

INDIAN FAMILIES

Contemporary Family Structures
and Dynamics

Edited by Vinod Chandra and Sampson Lee Blair

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES
IN FAMILY RESEARCH

VOLUME 26

INDIAN FAMILIES

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES IN FAMILY RESEARCH

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**INDIAN FAMILIES:
CONTEMPORARY FAMILY
STRUCTURES AND DYNAMICS**

EDITED BY

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Shivani Katara has always been driven to understand the forces that shape our existence within the society and influence the way we think, feel, and act. Structural dynamics of society, such as values, norms, religion, culture, gender, ethnicity, social and political institutions, and legislation, have always intrigued her. While pursuing her bachelors in Dental Surgery, she got interested in the social and personal aspects of health, illness, and utilization of care. She realized that every person is responding to their social or local worlds in which there is some kind of organization that shapes their everyday behavior and choices. She explored for an academic course dovetailed to this interest. Sociology as an interdisciplinary field has provided her a lens to look at these crucial areas objectively and framed her understanding about the world.

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He has numerous professional recognitions such as the "Emerging Psychologist" award from the International Congress of Psychology in South Africa in 2012 and the Young Researcher Award by the International Council of Psychologists in Montreal, Canada, in 2018.

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FOREWORD

With a rich and diverse cultural history dating back over 4,000 years, India is a unique society, by any measure. In 2023, its population of over 1.4 billion people surpassed its neighbor, China, and became the most populated country in the world. Although it is a collectivistic culture, there are over 120 languages spoken in India, across over 700 ethnic groups. Many religious groups exist in India, but the vast majority of the population adheres to the Hindu faith. Its long history of caste stratification, wherein there are approximately 3,000 distinct castes, further underscores the complexity of Indian culture. Yet, like other societies around the globe, Indian society and its culture revolve around its central social institution – the family.

Familial norms in India have a considerably long history, and understandably, many of the qualities of family structures and relationships have existed for many centuries. Indian families are often noted for their size, as its pronatalist culture has resulted in relatively high fertility rates, coupled with a strong tendency toward the maintenance of strong intergenerational ties. Hence, families with multiple children and a broad assortment of kin from multiple generations are common. The strength of familial bonds among Indian families is also seen in one of its more common family structures, the joint family, wherein it is common for adult siblings to live together, along with their respective spouses and children, in the same home. Such traits are viewed as providing greater stability and loyalty within families and providing an enduring strength to the family, itself. Indian culture has a long history of patriarchy, and this is readily evident within families, as patriarchal families have long been the norm, as is patrilineal lineage. With a firm hierarchy of authority across generations, parents tend to exercise considerable control over the lives of their children, who are expected to quickly comply with parental requests. The common practice of arranged marriage in India is evidence of the extent to which parents retain control. With its history of patriarchy, there is a strong preference among couples to bear sons. This preference, however, has resulted in a variety of practices, including female infanticide, that has led to a skewed sex ratio, with substantially more males than females in the adult population. Nonetheless, the expectation of marriage, childbearing, and the maintenance of the family has always been core norms within Indian culture.

On the one hand, India, along with its families, has an incredibly long history. However, like many other societies, it has also experienced substantial change over recent decades. The combinations of economic, political, social, and cultural changes have led to notable variations in many of the aforementioned attributes. In some parts of the country, particularly in urban areas, individual nuclear family units are becoming more commonplace. Arranged marriages remain common, yet many young adults openly prefer to choose intimate partners without

parental influence. Egalitarian gender roles within marriage, with wives wielding equal authority, are also increasing in prominence. Even fertility rates have fallen substantially, resulting in smaller numbers of children and, of course, smaller generations within families. Simply, Indian families are changing, and in ways which absolutely require the attention of researchers.

In this volume of *Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research*, a variety of researchers attempt to delve into many of the contemporary family structures and relationship dynamics among Indian families. In doing so, a number of fascinating discoveries are revealed, and the tremendous diversity across families in India is also demonstrated. In “No Preference? An Examination of Child Sex Preferences in Rural South India,” Ashley Larsen Gibby, Tiffany Fox Okeke, Nancy Luke, Melissa Alcaraz, and Mikaela Dufur explore the nature of sex preference among childbearing couples, along with the consequences of such preferences for the resulting children. Using a large sample from Southern India, they demonstrate that approximately one-fourth of couples expressed no preference for sons (nor daughters), and that children of these couples tended to have fewer mental or emotional issues, during adolescence. Shivani Katara also examines fertility in India, with a focus upon fertility aspirations. In “Fertility Aspirations and Family Planning Behavior: A Qualitative Study in a Small Town of Uttar Pradesh,” Katara uses data from a set of qualitative interviews of both women and men, noting that fertility aspirations are readily influenced by a combination of personal, family, and societal factors. Prospective parents are aware of cultural expectations, yet also recognize the outcomes which their fertility choices may have for their children.

In “Exploring the Transitions in Family Structure of Vaddera Community Through a Deconstructive Lens,” Sonal Mobar Roy and G. V. Snigdha Raj examine the transitions in family structure among the Vadders (an indigenous group) in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh. While the Vadders are quite traditional, many of the aspects of family structure and relationships have undergone considerable change as a result of modernization and the many aspects of how their lives have changed, as a result of external forces. Vinod Chandra details the more macro-level changes which Indian families are experiencing in “Changing Landscape of Indian Family.” Structural changes in regard to the number of children and the size of the household, along with behavioral and relationship changes, such as in mate selection and childrearing, are slowly, but surely, leading to a new form of Indian family life. In “Menstrual Hygienic Disparity in India: An Inter-State Analysis Using NFHS-5 Indicators,” Megha Jacob and Japjot Kaur Saggi explore the usage of hygienic menstrual products, as these patterns of usage are influenced by various factors and differ across regions. Socioeconomic factors are shown to be strongly associated, and the researchers propose that the rural–urban differences in women’s health need to be better addressed by existing policies, so as to improve and ensure women’s well-being.

Sunil K Verma et al digs deeper into the nuances of intergenerational relationships and family dynamics in changing patterns of family systems in interdependent society. The researchers made special emphasis on Indian perspectives focusing on urban and rural backdrop with 720 participants exploring cultural

attitude, socio economic variables and coping strategies within family. Findings highlighted complex interplay of ambivalence, solidarity, affection and association among family in featuring newer trends in family dynamics.

In “Family Dynamics and Intergenerational Relation in Interdependent Society - An Indian Perspective,” Sunil K. Verma, Saswati Bhattacharya, Tushar Singh examine how family relationships, both within and across generations, have changed over time. Using a sample of both urban and rural members of joint families, they note that there are a multitude of factors, including changing cultural norms, urbanization, economic growth, and others which have brought about substantial change in intergenerational relationships. Y. Gunjan Ramraj uses a mixed-methods approach to examine how online matchmaking sites are changing the ways in which young adults find partners and also how this new approach works within the context of traditions and norms concerning mate selection. In “Intermediating Individual and the Community: Indian Family in Online Matchmaking,” Gunjan Ramraj finds that young people do seek to have more control over their selection of a partner and make use of the internet to both seek more autonomy, while at the same time respecting the wishes of their elders. In “Premarital Romance, Dating, and Arranged Marriages in India: The Intersection of Tradition and Globalization,” Barani Kanth, Ananda Krishnan, and Debasmitta Sen also address the changing nature of mate selection in India, as they explore how young adults are increasingly seeking more autonomy and freedom of choice. They note that while young people do engage in romantic and sexual relationships, they frequently face an array of challenges from their families and the larger culture.

B. Devi Prasad and Shivangi Deshwal offer a range of recommendations concerning the changing attributes of Indian family life in their chapter, “My Family: Classroom Exercises on Unlearning and Learning about Families.” The exercises which they present address a range of issues, including the myth of a normative family, nature of family change, and multigenerational extended kin relationships. These teaching techniques provide numerous possible usages by researchers, teachers, and practitioners. Finally, Jyoti Sidana addresses the various aspects of change which are impacting the family in “Towards a Sociology of ‘New Family’ in India.” The family, in terms of its prevailing structures and norms, is being affected by a multitude of forces, including economic change and increasing materialism, increases in the elderly population, changing gender ideologies, and the growing presence of technology in family life. All of these are having a substantial impact upon families, along with the very definition of what constitutes a family.

This volume of *Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research* has presented an excellent collection of studies focusing upon families in India. A prominent theme across the enclosed chapters is that of change. Indian family life is built upon thousands of years of cultural norms, practices, and traditions, yet many of the long-standing traits of Indian families are clearly changing. The changes in structure, such as the growing presence of single nuclear family units, and the changes in norms, such as the increasing desire of young adults to choose their own partners, signal a fundamental shift in how the concept of family is to be

defined in India. Like many societies around the globe, forces such as modernization and urbanization have slowly led families to adapt to the larger societal changes. There is no doubt, whatsoever, that Indian family life will change in coming decades. More importantly, there is also no doubt that they will retain much of the qualities which make them so unique. Researchers of all varieties should focus more attention upon Indian families.

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