance. Therefore they need a different kind of glue to bind them together. Such a tie is generally called the bond of love, which is a grossly misunderstood term. Usually, in the context of marriage and sex, love is used to refer to the sensual attraction between two persons. That meaning is literally, only skin deep. In the context of the nuclear family, love may be regarded as the selfless concern and respect for others as persons. It is such a sacrificial love that establishes complete trust among the members of the family. In the absence of the authoritarian ethos, voluntary trust becomes the crucial bond in the nuclear family. Trust is also present in the joint family. But it is of a different kind, like the loyalty of a slave for the master, which is determined by the situation and role.

Development of one's self-identity or individuality is a necessary condition if one were to experience love as defined above. However, individuation by itself does not imply such a capacity. It needs to be cultivated through imbibing appropriate ideology supported by ritual. Therefore if the husband and wife in the nuclear family, who have strong individualities,

fail to cultivate trust for each other, their marriage, devoid of the support system of the joint-family, may be in jeopardy. In the absence of the sentiment of love, persons with strong individualities are prone to be self centred, preoccupied with their own self-actualization and self-fulfillment without much regard for mutual concerns. Such a situation detracts from family adjustment and is the cause of bickering and conflict between husband and wife, and their failure to reconcile, may finally lead to the termination of marriage. And what is left of the semblance of the nuclear family if its core is dissolved?

It is my surmise that the moral order of the emerging nuclear family in India has not yet been securely institutionalized with the appropriate ideology and ritual capable of shaping personalities of members in the democratic mould that inculcates respect for one another. It seems to me that in the absence of the suitable moral order, nuclear families are already in trouble. It is generally believed that the harassment faced by women in the Indian family would be mitigated by the nuclear family. Dismissing such beliefs, Lalita Panicker, a Senior Assistant Editor with The Times of India, Delhi, writes: "In Kerala, for example, where the joint family is a rare phenomenon and social development equals that of Norway, cases of wife battering are among the highest in the country" (The Sunday Times of India, May 28, 2000). Kerala is also noted for its universal literacy and a relatively high proportion of women in the better paid employment sector, and hence it may be presumed that both men and women of the state are relatively more individuated compared to the rest of the country. Yet during the last decade according to crime statistics, the cases of crime against women in Kerala increased threefold! We may therefore draw our own conclusion.

There are other straws in the wind which also point to the fragility of the fledgling nuclear family. For example, divorce rates among the urban middle class families, which were hardly visible a few decades ago, are now escalating every year; and it is among the middle classes that the proportion of nuclear families is growing at a faster rate. The signs of the time such as these go to show that the Indian family is in greater trouble of breaking up now than it was when the joint family ethos was stronger.

I am, however, not making a case for the strengthening of the joint family, which, from our present valuation, is outmoded. What I am suggesting would be that we should now focus attention upon the shaky moral foundations of the emerging nuclear family, especially its ideology and ritual to suit Indian conditions. One issue is clear enough: we cannot build the moral order of the nuclear family on the ruins of the moral order of the joint family because the two are fundamentally different. The dilemma of the Parsis referred to above boldly asserts this. The debris of the traditional moral order would have to be cleared. How the moral order of the nuclear family can be vitalized is a complex issue that cannot be dealt within the compass of this lecture. I believe, I have said enough to indicate that the Indian family is at the crossroads.

In conclusion, I should like to reiterate that befitting this occasion which is held to honour the memory of a great scholar such as IP Desai, I have tried to highlight the significance of one of his approaches for studying change in the Indian family. As against the prevailing trend of studying change in the structure of the family, IP had emphasized the importance of viewing change from the perspective of the moral order of the family. As it is evidenced by subsequent advances in structural-cultural analysis, the moral order happens to be the hub which integrates the social domains of society, culture and personality, and the family is intimately linked to all these domains. Using some of the recently developed analytical tools I have demonstrated the fruitfulness of studying social change, in this case family change, from the perspective of the moral order. Thus IP's approach, when combined with appropriate methodology, yields important insights into the fundamental changes in the basic features of the family as well as significant hypotheses for further testing. I hope and wish that IP's ideas and ideals would inspire generations of scholars to move ahead in their research pursuits.

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