

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THE INDIAN FAMILY SYSTEM**

#### **2.1 Chapter Overview**

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 child is ensured. According to Pope – “the family is more sacred than the State.” It was pointed out by Will and Ariel Durant that the family is nucleus of civilisation. 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 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. It ranks immediately after health and good conscience as aptly said by Byron. Without 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.

## 2.2 Family

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.<sup>19</sup> 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 founds 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<sup>20</sup>.

## 2.3 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

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<sup>19</sup> [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_family\\_structure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_family_structure)

<sup>20</sup> The Columbia Encyclopedia, Sixth Edition Copyright© 2004, Columbia University Press

collectivist society that emphasizes family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity. C. Hui and H. Triandis<sup>21</sup> 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 Indian family has been a dominant institution in the life of the individual and in the life of the community.<sup>22</sup> For the Hindu family, extended family and kinship ties are of utmost importance. In India, families adhere to a patriarchal ideology, follow the patrilineal rule of descent, are patrilocal, have familialistic value orientations, and endorse traditional gender role preferences. The Indian family is considered strong, stable, close, resilient, and enduring.<sup>23</sup> Historically, the traditional, ideal and desired family in India is the joint family. A joint family includes kinsmen, and generally includes three to four living generations, including uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, and grandparents living together in the same household. It is a group composed of a number of family units living in separate rooms of the same house. These members eat the food cooked at one hearth, share a common income, common property, are related to one another through kinship ties, and worship the same idols. The family supports the old; takes care of widows, never-married adults, and the disabled; assists during periods of

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<sup>21</sup> Hui, C. and Triandis, H. (1985), ‘Measurement in Cross-Cultural Psychology: A Review and Comparison of Strategies’, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Mullatti, L. (1992), ‘Changing Profile of the Indian Family’, *The Changing Family in Asia*, UNESCO Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, RUSHSAP Series on Monographs and Occasional Papers 35, Bangkok.

<sup>23</sup> Shangle, S. (1995), ‘A View into the Family and Social Life in India’, *Family Perspective*, Vol. 29, pp 423–446.

unemployment; and provides security and a sense of support and togetherness.<sup>24</sup> The joint family has always been the preferred family type in the Indian culture, and most Indians at some point in their lives have participated in joint family living.<sup>25</sup>

The beauty about the 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.

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 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.

The intention behind the formation of any social unit will fail to serve its purpose if discipline is lacking and the same applies to the joint family system as well. Due to this reason, discipline is another factor given utmost importance in the joint family system in India. As a rule, it's the say of the family head that prevails upon others. Incase of any

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<sup>24</sup> Chekki, D.A. (1996), 'Family Values and Family Change', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp 409-411.

<sup>25</sup> Nandan, Y. and Eames, E. (1980), 'Typology and Analysis of the Asian-Indian Family', In Saran, P. and Eames, E. (Eds.), *The New Ethnics: Asian Indians in the United States*, Praeger, New York.

disagreement, the matter is diligently sorted out by taking suggestions from other adult members. One usually also has to follow fixed timings for returning home, eating, etc.

The reason why Indians are proving to emerge as a prosperous lot globally, many researches claim, is because of the significance they attach to the joint family system. All working cohesively to solve a problem faced by any one or more members of the joint family, is what works magic in keeping one tension-free, happy and contented even in today's highly competitive environment. An Indian may be a top corporate honcho or a great sportsperson or a movie actor and so on in a particular professional field, but all these accomplishments relegate to the backseat when at home.

With the advent of urbanisation and modernisation, younger generations are turning away from the joint family form. Some scholars specify that the modified extended family has replaced the traditional joint family, in that it does not demand geographical proximity or occupational involvement and does not have a hierarchal authority structure.<sup>26</sup> This new family form encourages frequent visits; financial assistance; aid and support in childcare and household chores; and involvement and participation in life-cycle events such as births, marriages, deaths, and festival celebrations. The familial and kinship bonds are thus maintained and sustained. Even in the more modern and nuclear families in contemporary India, many functional extensions of the traditional joint family have been retained, and the nuclear family is strongly embedded in the extended kinship matrix. In spite of the numerous changes and adaptations to a pseudo-Western culture and a move toward the nuclear family among the

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 25, p 22

middle and upper classes, the modified extended family is preferred and continues to prevail in modern India.

India is an extremely pronatalistic society, and the desire to have a male child is greatly stressed and is considered by some to be a man's highest duty, a religious necessity, and a source of emotional and familial gratification.<sup>27</sup> Because male children are desired more than female children, they are treated with more respect and given special privileges. Male children are raised to be assertive, less tolerant, independent, self-reliant, demanding, and domineering.<sup>28</sup> Females, in contrast, are socialised from an early age to be self-sacrificing, docile, accommodating, nurturing, altruistic, adaptive, tolerant, and religious, and to value family above all.<sup>29</sup> In rural areas, low-income women have always worked outside the home. In urban areas, there has been a substantial increase in the number of middle- and upper-class women working to supplement their husbands' incomes. In a traditional Indian family, the wife is typically dependent, submissive, compliant, demure, nonassertive, and goes out of her way to please her husband. Women are entrusted with the responsibility of looking after the home and caring for the children and the elderly parents and relatives.

Child rearing practices in India tend to be permissive, and children are not encouraged to be independent and self-sufficient. The family is expected to provide an environment to maximise the development of a child's personality and, within the context

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<sup>27</sup> Kakar, S. (1981), *The Inner World: Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*, Oxford University Press, Bombay

<sup>28</sup> Pothen, S. (1993), 'Divorce in Hindu Society', In Tepperman, L. and Wilson, S. (Eds.), *Next to Kin*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

<sup>29</sup> Kumar, P., and Rohatgi, K. (1987), 'Value Patterns as Related with High and Low Adjustment in Marriage', *Indian Journal of Current Psychological Research*, Vol. 2, pp 98–102.

of the Hindu beliefs and philosophy, positively influence the child's attitudes and behaviours.

Adolescence and young adulthood are particularly stressful and traumatic stages in the lives of Indian youths. In one way, they desire emancipation and liberation from family but residing in the matrix of the extended family makes it difficult for them to assert themselves and exhibit any independence in thought, action, or behaviour. Social changes are gradually occurring but arranged marriages are still the norm, and dating generally is not allowed. Furthermore, sex and sexuality issues are not openly discussed, sex education is not readily available, interrelationships with the opposite sex are discouraged, and premarital sex is frowned upon. In the traditional Indian family, communication between parents and children tends to be one-sided. Children are expected to listen, respect, and obey their parents. Generally, adolescents do not share their personal concerns with their parents because they believe their parents will not listen and will not understand their problems.<sup>30</sup>

## **2.4 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.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Medora, N. P., Larson, J. H., and Dave, P. B. (2000), 'East- Indian College Student's Perceptions of Family Strengths', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 31, pp 408–424

<sup>31</sup> [www.egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/36906/1/Unit-1.pdf](http://www.egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/36906/1/Unit-1.pdf)

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 of 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.<sup>32</sup>

#### **2.4.1 Disappearing Joint Family System**

Since time immemorial the joint family has been one of the salient features of the Indian society. But the twentieth century brought enormous changes in the family system. Changes in the traditional family system have been so enormous that it is steadily on the wane from the urban scene. There is absolutely no chance of reversal of this trend. In

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<sup>32</sup> Bharat S. (Ed.) (1991), *Research on Families with Problems in India: Issues and Implications*. Vol. 1, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay.



villages the size of joint family has been substantially reduced or is found in its fragmented form. Some have split into several nuclear families, while others have taken the form of extended or stem families. Extended family is in fact a transitory phase between joint and nuclear family system. The available data suggest that the joint family is on its way out in rural areas too.<sup>33</sup>

The joint family or extended family in rural areas is surviving in its skeleton or nominal form as a kinship group. The adults have migrated to cities either to pursue higher education or to secure more lucrative jobs or to eke out their living outside their traditional callings, ensuing from the availability of better opportunities elsewhere as well as the rising pressure of population on the limited land base. Many of the urban households are really offshoots of rural extended or joint families. A joint family in the native village is the fountainhead of nuclear families in towns. These days in most cases two brothers tend to form two independent households even within the same city owing to the rising spirit of individualism, regardless of similarity in occupation, even when the ancestral property is not formally partitioned at their native place.

The nuclear family, same as elsewhere, is now the characteristic feature of the Indian society. According to the Census of India data<sup>34</sup>, of all the households nuclear family constituted 70 percent and single member or more than one member households without spouse comprised about 11 percent. The extended and joint family or households together claim merely 20 percent of all households. This is the overall picture about the

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<sup>33</sup> Singh, J.P. (2004), 'The contemporary Indian family', In Adams, B.N and Trost, J. (Eds.), '*Handbook of World Families*', Sage Publications Inc., California.

<sup>34</sup> Census of India (2011), Available at <http://www.censusindia.net/>.

entire country, whereas in the case of urban areas the proportion of nuclear family is somewhat higher still.

An extended family, which includes a couple with married sons or daughters and their spouses as well as household head without spouse but with at least two married sons, daughters and their spouses, constitute a little less than one fifth of the total households. With further industrial development, rural to urban migration, nuclearisation of families and rise of divorce rate and the proportion of single member household is likely to increase steadily on the line of industrial West. This is believed to be so because the states, which have got a higher level of urbanization, tend to have a higher proportion of single member households. Similarly, about a couple of decades ago almost 20 percent households contained only one person in the USA.<sup>35</sup> More or less, a similar situation exists in other developed countries as well, and above all, not a single country has recorded decline in the proportion of single member household during the last three decades. In fact, the tendency is more towards increase in the proportion of single member households.

As the process of family formation and dissolution has become relatively faster now than before, households are progressively more headed by relatively younger people. Census data from 1971 onward have clearly borne out that at the national level over three-fifths of the households are headed by persons aged less than 50.<sup>36</sup> There is every reason to believe that proportion of households headed by younger persons is likely to constitute a larger proportion than this in urban areas where the proportion of extended family, not to speak of joint family, is much smaller than that of rural areas.

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<sup>35</sup> Skolnick, A. and Skolnick, J.H. (1980), *Family in Transition*, Little, Brown and Company, Boston.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 33, p. 28

The emergence of financially independent, career-oriented men and women, who are confident of taking their own decisions and crave to have a sense of individual achievement, has greatly contributed to the disintegration of joint family. Disintegration of joint family has led to closer bonds between spouses, but the reverse is also true in certain cases. For many, nuclear family is a safer matrimonial home to a woman. In bygone days people generally lived in joint families, yet familial discord never escalated into extreme physical violence or death, as we so often come across such instances in our day-to-day life and also know through national dailies, both electronic and print media.

#### **2.4.2 Changes in Authority Structure**

Once the authority within the family was primarily in the hands of family elders. The general attitude of members of the family towards the traditional patriarch was mostly one of respect. Loyalty, submissiveness, respect and deference over the household were bestowed on him. These attributes also encompassed other relationships in the family, such as children to their parents, a wife to her husband, and younger brothers to their older brothers.<sup>37</sup> Within a household no one was supposed to flout the will of his elders. The father, or in his absence the eldest brother, was consulted on all important family matters like pursuing litigation in courts of law, building a house, buying and selling of property and arranging marriages, etc. The joint family did not allow the neglect or disregard of elders. The age-grade hierarchy was quite strong. Now the people of younger generation, particularly those with modern tertiary education, do not seem to show the same reverence which their fathers had for their parents or elders.

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<sup>37</sup> Gupta, G.R. (1978), 'The joint family', In Das, M.S. and Bardis, P.D. (Eds.) '*The Family in Asia*', George Allen & Unwin, London.

Among women, patriarch's wife was the paramount authority. In fact, women's position depended on the position of their husbands in the household. The wife of the household head or mother-in-law was in charge of the household. Her word was law or at least had the same force. Her decisions were made for the entire family and not for the welfare of the individuals in it. Young women in the family were expected to be dutiful and obedient. Self-assertion, even in bringing up their own children, was blasphemy. Widows and those spurned by their husbands were assured of the family roof, though mostly as voiceless members.

With a view to absolving themselves of responsibility now parents cleverly encourage their educated sons and daughters-in-law to take independent decision in a joint and extended family situation, leave aside urban areas, the similar situation has started to emerge in rural areas too. This is not unusual when sons and daughters tend to possess a higher level of education and a greater degree of exposure of the world outside the family than ever before. Now boys and girls, contrary to the old practice, are beginning to assert their wishes in mate selection. Parental decisions are no more supreme. Changes concerning erosion of authority of old guards, particularly in matters of mate selection, are on gradual decline in rural areas too.

Yet another interesting fact about the change in authority structure within the family is that about 10 percent of all the households are headed by women.<sup>38</sup> Most of the female household heads are usually independent and gainfully employed. In the absence of their husbands, either because of death, separation, transfer in job or business

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<sup>38</sup> National Family Health Survey-1 (1992-93) (1994), *India: Introductory Report*, IIPS and ORC Macro, Mumbai.

engagement, women are themselves able to run the affairs of their family. Long distance migration of men for employment is also an important reason for the emergence of such households. The phenomenon of female-headed household assumes significance in the Indian society because in the past when the joint family system was so preponderant that the female-headed household was quite an uncommon phenomenon.

### **2.4.3 Changes in Marital Practices**

The traditional system of values of the Indian society, especially that of Hindus, has been such that it stood for the practice of early as well as universal marriage for females. Child marriage or pre-puberty marriage all through has been an archetypal institution of India. The mean age at marriage was reported to be quite low in the 19th century and so also in earlier days. The mean age at marriage for females was about 13 years between 1901 and 1931 censuses<sup>39</sup> and it did not differ much between different communities. Of all the legal measures the Child Marriages Restraint Act 1929 (and its further amendments in 1949, 1955 and 1978) happened to be quite effective one. Rise in the age at marriage really became conspicuous during the post independence era, that is, during the period onward 1950. The act was further amended in 1978 wherein boys' marriage age was raised to 21 and girls' age to 18 years. On the whole, the state level census information for the last one hundred years has revealed a clear rise in the age at marriage for girls. During 1891-1991 the age at marriage increased by 4 to 7 years in different parts of the country. The Census of India, 2011<sup>40</sup> has estimated an age of 21.5 at marriage.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 34, p. 28

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

A new law banning child marriage was passed in December 2006. The law provides certain positive initiatives for the intervention of courts to prevent child marriages through stay orders. Child marriages are solemnised during times of festivals such as Akshaya Tritiya, Akha Teej, Ram Navami, Basant Panchami and Karma Jayanti.<sup>41</sup> According to UNICEF report<sup>42</sup>, 47 percent of India's women aged 20-24 were married before the legal age of 18, with 56 percent in rural areas.

Child marriages have been prevalent in many cultures throughout human history, but have gradually diminished since some countries started to urbanise and experience changes in the ways of life for the people of these countries. An increase in the advocacy of human rights, whether as women's rights or as children's rights, has caused the traditions of child marriage to decrease greatly as it was considered unfair and dangerous for the children. Today, child marriage is usually practised in countries where cultural practices and traditions of child marriage still have a strong influence. Although child marriages have been outlawed a long time ago, South Asia has currently the highest prevalence of child marriage of any region in the world.<sup>43</sup> India, as noted above, happens to be a forerunner in this regard.

Yet another important marital practice is consanguineous marriage which has been the notable feature of a large segment of the Indian society since long. Through the ages the system of cross-cousin and cross-uncle niece marriages has been the most favoured kind of marriage in South India. The most desirable mate for a man has been his

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<sup>41</sup> [social.un.org/index/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket...tabid=215](http://social.un.org/index/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket...tabid=215)

<sup>42</sup> UNICEF (2009), *The State of the World's Children*, Division of Communication, UNICEF, United Nations Plaza, New York.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

own sister's daughter or mother's brother's daughter.<sup>44</sup> In the face of rising dowry practices across the country consanguineous marriages have appreciably declined in South India in recent years. However, such marriages have remained tabooed among the vast majority of Hindus of North India. The Hindu Marriage and Divorce Act 1955 prohibits marriage among close relatives, called sapinda marriage. The sapinda relationship extends as far as the third generation in the line of mother and the fifth in the line of father. In North India only Muslims, certain scheduled castes and scheduled tribes tend to practice consanguineous marriages. Most of the tribal groups practice consanguinity of both types such as marriages with the father's sister's daughter, the mother's brother's daughter and the elder sister's daughter.<sup>45</sup>

The Indian society has been a highly endogamous. Marriage within the same subcaste has been followed very strictly. The scheduled tribes are also endogamous, but most of the tribal communities practice clan exogamy.<sup>46</sup> Polygamy, more particularly polygyny, has been one of salient features of Indian family. It has been more popular among Muslims than Hindus. Here it is not suggested that the incidence of polygyny is more common than monogamy. The polygamous males often derived support from age-old scriptures and mythological stories. But mainly those who had no issue from the first wife practised such marriages. With the rise in the level of literacy the incidence of polygyny has receded even among the Muslims despite the fact that such marriages have got full cultural and legal sanction. While monogamy is the predominant form of

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<sup>44</sup> Driver, E. D. and Driver, A.E. (1988), 'Social and demographic correlates of consanguineous marriages of south India', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Vol. 19, pp 229-244.

<sup>45</sup> Singh, K. S. (1997), *The Scheduled Tribes* (People of India, Vol. III), Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

marriage, there are a large number of tribes practicing sororal polygyny and non-sororal polygyny.<sup>47</sup>

#### **2.4.4 Dissolution of Marriage**

The dissolution of marriage has been quite uncommon and rare in India for a long time. In case of any crisis or threat to stability of marriage, caste, community, kinsmen, tended to have played a dominant say. People had both respect for and fear of social values and public opinion. Authority of community, though implicit, has been supreme. The system of religious belief has provided enough sustenance to the institution of marriage and family. Individual choice has always been subservient to the communal sentiment or public opinion. Hindu marriage is taken as a life-long union for the couple, as it is a sacrament, rather than a contract between the couple to live in a social union so long as it is cordially feasible. Even in the event of frequent mental and physical torture, most Indian women persist in marriage, since remarriage of divorced or separated women is quite difficult. Morality relating to sex is so highly valued that every male wants to marry a virgin girl only. In the past Hindus demanded pre-nuptial chastity on the part of both, but now it is by and large limited to females. Virginity is regarded as the girls' greatest virtue and a symbol of respectability. Under the circumstances remarriage of women is so difficult that annulment of marriage is a very hard choice or option.

Despite all these there has been a significant change in the views and attitudes towards sanctity of marriage in the recent past, especially in cities. Marriage is no longer held to be a 'divine match' or a 'sacred union'. Now it is more like a transfer of a female

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 45, p. 34.



from one family to another, or from one kinship group to another. The marriage is no longer sanctified as it was believed in the past, and is viewed only as a bonding and nurturing life-long relationship and friendship. The rather flippant and superficial reasons given by many women and men to break a marriage may not portend well for the future. Indian marriages are still largely resilient and lasting, whereas in many developed countries they seem to break up for seemingly trivial reasons. Marriages are very vulnerable or fragile there. One in every four or five marriages breaks up despite more space and freedom in the West. The longevity of marriage in most developed countries ranges on an average from five to seven years. While in India divorce rates are among the lowest in the world. Only one out of 100 marriages ends up in divorce here. These days divorce rates in India's urban sphere are, however, slowly mounting.<sup>48</sup>

Marriage counsellors, formerly pooh-pooed at, have today assumed a lot of importance in guiding couples through stormy seas and averting the imminent pain of divorce. Today in cities there is disenchantment with the system of arranged marriages in a large number of cases. The Indian family is faced with a new kind of social and psychological constraints. The women, however, tend to be more concerned about their marriage than men and in case of a problem they are expected to go for counselling. They are expected to take the lead to resolve conflicts and when they give up the effort, the marriage is generally over. In today's shifting values and changing times, there is less reliance on marriage as a definer of sex and living arrangements throughout life. Today in cities there is disenchantment with the system of arranged marriages. There is a greater incidence of extra-marital relationships, including open gay and lesbian relationships, a delay in the age at marriage, higher rates of marital disruption and more egalitarian

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 41, p. 33.

genderrole attitudes among men and women. It is reported that in big metropolises a new system of 'live-in-arrangements' between pairs, particularly in upper stratum of society, is steadily emerging as a new kind of family life. Anyway, a relatively higher divorce rate in cities, inter alia, connote that marriage is an institution in trouble, or else expectations are so high that people are no longer willing to put up with the kinds of dissatisfactions and empty shell marriages that the previous generations tolerated. High rate of remarriages clearly means that people are sacrificing their marriages because of unsatisfactory relationships.

#### **2.4.5 Domestic Tension and Violence**

Violence within family settings is primarily a male activity. The prime targets are women and children. The women have been victims of humiliation and torture for as long as we have written records of the Indian society. Despite several legislative measures adopted in favour of women during the last 150 years, continuing spread of modern education and women's gradual economic independence, countless women have continued to be victims of discrimination and violence in the country.<sup>49</sup> Increasing family violence in modern times has compelled many social scientists to be apologists for the traditional joint family- as happy and harmonious, a high-voltage emotional setting, imbued with love, affection and tenderness. India's past has been so romanticised by certain scholars that they have regarded the joint family as the best form of family.

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<sup>49</sup> Singh, J.P. (2002), 'Social and cultural aspects of gender inequality and discrimination in India', *Asian Profile*, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp 163-176.

There are data<sup>50</sup> showing that in India 40 percent of women have experienced violence by an intimate partner. These stark figures underline the fact that, although the home and community are places where women provide care for others, they are also places where millions of women experience coercion and abuse. A study of five districts of the State of Uttar Pradesh has revealed that 30 percent of currently married men acknowledge physically abusing their wives.<sup>51</sup> About fifty percent of the women experiencing physical violence also reported physical abuse during pregnancy.

With the rise in the level of education and exposure to mass media, women tend to have greater awareness of the notion of gender equality, faith in the effectiveness of legal action to protect their rights, and confidence in such institutions as family courts and certain voluntary organizations working for women. Yet there is no sign of abatement in gender related violence. Cases of domestic violence, like wife-battering and forced incest with the women of the household, are so personal and delicate that they are seldom reported to the police or law courts. We are sure that the recent legislation of anti-domestic violence act of 2005 would certainly take care of the problem of gender-based violence of the Indian woman to a very large extent.

There is another side of the story of domestic violence as well which has remained uncovered, particularly by feminist writers. It is roughly estimated that every year more than 58000 educated women are making the life of their husbands hell by misusing anti-dowry law and domestic violence act and under these laws legal terrorism is continuing openly to extort money from the husbands and their families. More than 52000 married men are ending their life due to various type of harassment and domestic

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 41, p. 33.

<sup>51</sup> UNC, 1997, *Uttar Pradesh Male Reproductive Health Survey 1995-96* (The Evaluation Project), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, NC.

violence faced from their beloved wives in the form of verbal abuse, financial abuse, mental abuse, sexual abuse, relationship cheating, etc.<sup>52</sup>

#### **2.4.6 Problems of Children**

Children constitute a little over 30 percent of the total population of the country according to the 2001 Census of India.<sup>53</sup> Evidence suggests that they are quite vulnerable and their exposure to violations of their protection rights remains widespread and multiple in nature. The manifestations of these violations are very varied, ranging from child labour and child trafficking to commercial sexual exploitation and many other forms of violence and abuse. With an estimated 12.6 million children engaged in hazardous occupations<sup>54</sup>, for instance, India has the largest number of child labourers under the age of 14 in the world. Although poverty is often cited as the cause underlying child labour, other factors such as discrimination, social exclusion, as well as the lack of quality education or existing parents' attitudes and perceptions about child labour and the role and value of education need also to be considered.

While systematic data and information on child protection issues are still not always available, evidence suggests that children in need of special protection belong to communities suffering disadvantages and social exclusion such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, and the poor. The lack of available services as well as the gaps persisting in law enforcement and in rehabilitation schemes also constitute a major cause of concern. The children of poor families, especially those of artists, craftsmen, and other professions are trained by their parents and elders of the family in their vocations such as

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 41, p. 33

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 34, p. 28

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

weaving, tanning, sweeping dyeing, hairdressing, painting, carpentry and agriculture. A vast number of children grow up lending a helping hand to elders in their home-industries. The practice or intergenerational transfer of traditional callings more or less is still continuing. Such kids who lack formal schooling, but working and specializing in some craft or their traditional callings help them build a career.

Indeed, the poverty in India forces many parents to send their children to earn extra money. The employers who hire such children pay them paltry wages. One can see boys of poor families act as vegetable vendors throughout India. Children of construction workers help in bringing water, cleaning vessels or collecting twigs for fuel. Their parents are compelled to come to cities when monsoon fails and they cannot cultivate their lands.

Children are also subjected to gender based discrimination. Discrimination against women in fact starts the day she is born. Sometimes it also starts when she is in her mother's womb as a foetus. The practice of female foeticide, despite being illegal, is vigorously practised in urban India. The girl child's right to survival, health care and nutrition, education, social opportunities and protection has to be recognised and made a social and economic priority. Along with this the basic structural inequalities that cause poverty, malnutrition and the low status of women have to be addressed, if these rights are to be ensured. Within family parents are first to practice gender based discrimination and it is the first school of learning where girls are inculcated the values of their being inferior to their brothers.

Although India loves their children, still thousands of children roam the streets of major cities around the country and receive no education, proper food, clothing, or a bed to sleep in at night. Awareness presentations through multi-media, contributions, talking and sharing information among friends, education, self-help initiatives and good old fashion kindness are all that is needed to get these kids off the streets. Basically they need five things for their living: food, clothing, shelter, medical assistance and education.

Contrary to the above, there are children who belong to the well-off sections of society, but they are also not free from problems. They are facing a different kind of problem either due to lack of adequate care or attention from their working parents or due to heavy expectation from them by their parents in a fiercely competitive modern world full of uncertainties in life. In cases of working mothers, children are placed in an entirely different situation. The demands of city life are such that both wife and husband tend to remain outside their home for work even at the cost of interests of their children. Working couples are unable to give proper care and affection to their children. Obviously, latchkey children of working couples are strangers to the sense of security enjoyed by their own parents. The system of surrogate mothers or the Montessori and Kindergarten systems of schooling has proved to be a very poor substitute for family as an agent of socialization. With the diminished role of family as an agent of socialization juvenile delinquency is on the increase. In the past children enjoyed security of a kind unknown today. Growing up under the joint care of adults made them feel responsible for all the extended members of the family, besides their own parents. Now children are at greater strain than ever before because in general parents intend to accomplish those things in their life through their children what they themselves could not be able to achieve, no matter how difficult they are. Children are put under great stress and strain to

score high marks at schools to be able to meet the ever-increasing challenges of fiercely competitive world of education and employment. In addition to helping their children achieve higher goals of life, women, sometimes both the parents, have to work harder with a view to attaining economic independence and maintaining a higher standard of living of their family.

As stated above, there has been appreciable decline in fertility over the years. This has not been possible without recording drastic changes in the attitude of people towards the size of family and the value system of patriarchy and patriliney. Based on studies on fertility behaviour and contraceptive practices one can conclusively contend that perhaps no element of the Indian social system has experienced greater changes than the system of family during the post-independent period. This is clearly borne out by various empirical investigations. Despite considerable decline in fertility or lesser burden of children on the family, there is no improvement in the quality of care of children especially in rural areas.

There hardly exists any pre-school or community centre in villages. There also does not exist even a basic facility of play ground for children. The older children have to mind the younger children at home and sometimes they are also expected to lend helping hands to their parents in the household chores as and when required. The poor children learn the expected roles of life of their own with the passage of time, while the well-off peasantry send their children to private schools in towns and cities for better schooling.

## 2.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, an introductory theme, definition and meaning of family is presented. Indian family system and contemporary changes affecting the family structure in India in terms of disturbed family, changes in marital status, and problems of children are addressed in detail.

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 patrilineally related generations, all living under 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.