Indian Family System - A School of Girls' Education, Values and Sanatana Culture

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Abstract

Family is one of the main socialising institutions of the society. Since ancient times, the family has been the most important child care institute in India as children are expected to grow under the glory of family where a satisfactory rearing of the child is ensured.

According to the Pope – "the family is more sacred than the State." It was pointed out by Will and Ariel Durant that the family is the nucleus of civilization. The universal declaration of human rights prescribes the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society. Family is virtually a social organisation or a unit of men and women out of a relationship. The importance of family lies in bringing up the child to a full man in the family atmosphere. It has been a time honoured belief in our culture that the child is a gift of God that must be nurtured with care and affection within the family and society as a future dawn. As per Confucius-the strength of a Nation is derived from the integrity of its homes. It is the famous saying that a comfortable home is a great source of happiness.

Keywords - Culture, Values, Social Structure, Girls Education

Introduction

Family, a basic unit of social structure, the exact definition of which can vary greatly from time to time and from culture to culture. How a society defines family as a primary

group, and the functions it asks families to perform, are by no means constant. There has been much recent discussion of the nuclear family, which consists only of parents and children, but the nuclear family is by no means universal. In the United States, the percentage of households consisting of a nuclear family declined from 45% in 1960 to 23.5% in 2000. In preindustrial societies, the ties of kinship bind the individual both to the family of orientation, into which one is born, and to the family of procreation, which one finds at marriage and which often includes one's spouse's relatives. The nuclear family also may be extended through the acquisition of more than one spouse, or through the common residence of two or more married couples and their children or of several generations connected in the male or female line. This is called the extended family; it is widespread in many parts of the world, by no means exclusively in pastoral and agricultural economies. The primary functions of the family are reproductive, economic, social, and educational; it is through kin itself variously defined that the child first absorbs the culture of his group.It ranks immediately after health and good conscience as aptly said by Byron. Without a loving heart there is no meaning for home. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the theoretical framework of this research by defining family and giving insight into the Indian family system.

Indian Family System

In India the family is the most important institution that has survived through the ages. India, like most other less industrialised, traditional, eastern societies is a collectivist society that emphasises family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity. A major factor that keeps all members, big and small, united in love and peace in a joint family system in India is the importance attached to protocol. This feature is very unique to Indian families and very special. Manners like respecting elders, touching their feet as a sign of respect, speaking in a dignified manner, taking elders' advice prior to taking important decisions, etc. is something that Indian parents take care to inculcate in their kids from very beginning. The head of the family responds by caring and treating each member of the family the same.

C. Hui and H. Triandis defined collectivism, which is the opposite of individualism as, "a sense of harmony, interdependence and concern for others". More specifically, collectivism is reflected in greater readiness to cooperate with family members and extended kin on decisions affecting most aspects of life, including career choice, mate selection, marriage and its continuity. The beauty about Indian culture lies in its age-long prevailing tradition of the joint family system. It's a system under which even extended members of a family like one's parents, children, the children's spouses and their offspring, etc. live together. The elder-most, usually the male member, is the head in the joint Indian family system who makes all important decisions and rules, whereas other family members abide by it dutifully with full respect.

Role of culture and Values in shaping the family

Culture, however, is not an external passive influence on the families but families themselves serve as the primary agent for transferring these cultural values to their members. Parents help children to learn, internalise, and develop understanding of culture through both covert and overt means. Family members modify behaviours in themselves and others by principles of social learning. In this process, the general norms and beliefs may be modified to suit the needs of the family creating a set of "family values" – A subset of societal norms unique to the family. Such cultural differences mean that people in different cultures have fundamentally different constructs of the self and others. For more collectivistic societies like ours, the self is defined relative to others, is concerned with belongingness, dependency, empathy, and reciprocity, and is focused on small, selective in-groups at the expense of out-groups. Relationships with others are emphasised, while personal autonomy, space and privacy are considered secondary. Application of western psychotherapy, primarily focused on dynamic models, ego structure and individuals, therefore, becomes difficult in the Indian collectivistic context. The point has been well discussed by Indian psychiatrists in the past.

The traditional Indian family

Such traditional families form the oldest social institution that has survived through ages and functions as a dominant influence in the life of its individual members. Indian joint families are considered to be strong, stable, close, resilient and enduring with focus on family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity at expense of individuality, freedom of choice, privacy and personal space. Structurally, the Indian joint family includes three to four living generations, including grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews, all living together in the same household, utilising a common kitchen and often spending from a common purse, contributed by all. Change in such family structure is slow, and loss of family units after the demise of elderly parents is counterbalanced by new members entering the family as children, and new members (wives) entering by matrimonial alliances, and their offsprings. The daughters of the family would leave following marriage. Functionally, the majority of joint families adhere to a patriarchal ideology, follow the patrilineal rule of descent, and are patrilocal; although matrilocal and matriarchal families are quite prevalent in some southern parts of the country. The lines of hierarchy and authority are clearly drawn, with each hierarchical strata functioning within the principle of "collective responsibility". Rules of conduct are aimed at creating and maintaining family harmony and for greater readiness to cooperate with family members on decisions affecting almost all aspects of life, including career choice, mate selection, and marriage.

The changing Indian family

The socio-cultural milieu of India is undergoing change at a tremendous pace, leaving fundamental alterations in family structure in its wake. The last decade has not only witnessed rapid and chaotic changes in social, economic, political, religious and occupational spheres; but also saw familial changes in power distribution, marital norms and role of women. A review of the national census data and the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) data suggests that, gradually, nuclear families are becoming the predominant form of Indian family institution, at least in urban areas. The 1991 census,

for the first time reported household growth to be higher than the population growth, suggesting household fragmentation; a trend that gathered further momentum in the 2001 and the 2010 census. A comparison of the three NFHS data also shows that over the years there has been a progressive increase in nuclear families, more in urban areas, with an associated progressive decrease in the number of household members. Other important trends include a decrease in age of the house-head, reflecting change in power structure and an increase in households headed by females, suggesting a change in traditional gender roles.

Importance of values in India

India, a country renowned for its diverse cultures and traditions, has family values deeply ingrained in its societal fabric. These values, passed down from generation to generation, shape the behaviour, attitudes, and decisions of individuals within the family unit. The core of Indian family values lies in the principles of love, respect, and mutual support.

The Essence of Indian Family Values

At the heart of Indian family values is the concept of 'Dharma', or duty. This principle guides individuals to act responsibly towards their family members, fulfilling their roles and responsibilities with utmost dedication. The family is viewed as a cohesive unit, where each member's actions are not just for individual gain but for the collective good of the family.

Respect and Reverence

Respect for elders is a cornerstone of Indian family values. Younger members are taught to show deference to their elders, considering their wisdom and experience as guiding lights. This respect extends beyond the immediate family to include relatives and the larger community.

Collectivism and Interdependence

Indian family values emphasise collectivism over individualism. The family is seen as a collective entity with shared goals and aspirations. This interconnectedness fosters a sense of belonging and promotes interdependence, where each member contributes to and benefits from the family's resources and achievements.

Endurance and Sacrifice

Endurance and sacrifice are other significant aspects of Indian family values. Family members are expected to endure hardships and make sacrifices for the betterment of the family. This mindset encourages resilience and fosters a strong bond among family members. With globalisation and the influence of Western cultures, Indian family values have seen a gradual transformation. The traditional joint family system is giving way to nuclear families, and individualistic values are gaining prominence. However, the core values of love, respect, and mutual support continue to hold strong and guide the dynamics within Indian families.

The Values and Cultural Context of Girls Education in India

If a broad profile were to be drawn of the common experience of growing up female in Indian society, it would highlight physical restrictions as well as mental or psychological negativity communicated to little girls from birth onwards. A son's birth is greeted with celebration while a daughter's birth is, at best, endured. The unwantedness of daughters gets conveyed in ways which are hardly subtle. The idea of life-long dependence and insecurity get communicated in terms of marriage and motherhood being the sole objectives of a woman's life. The temporary nature of one's natal home and the anxiety of adjustment in an unknown family form part of the *learning* that a girl cannot escape during childhood. Communication of deep-rooted beliefs, such as the "impurity" of menstruation, enables girls to internalise their lower ritual status under patriarchy. Transmission of culturally sanctioned attitudes constitutes the gendering process which guides girls into becoming socially acceptable women. Socialisation in the family setting receives powerful reinforcement from the modern

media, including both television and cinema, which use these basic elements of culture to weave commercially successful products which perpetuate tradition both in terms of its material practices and attitudes.

Little attention has been paid in educational research and teacher training to the implications of such negative aspects of girls' upbringing on their psychological development. Educational policy endorses child-centred pedagogic practices which essentially respond to the child's own search for opportunities to express agency. Nurturing self-esteem is another major value in the child-centred philosophy of education, as it enhances the motivation and confidence to learn. In the case of girls, both agency and self-esteem come under stress and, in many cases, get damaged at an early age by behavioural practices and beliefs entrenched in the culture of child-rearing. Some of these practices have an explicitly discriminatory character, involving positive parental behaviour towards the male siblings which heightens the negative treatment meted out to girls. But even outside the frame of discriminatory behaviour, the everyday signal conveyed to girls that they have a vulnerable body and a "weak" mind, unsuitable for the rigor of subjects like science and mathematics, poses a major challenge for school education. There is little evidence to suggest that teachers recognize the challenge or appreciate its nature and scale. They themselves carry patriarchal prejudices towards the feminine self, and in this matter, male teachers may not differ much from women teachers. Internalisation of patriarchy is common to both, and teacher education does little to induce self-reflection or questioning. Teachers are trained to impart subject knowledge and that is what they mainly do, without worrying about the socially constructed structure of their students' minds.

This takes many forms, some of which are entrenched in curricular and institutional policies. According to V. Geetha, as the recent studies carried out by Nirantar show, gender bias and stereotyping are not just common but structurally embedded in textbook writing, and the relatively more developed States like Tamil Nadu are no exception to this trend. The vast effort made by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) in this respect, on the basis of the National Curriculum Framework –

2005, has yet to make an impact on textbooks development processes used by State governments and private publishers. NCERT's new syllabi and textbooks take a proactive and analytical, rather than a remedial stance towards gender asymmetry. They're-articulate social and economic relations in ways that would enable both teachers and children to notice the presence of women in social spaces where they have been rendered invisible by the symbolic power of patriarchy.

For instance, in the Class VI textbook of the new subject called *Socio-Political Life*, the farmer whose profile is drawn to draw children's attention towards the rural economy is a woman. Gender relations are introduced in other subjects and textbooks at a deeper, epistemic level, not merely to avoid the charge of bias towards women.

Need of girl Education

Girls' education needs to be looked at in a far wider and more complex and nuanced perspective than what is generally applied with reference to gender parity. This wider perspective needs to be constructed on the basis of the realisation that girls' lives and education in contemporary India continue to be shaped by historical forces which have their roots in culture. The specificity of India's patriarchy lies in the relation between gender and caste. The concepts of purity and pollution are fundamental to caste, and though women themselves are deemed "impure," the major burden of the maintenance of caste purity rests on them. According to Leela Dube, "the principles of caste inform the specific nature of sexual asymmetry of Hindu society; the boundaries of caste and the hierarchies of caste are articulated by gender." How caste and kinship affect girls' lives should be a matter of as much interest to the modern state as the challenges posed by the caste system to the Constitution's egalitarian social vision are. Matters pertaining to girls constitute a hard area of social policy, and the state's record of dealing with such matters offers considerable signs of continuity since colonial times. The latest evidence of this continuity comes from the revised version of act, approved by the parliament in 2006, which seeks to curb child marriage. The 1929 version mirrored a hesitant state, and so does the 2006 version. The state's capacity to deal with such matters was shaped during the colonial period in the context of the emerging relations of power between

native elites and the colonisers. As Charu Gupta points out, Hindu revivalism and Hindu-Muslim separatism developed, during the late colonial period, a modern discourse of misogyny which later became part of a political ideology. This historical legacy continues to act as a resource for the symbolic violence that permits modernity and democracy to operate in conjunction with women's oppression from an early age. An engagement with the structures of knowledge and power which permit this conjunction to perpetuate itself is necessary to devise a new policy and strategies for girls' education.

Conclusion

Investing in girls' education transforms communities, countries and the entire world. Girls who receive an education are less likely to marry young and more likely to lead healthy, productive lives. They earn higher incomes, participate in the decisions that most affect them, and build better futures for themselves and their families. Girls' education strengthens economies and reduces inequality. It contributes to more stable, resilient societies that give all individuals – including boys and men – the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Education plays a key role in achieving social justice and creating an inclusive society that is free from inequality. Every Indian child must have the opportunity to get a quality education irrespective of their financial status, caste, creed and background.

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