

Changing Family Composition, Structure and Practices in Bhota Town of District Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh (India): A Comparative Study

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Abstract The family, as a primary social institution in India has been undergoing change, both in its composition and structure. The family, as in many societies has been not only the center of socio-economic life, but also the primary source of social security and support for the members of the family. The increasing urbanization, commercialization of the economy and the development of the infrastructure of the modern state have brought changes in the composition and structure of Indian family in the 20th century. The last few decades have brought speedy and important changes in family relations. India's fertility rate has fallen and life expectancy has increased. All of these changes are taking place in the context of increased urbanization and high standard of living, which is separating children from elders and contributing and bringing change in the composition and structure of family-based support system. The Present study is conducted in Bhota Town of District Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh, India. This paper examines the impact of various contributing factors which bring changes in the composition, structure and practices in Indian family. If this trend continues then it will lead the disintegration in familial relations and adversely affect the caring attitude of the family towards its members.

Keywords Familial relations, Composition, Structure, Marriage patterns, Practices

1. Introduction

The family is an important and the primary institution of Indian traditional as well as modern societal set up. In the dynamic nature of society, the complexity of the institution is growing day by day. For the last many years, numbers of studies were conducted to explore the complexity of this very important institution. The family is the essential agency of socialization to learn the basics of cultural life in India. The patrilineal family and extended kinship relationships are the basic units of society in the majority of countries in the world. In Indian joint family, members of three or four generation are living together under one roof, sharing common property, kitchen, worshipping and working together in socio - 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 two or more persons living under the same roof and eating food cooked in a single kitchen. The family as a primary unit is continuously remained to be one of the most important elements in the fabric of Indian society. Family is

the valuable unit of institutional structure of Indian society which exercises the ascribed authority on every member of the family. Familial bond ties an individual to his family and influenced his personality to a great extent. Indian family is the key factor behind the stability and continuity of our culture and society.

In these days, changes are taking place rapidly in socio - economic, political and cultural sphere of society showing direct impact on the structure of Indian family. The change in the modes of production changes the patterns of distribution and consumption, considerably. The processes of industrialization, urbanization, commercialization and globalization have shown great impacts on the family. Continuous migration of people from rural to urban areas is a major contributing factor in the growth of slums. Technological advancement brings changes in our traditional hereditary and caste based occupations to new patterns of multiple employment based on specialization and experience. The survival becomes more difficult in these days due to price rise and cut-throat competition in every area of life leads disintegration of family relations. In nutshell these changes in the socio-economic, political and cultural environment of our society have enforced changes in the composition, structures, authority, roles, relationships and values system of our family.

Family as a primary social institution is the major agency of socialization which imparts and cultivates social values

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among individuals. Fundamentally, family is the main source of social values. It is impossible to think of patriotism and nationalism without the presence of family. The family goes on teaching the social values and transforming cultural traits from one generation to another. Family plays a vital role in transforming a biological being to social being. It makes a man capable to deal with societal responsibilities successfully and fulfill the expectations of family and society. It is the need of the hour to strengthen familial relations. It teaches us to show respect to others by creating an environment of mutual understanding, tolerance and patience, love and affection, dedication and devotion and more importantly care and sacrifice towards humanity. It imposes checks on selfishness and restrains rigidity. The survival of traditional culture in Asian societies for a thousand years is due to the continuous emphasis on enforcement of family values. Failure in family system will collapse the whole social system. In the contemporary society emergence of modernization and urbanization, the younger generation is moving away from the joint family system. Modern societies are producing multiple variations in family. Most traditional and extended families with strict gender based sex roles are changing into equal authority based sex roles with more freedom to live-in-relationship. The alternate family pattern is originated due to temporary relationships leading to bad socio-economic conditions. Socio-economic and personal circumstances create variation in the Indian family system. Increasing craze towards Live-in relationship and opting to remain childless voluntarily, promotes small family. Single parent families, female headed households, childless families, adoptive families are some of the commonly observed family variation in India. No study was conducted on changing family composition, structure and practices in this area so far. Thus this study is an attempt to review the impact of various contributing factors which bring change in family composition, structure and practices in urban areas of Bhota in Himachal Pradesh (India).

2. Objectives

To review the changing family composition in urban areas with respect to following:

- Changing role, power and status in family
- Changes in familial relationships

To review the changing family practices in urban area of Bhota Town with respect to following:

- Changing marriage patterns and
- Changing other family practices

3. Method

This study was conducted in Bhota Town of district Hamirpur, Himachal Pradesh, India. For the purpose of the study, fifty families of the same income group residing in

this area were selected using Purposive sampling. To collect the data, a survey was conducted by using a self-structured questionnaire with close ended questions. The data were analyzed in terms of mean, frequency and percentage.

Himachal at glance:

Himachal Pradesh is also known as 'Dev Bhoomi' came into existence as a distinct entity on 15 April 1948 with the merger of 30 erstwhile Punjab hilly states. The span of 63 years has taken big strides in the path of social-economic development. The population of Himachal Pradesh is 68,56,509 in which 34,73,892 males and 33,82,617 are female's. Himachal comes second in literacy rate with 83.78% after Kerala in India. Hamirpur District is situated between 76° 18' to 76° 44' East longitudes and 31° 25' to 31° 52' North latitude. The tract is hilly covered by Shivalik range. This district was made in 1972 by carving it out from the Kangra district. It is well connected by roads from all sides. Majority of the population here comprise of Hindus. Bulk of the people speaks Pahari. Hamirpur is the most Literate district in Himachal Pradesh. The majority of its population fluently speaks Hindi.

4. Results and Discussion

The data in table 1 reveals that 70% families were nuclear whereas only 30% were joint. There were no families of alternate family type out of selected families. Banerjee (2010) explains that in Indian cities; families aspire to an improved lifestyle, which they recognize is possible with fewer children. Reflecting the rise of the nuclear family in urban India, these households are small in size. According to Kashayap (2004), industrialization, together with technological development, has brought several new challenges to the family. It has brought significant changes to the structure of urban families that have moved from large extended family systems to more nuclear structures.

Table 1. Percentage-wise distribution regarding changing family composition in Bhota town

Types of Family	No. of Respondents (Out of 50)	%
Nuclear	35	70.00
Joint	15	30.00
Alternate	0	00.00

Table 2. Percentage-wise distributions of role, power and status in families in Bhota town

Role, Power and Status in families	Number of Respondents = 50	
	No.	%
According to age	42	84.00
According to gender	08	16.00

It is evident from the table 2, that 84.00% of the total families were of the opinion that role, power and status were given according to age of person whereas only 16.00% were

of the opinion that gender was the basis of distribution for role, power and status in the family.

As shown in **Table 3** 36.00% families were having normal dual relationship and 30.00% families had a good dual relationship with their extended families. Only 10.00% families were involving dual relationship with their extended families where as 24.00% families were not connected/ poorly connected to their extended families. 46.00% families were having normal dual relationship and 26.00% families had a good dual relationship with their kinship reference group. Kashyap (2004) explains in his study that with urbanization and migration, kinship bonds have been weakening in urban areas. However, there is also evidence that the kinship system is changing, adapting itself to the new demands. In urban areas, this extended kinship system is proving to be a viable organization even today, as it has facilitated the adaptation of its individual members to urban life by providing shelter and other material assistance.

Table 3. Percentage-wise distribution regarding familial relationship in Bhota town

Number of Respondents = 50								
Familial Relationship	V-good		Good		Average		Poor	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Relationship with Extended Family Members	5	10	15	30	18	36	12	24
Relationship with Kinship	3	6	13	26	23	46	11	22

Along with the change in the structure of the family from the traditional joint or extended family systems to the evolving nuclear form, changes have also been observed in role relationships and authority among family members. Norms of interpersonal relationships are gradually becoming more egalitarian and reciprocal Kashyap (2004).

The concept of Indian wedding has seen drastic changes, over the last few years. In the previous years, the ceremony was a small and informal affair, confined to an economical budget, even though the guest list was long. On the contrary, in the present time, the occasion is generally celebrated in an elaborated formal way, with number of rituals that are conducted before, during and after it.

The **table 4** shows that all of the families had adopted monogamous marriage pattern because polygamy is illegal in present scenario. 74.00% families were in favor of endogamy type marriage while 26.00% families favored exogamy type of marriage. Some year back, inter- caste and inter- religious marriages were not permitted by the families. With the increasing trend of urbanization and modernization of Indian society, inter-caste and inter-religious marriages have become a common sight nowadays. This is primarily due to the acceptance of the concept of love marriage. Nonetheless, in the past people with an orthodox or conservative outlook of life are still firm about marrying within the same caste, community and religion. Contrary to this notion, people in the present time do believe in

solemnizing weddings of two different individuals belonging to different family background and culture.

Table 4. Percentage-wise distribution regarding changing Marriage practices in Bhota town

Marriage Practices		Number of Respondents = 50	
		No.	%
Marriage patterns	Monogamy	50	100.00
	Polygamy	0	00.00
Preference of Mate selection	Exogamy	13	26.00
	Endogamy	37	74.00
Types of Marriage	Love Marriage	11	22.00
	Arranged Marriage	20	40.00
	Arranged-Love Marriage	19	38.00
Age of Marriage	Below 18 years	0	0.00
	18-21 years	4	8.00
	21-25 years	20	40.00
	Above 25 years	26	52.00
Marriage Rituals	yes	50	100.00
	No	0	00.00
Financial Exchange during Marriage	Yes	47	94.00
	No	3	6.00

It is further evident from the table that 40.00% families were in favor of arranging marriages whereas 38.00% were in favor of arranged marriages. Only 22.00% were in favor of love marriages. The custom of arranged marriages has been a part of Indian culture since long back in the history of human evolution. This practice was primarily begun to transform and maintain the family traditions from one generation to the other. It is still prevalent in both rural and urban parts of India, former being more inclined towards the system. In fact, arranged marriages are still prevalent in masses, because concept of love marriage is not yet fully accepted. However, with the changing time, people (both urban and rural) are gradually opening up to the concept of love marriages which is otherwise considered against Indian culture.

The age of marriageable individuals is also one of the important factors. Almost 52.00% families were in favor of marriage after 25 years whereas 40.00% was in favor of marriage between 21-25 years. Only 8.00% favored for marriage between 18-21 years. No one favored for marriage before age of 18.

All the families were in favor of observing marriage rituals as per the old traditions. The majority of families i.e. 94.00%, accepted that financial exchange is common practice in marriages. Only remaining 6.00% were against financial exchange during marriage. Kashyap (2004) says Marriage in India is still a socio- religious institution that takes place between two families rather than two individuals.

It is still arranged by parents and members of the kinship group with class, caste and religious positions. However the youth in India now wants to have a greater say in the choice of marriage partners and they do not mind their parents arranging their marriage as long as they have a say in it. In the present times, though the patterns of partner selection vary in terms of extent of choice given to the young man or woman, family approval is very essential for the marriage to take place. Among the urban educated youth, the traditional concept of marriage as a sacrament, a social obligation, and for the perpetuation of the lineage, is slowly being sidelined by the concept of marriage, for love, companionship and individual happiness.

Table 5 shows that all the families were having their own residence and lineage system. Most of the families 60.00% were following democratic disciplinary system where as 32.00% were following authoritative disciplinary system. Only 8.00% families were permissive to their children. Most of the families 86.00% were giving preference to their family member for Guardianship and custody of their children whereas 14.00% were taking facilities of neighborhood and community centre. In spite of some social changes, families still believe in the sharing the custody of a child with uncles, aunts and grandparents.

The western press very recently noticed that sharing child rearing- roles among the family community is a new idea. Proximity of parents with their children is considered very important in Indian families as far as discipline and guidance of children are concerned. In India, it is a firmly believed that children should start learning as early as possible in their childhood. According to Baby zone, Indian families believe in strict discipline, obedience, even passivity in their children. Indian Families are still performing their duties as earlier; with the notable move from extended to nuclear families in some regions. As a result of this shift, family support is lessening and consequently the absence of nearer and dearer like parents or other relative to support, the nuclear family has to bear more responsibilities and do more work. However, it can also mean less unwanted advice and more personal space. While Dr. Spock's "Child and Baby Care" was published in 1946, but the Indian families start paying attention towards his ideas of parenting in the recent few years. To some extent parenting styles in Indian is very much influenced by this idea of Dr. Spock, such as, "feeding on demand and not leaving children alone for long periods."

All families were of the view that they enjoy taking the responsibilities of the caring and upbringing of their own children. Majority 90.00% families were able to fulfill their family needs whereas 10.00% have sometimes been unable to fulfill their family needs. 90.00% families were very careful about the health and hygiene of their family members. Only 10.00% were not bothered much about the health and hygiene of their family members. A large number of 86.00% families were very careful to plan about the future of their family members through regular saving whereas 14.00% were not regularly saving for the future. All family members

were very supportive to each other whether they were working or not.

Table 5. Percentage-wise distribution regarding changing Other Family Practices in Bhota town

OTHER FAMILY PRACTICES		Number of Respondents = 50	
		No.	%
System of Lineage	Present	50	100.00
	Absent	0	00.00
Residence Facility	Present	50	100.00
	Absent	0	00.00
Disciplinary System	Democratic	30	60.00
	Authoritarian	16	32.00
	Permissive	4	8.00
Guardianship and Custody of Children	By Self	43	86.00
	By Other	07	14.00
Responsibilities of Child bearing and Rearing	Present	50	100.00
	Absent	0	00.00
Maintenance of Familial Needs	Able to fulfill	45	90.00
	Unable to fulfill Sometimes	5	10.00
Managing death in family	Present	50	100.00
	Absent	0	00.00
Management of Family health and Hygiene	Care for health and Nutrition	45	90.00
	Less care for health and Nutrition	5	10.00
Earning and savings for Future of Family	Regular	43	86.00
	Irregular	07	14.00
Supporting Family Members	Supporting working/Non-working members	50	100.00

5. Conclusions

From the above paper and other research review we have reached at a conclusion that the majority of the families belonging to middle socio economic status have brought very basic and important changes in the composition and structure of the family. These changes can be viewed in the form of status, role, power, relationships, family practices and marriage patterns. Continuous urbanization of families is changing the structure, composition and practices of family. But family rituals are still being followed by young and old in the families, supporting all working as well as non-working members. Even in modern society some of the traditional family practices are still untouched and having a major role to play in family matters. Traditional marriage rituals and practices like financial exchange during marriage

are very commonly practiced in the family. Our results reinforce the view that efforts are needed to protect our traditional value system, joint family and other healthy family practices to maintain the family structure and composition for the betterment of society.

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