

Society, Culture, Religion and Family Values

** M. Suja*

Introduction

In the preceding chapter we have examined in detail the meaning of marriage, choosing a life partner, and the various forms of marriage. Human beings as social entities are part of the global family of the world and the particular culture and social strata in which one lives inseparably related to individual through his/her family, neighbourhood, education and social surroundings. Though religion, culture and society are independent subject in themselves, they influence one another and have a serious impact on human values of family life.

Family life education is based on values and relationships. Many people yet have to become aware of the changes that have already overtaken patterns of family life and they have also to know how to handle them. Some take for granted that all families of all time have a permanent basis, untouched by contemporary problems and social changes. This is not true, as families have been exposed to the changing patterns of culture in an age of globalization. In fact family is a word that triggers emotions in most people.

Family Life: Changing Patterns

Definition of Family

A family is a community of persons related to one another, living together in an environment of

** Sr. M. Suja, New Delhi*

understanding and acceptance. A family is a place where one can freely express one's feelings, emotions and needs without being threatened or ashamed of them. Family is a place where one can feel security, wholeness and a sense of being wanted.

Family can also be defined as "Those related persons who live together within a household, usually with common eating habits or one kitchen." It is experienced and proved that children grow best in an atmosphere of security and affection and that material attributes can never be substituted for true love.

Types of Family

Development in society in the recent years have focused their attention on man's self-fulfillment through individualism, materialism and consumerist values isolating man from his need to belong to one another as persons. Authentic fulfillment and happiness is experienced not in the acquisition of the external, material wealth and possessions, isolated from one's relations to the rest of humanity, but in his intimate and significant experiences of other people starting with the family. In fact every human being is bound together in family and in the earliest experience of interacting with the father, mother and other significant people, one learns to find meaning and identity for the rest of one's life.

The traditional pattern of family living in India was that of joint family, in which members were bound together by ties of common ancestry and common property. Now in India we find three types of family structures.

- a) The large Joint Family
- b) The Nuclear Family
- c) The Extended Family

A joint family is one that has a greater generation depth than the nuclear family, in which members are related to one another by property, income, mutual rights and obligations.

The care and maintenance of dependents is a moral obligation. Members of the family are closely knit together and share the problems and joys of social living, having strong feelings of mutual obligations during crises and regard self-interest as being identical with family welfare. The joint family provides an “umbrella” of support, which covers financial loss, decease of a spouse and social security. Children brought up in a joint family are more secure, affectionate and have a well-developed personality. Joint family can be found more frequently among Hindus than amongst any other community; among agriculturists rather than traders, clerical and professional workers. Joint families can be found in the lowest income groups too. Men grow up with the knowledge of people around, confidence and skill in family business matters. Children grow up with the experience of life cycles: birth, maturation, marriage and death. There is no difficulty of boy-girl relationship, no problem of single woman, no problem of single or neglected child and marriage are arranged by parents.

The positive aspects of joint family system are based on the advantages of the members such as:

- Family survival
- Care in old age
- Increase in family income
- More share in the property
- To follow the pattern in the community
- To make the home happier

Nuclear Family

Nuclear family is one in which the parents and their unmarried sons and daughters live together.

Extended Family

The extended family is a later development of the joint family system with a transformed image. It mediates the nuclear family and the large joint family. In this type the nuclear family is extended with sons marrying, bringing up children and remaining within the original family of the parents.

Traditional in Family Patterns

We live in a fast changing world. We have reached a time in history when sitting at home, we are able to know what is happening around the world. We are able to move around the world in a shorter time than before. We are living with all the modern technologies that dictate easy life, pleasure, comfort and provide automatic answers for most of our problems. Many are doing their own business sitting at home. The science and technologies have progressed to such an extent that man only has to sit in homes press a button in order to send a written message across the world and receive the reply. Any information one needs on any topic can be obtained through our family computer.

Over the years, the Indian Family has gone through many transitions. The larger families of six and eight children have been replaced by families of one or two children who learn constantly to compete with each other over toys and personal possessions from their infancy. In place of joint families where adults, children and the elderly interacted with one another in a secure atmosphere, now we have strangers and lonely individuals living in separate worlds. The elderly are conveniently put into old-age homes and children are kept waiting at the school gates or in front of family

T.V. till their parents return from the offices. Children who spend long hours in closed houses or in the company of servants or other school children develop a sense of rejection, depression and isolation. All that they are able to interact with for long hours after school are toys, story books, T.V. computer games and cartoons that contribute to the formation of a mechanical, dehumanizing, individualistic, and narrow-minded attitudes in children.

Significance of Transitions in Families

The joint family cannot be dismissed as outdated. Many Hindus as well as Muslim still families follow that life-style. Rank and wealth are not the conditions for this system but blood relations and social value are. They are mostly found in non-urban, non-industrialized settings. It is interesting to note that even when the members of an extended family do not live in the same household, they still share a common budget and follow the same family leader. Besides, even among the members, who live separately, we observe that all belong to a joint family system and believe in this value.

There are problems connected with all extended families, as the joint family is based on the relations among the adult males rather than on the conjugal bonds between spouses. The spouses do not feel the allegiance toward the large units as the husbands feel and there are quarrels, competitions and dissatisfaction among women and children. In recent years majority of Indians prefer to live in nuclear families. The role of religion is to give a perspective to human life, hence, to family life and through it to society.

Aspects of Value Formation in Family

Definition of Values

Values are those ideas which direct our thinking and living and give meaning to our existence. The values

we hold dear are expressed in our actions by which our lives receive a certain amount of identity. It is the value one possesses which gives him/her an image by which others judge or measure him/her. In order to make values meaningful, they have to be practical and directive.

Classification of Values

Values can be classified into three groups—personal, social and neutral. This classification is based on the traditionally held on customs and beliefs inherited by the person which make a society proud and protective of the culture which is inherited.

Values can also be classified as material values and higher values. Material things have their own values: food, physical health, and clothes are such visible values by which one exhibits one's identity and are essential for survival in a society. Higher values are seen only by way of behaviour. Since food is a necessity for human life, working for daily food is a value, but to share what one has with other needy people is a higher value. Even though joy is a value, all things which give joy need not be values, though there can be a desire to possess all things. Higher values are eternal values: they can be understood as human or divine.

Whenever, there is a doubt; a need for the expression of values becomes apparent. Life is made up of small and big decisions. Where families are authentic in loving one another and caring for each other, obeying God and working for Him as the source and centre of the universe, progress, peace, harmony and human development will be the outcome.

Socialization and Value Formation

Social, religious, and cultural values affect family life to a great extent. In fact no family can exist independently of these factors. One of the most

significant stages of one's life is socialization. Socialization is a process through which the child absorbs, assimilates and internalizes socio-cultural and religious practices from the significant persons in his/her life e.g. parents, teachers, siblings. Thus, a child acquires attitudes and values, some of which pertain to moral standards and others relating to people love and hate, superior and inferior, etc. These attitudes and values exist in children in different ways, at different levels according to the atmosphere, psychological stages and physical conditions.

Socialization is seen by sociologist as a process toward cultural conditioning. For an individual infant to survive, it must be socialized. There is a structural relationship socialization. As result of being socialized by parents, one becomes an agent of socialization for one's children and grand children. These obligations become fixed and specified for generations. It is easy to understand that such a conditioning attached to a joint family system can be so strong in the Indian society as it has existed for over 2000 years with its culture, beliefs and socialization process give a meaningful values to family life that are inseparable from society.

Thus we see that the individuals and the families are motivated to serve the society's interests and keep up the system. In this sense the socialization process is more or less a natural process to make the individual conform to the social norms and cultural pattern of a society. There is a tendency in many individuals, to deviate from this type of forced pattern, since all human beings have an innate longing for freedom and self-expression, for spontaneity and personal identity. This explains the reason for teenagers and young adults growing up with antagonism and rebelling against parents and those in authority.

Value Formation in Parent Child Interaction

The mother-child ties is emotionally intimate which facilitates the process of socialization. The span of

human life is long and hence socialization continues. The pattern of dominance by father or mother gives further authority to what is learned and fixes attitudes and values in the minds of children.

Already learned experience of children through families are made forceful and commanding by the way the society lives and interacts. At this stage, the experience of the father and mother and the strength of the parent-child relationship will determine the values of selfhood (identity, security and self image of the child), which form the core of a child's personality.

Children of pre-school age are already exposed to a competitive world. Parents, out of enthusiasm for proving their identity and getting approval for their status, pressurize their children to achieve excellence in studies, sports, music and other fields and push them beyond their capacity and speed up their performance. But gradually this creates stressful feelings and inferiority complexes in children and they become victims to physical and verbal humiliation in school and at home.

Women's Role Affecting Family Values

We cannot satisfactorily talk about the formation of family values, by passing the nature and role of women in both society and family. The house is the pivot of society and the woman is its centre. The home – the family – is the first institution which imparts self identity to an individual and where he/she formulates a self image. The respect and esteem the mother is given in the family greatly determines the values with which the family looks at others in society.

“A women's position in the family is lowered if she gives birth to female children, and she is looked down upon by others. On the other hand producing sons is considered to be a great achievement” (Basin (ed) 1972). Such families cannot give a positive self-concept to

female children who in turn look at women negatively and pass on negative values to the coming generations.

“The cultural conditioning has gone so deep into the psychology of people of India that even among the educated and so called enlightened and well-to do urban-dwelling people, the birth of son is much more desired”.

Though some change is evident in cities, most of the village women still live under the subjugation of men and traditional social customs.

It is clear from what has been said that one of the important aspects of family values depends on the position that women occupy in home and in society. The women's self-image, the opportunities and congenial environment for utilizing the rights and privileges due to her has a great deal to do with the type of families and the quality of values imparted to the family members. Hence women's empowerment is necessary for the formation of new values in Indian families.

Family Values and Influence of Socio-Cultural and Religious Dimensions

Values in Family and Society

The family is made up of individuals but it is also a part of the larger social network. Thus, individuals are initiators and promoters of culture. Individuals and society are mediated by families. It is in and through families that people learn and pass on values. But all members of a society are under the constant supervision of parents in childhood, of friends in teenage, and of the public in adulthood. Family is where children are trained; the adults feel free to praise, criticize, suggest and order so that the children learn family preferences. They are taught what is right and wrong, what to tell others and not, how to behave inside and outside the

home, who must be their friends etc. All these influence and communicate to the children directly and indirectly the attitudes, values and conduct which remain with them for the rest of their life. What they learn is part of that culture and customs of the society which are valued by the adults.

Family as a social institution is the basic structure of the society. Hence the flow of values between the family and society is very lucid and they interact very closely, intrinsically and inter-dependently before the effect is apparent.

It is not wrong to say that it is through the family that the values and attitudes are absorbed by the child in his/her early age, cultural transmission of particular society is kept up and the major agent for all these is the woman. The significance of the family is the mediating function of family in the larger society, as it links the individual to the larger social structure. As part of the society, families like to keep their identity linked to it, hence the family values remain mostly undifferentiated from the values of the society.

Socially, man's relationship with other human beings is diminishing. His engagements are more with the machine and technically produced means of communication. Communication, which is the medium of relationship and social connection, is no more concerned with human relationships, but media and media-related learning and knowledge. Media also has helped to replace human interactions with group interactions.

Studies (Erich Fromm, 1973) have shown that in societies where human life and peaceful living are valued, there is little competition and there seems to be hardly any exploitation of one another. Work is done essentially in co-operation and there is no economic rivalry. Women are respected and included in the decision making processes. We can also see that the

opposite is true in societies where wealth and success are valued over human life. When money, position and power are valued, individuals grow up with aggression, violence, competition and manipulation. Families become unable to foster human values that can sustain and uphold members, as they are subjected to the negative influences of peers, employees, neighbours and organisations in the society.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, truth and love are the most admirable and cherished values of youth.

Values in Family and Culture

The Indian family is no more unicultural following customs, practices and beliefs of definite pattern but a plurality of practices and patterns. The elders used to be the central persons whom the youngsters looked up to, learned from and were agents of imparting the traditions and values of family, life, parent-child relationship and discipline. The uniqueness of the Indian culture is being engulfed by the global culture.

However, the villages still hold on to the traditional values of hospitality, simplicity, submissiveness, and belief in God. They have been excluded from the modernism by deprivation of economic and technological development.

Man's uniqueness consists in developing language and preserving meaningful, creative behaviour and in communicating the internal conditions and feelings through external expressions. The cultural implications of values are tied up with practices, symbols, religious rituals and the customs of a society. Also, traditions and languages of the different regions or nationalities are expressions of values of the ethnic group to which one belongs. Though India is known for its unique culture, the different religions have specific cultures. Culture expresses itself in one's life-style, food habits, dress and symbolic expressions. Indian culture

is unique in comparison to the West, but each culture has its own richness and inherent in it are specific messages, interpretations and expressions of values the people of that society hold dear. The diversity of perception, experience expressed through different and creative ways become integrated in the life of individuals through learning, understanding and accepting in the given cultural contexts. The family is the place where the atmosphere of unity, integration, harmony and respect of different beliefs and expressions become a necessarily parts of unified consciousness.

India is a land of many striking contrasts, and a great cultural complexity, social diversity and regional variation can be found among the people. And in the diversity of the Indian scene it is very difficult to make any generalized judgments concerning the values in family life. But it is the unity running through diversity which reveals the positive dimensions of social and cultural values in family life.

Older attitudes and prejudices still persist and social opinion is taking its time in changing itself.

As values are integrated with culture, religion as well as socially determined attitudes, behaviour and customs, an evaluative and critically questioning methodology is required for the promotion of family values. In course of social change people adopt new ways of living. Old customs and practices fail to make meaning to younger generations. Hence, the need for introducing meaningful values become a necessity. For example, the role of women was considered to be within the family, taking care of the husband and children, but now as women are working on equal terms with men, outside home the attitude toward women cannot remain the same. This perception affects family values.

Values in Family and Religion

The world is not the ultimate reality. This is the teaching of all Religions. The Bible, Gita, Koran and

other scriptures affirm and acknowledge the one and only powerful and omnipotent God who is invisible to the external eyes and to the physical world in which we live.

All religions emphasize the need for forming a mature conscience in people. Religion provides a code of norms which will guide and enable persons to have an objective understanding of God. Religion must help people to grow in a balanced, harmonious, altruistic attitude which will result in accepting all people as one's relations, regardless of their caste, creed, religion, or customs/language.

It is difficult to differentiate the socio-cultural and religious values as they affect family life. Religion in its purest form deals with one's faith in God and shows how he/she must live in this world. Hence religion frames 'law' or teaches one's duty to God and towards others, which we call Dharma. All religious founders taught how to live our lives in worship to God and our duty towards our neighbour. Hence Buddha taught compassion and less desire for worldly pleasure. Jesus taught of love for neighbour to the extent of giving up one's life for the other in service. Hinduism talks of Nishkamakarma; doing one's duty toward others and not expecting the results of the actions. However, the truth is that it is the religious beliefs of a society that sweeps under all other values in family and society.

Family Values and Attitude toward Sex

According to the study and analysis of number of psychologists and educationists, the attitudes and values (either positive or negative) which the parents have, become the most powerful instrument in the hands of the children for later years. The self-image, as well as the ability to interact with other in children from childhood to later years are affected by the early experience of sex-related values taught in the family.

According to a classic concept a little boy at the age of five or six chooses his mother as the first object of his sexual desires. The same thing is true about girls concerning their father. The upbringing of children with a positive, balanced, relationship with family members and outsiders at this age is essential for the growth of proper values regarding sexuality in children. The understanding of sex as part of the body for a special purpose in the plan of God for the world has to be taught to children gradually as they mature in life.

Respect for all persons, regardless of sex difference is a higher value which very few people possess. At the same time a family that does not respect persons and considers sex as an object of pleasure and a means of play can cause negative understanding of sex in children who may grow up to be exploiters of women in society.

Values in Family and Role of Media

As we have already seen earlier, with the breakdown of the joint family and the advent of industrialization, the family atmosphere has changed drastically. The family has become small in size, the elderly and children are left alone at home and the parents are burdened with over time jobs. The rise of materialism and consumerism has created unnecessary anxieties of isolation and loneliness in families and among families. The advertisements set the norms for values concerning food, dress and friends. The concepts of values are created in children by what they see and hear in the media. T.V., internet, computer and other technological devices have become source of entertainment for both children and adults. In place of listening to the stories of parents and grand parents while going to sleep, children seek music, serials and cartoons before going to bed. Role models for the present generation are film stars who constantly appear on televisions. Balance in the media against the values of families has gone beyond the control of parents.

On the positive side, children are becoming aware of the wider dimension of human life and interactions. Young children are growing rapidly in their intellectual curiosity and general knowledge of the world around them. Teenagers, youth and adults themselves are becoming more aware of their rights. Environmental Preservation, Animal Protection and Human Rights are becoming issues of priority for the young people of today. The demands of children and adults in families to up-keep with the media-world has become an obsession affecting the dignity and self-worth of family members.

Family as the Agent of a New Society

Family in Process of Value Formation

The truth that family is the foundation for a stable and strong society is becoming more and widespread throughout the developing countries. The topic is complicated one, as family, society, culture and religion are inseparable factors and each one has something to do with the shaping of values in the individual and families.

The family is a 'mini school' and it is there the children learn to relate with others. According to physiologists the child perceives and experiences its parents in the first year of life. The child's personality and attitude to a great extent are shaped by the age of four. The significant persons of the child's life in this stage are the mother, father, brothers, uncles and aunties. This is the period in which parents can play a great foundational role in families.

The future of humanity passes by way of family. Philosophers and social analysts have noted that society is a structure made up of families, and that peculiarities of given society can be described by outlining its family relations. The earliest moral and ethical writing concentrated much on family due to its importance as the base of the society. True happiness and progress of

a society depends on the positive attitudes and behaviour of the members of the family. When these attitudes and relatedness extends from family to society, the society mirrors the family. When the influence is vice-versa, the family becomes the mirror of the society. In either situation, both family and society influence each other and one of them will always be dominant.

Family must become the Basic Unit of Change

Families as the basic and most important unit of social institution must be given special attention by any educational field that deal with society and progress. Being the fundamental constituting unit of the society, the family concerns itself with the well being and growth of persons. A happy family is where the parents and children together experience the joy of belonging, and the feeling of being cared for the deepest needs. Food, clothing and shelter are the basic needs of all human beings, but the happiness of a family depends on higher needs such as being loved, trusted, understood, for given, recognized for one's talents, gifts and the ability to reach out to those less fortunate. The fulfillment of family life is in bringing forth persons strong in body, mind and spirit, with emotional maturity and altruistic outlooks as citizens of the nation. Persons must be socialized and educated for bringing about a social change. Hence, schools have a vital role in the attitudinal change and inculcation of values in children. This has to be done in co-operation with families. Parent-Teacher Associations and Management Committees are such means through which schools and families can take co-operative responsibility for education of children in the true spirit of formation.

Personality Traits and Basic Life Orientations

- 1) Basic trust vs. basic mistrust;

- 2) Autonomy vs. shame and doubt;
- 3) Initiative vs. guilt;
- 4) Industry vs. inferiority;
- 5) Identity vs. role confusion,
- 6) Intimacy vs. isolation;
- 7) Generativity vs. stagnation; and
- 8) Ego integrity vs. despair.

Men and woman are made in the image of God so that they can think, question and differentiate between good and bad, design their own destiny and reach the ultimate goal.

Parents' Focus on Value Clarification

In order to function as moral human beings in society, children need to grow in an atmosphere of clearly defined values which are practiced by adults. Children need to see/hear parents doing and talking what they believe in. Mostly, children learn from adults through imitation when they are young, and through reasoning when they grow up. They look for impartiality in behaviour and preaching in practice. Hence there is a need for clarification of values in the day-to-day life of the families. Initiated by parents, children seek guidance and answers to question in order to understand and accept values in the light of their purpose in life. Therefore, every family's first priority in training and educating children must begin with the question of personal identity.

Who am I? Where have I come from? Where am I going? This basic foundational principles of life must become a stepping stone for the positive socialization of children. Religious and moral values of God as the Creator-Father and the Universe as His Creation – Home should occupy important place in their value domain. A

relationship with self, with God and with others will pave the way through to the child's mind. Children then will learn to relate to others as extension of themselves and develop social consciousness. The understanding of personal, social and spiritual relationships will grow in children through their experience in the family with the interaction with one another, day in and day out.

Family Values and Positive Strokes

Psychologists have come to the conclusion that positive thinking is the secret of happiness. In order to grow up in positive thinking, one must be exposed to positive strokes. The families where parents accept one another and encourage what they are and their contributions, health and happiness abound. From childhood on, children need to feel secure in themselves from the recognition and understanding they get from their significant people. Positive strokes can be effective in families for the proper self-image and upbringing of children.

Case studies show that the most unhappy and violent people have been those whose childhood was spent with adults who were strict, constantly nagging, criticizing, and condemning. Allowing children to grow up with clearly defined freedom, respect, love, encouragement and appreciation will result in making new generations of good citizens for the nation. The quality of change thus brought about in persons through families will prepare the groundwork for causing a gradual change in the society. Therefore, the parents must concentrate on giving positive strokes to the children in order to direct them toward a new value system making families agents of social change.

Marriage is a point of departure in which boys and girls, brothers, and sisters realize themselves as persons with responsibilities in life, from individual ties with other persons and appear mature and able to make decisions for life.

Recommendations

In order to form families with lasting value that can influence society and change it for the better, the following values must be inculcated and transmitted to children both by parents and social institutions.

- 1) Family life must be based on truth, faith and justice.
- 2) A culture of peace, brotherhood and tolerance must be taught in families.
- 3) Respect for life and respect for different views regardless of religions, ethnicity and regions must be fostered in families.
- 4) A sense of responsibility for the welfare of others; family must be recognized by society and educational systems as a primary unit of society.
- 5) Adults must become examples of inter-faith dialogue, critical analysts of social issues and promoters of Nation Building.
- 6) True patriotism must be affected in children through parent's efforts and social institutions.
- 7) Education at home and in an institutional set up must direct the yearning of human communion and self-realization.
- 8) Young people must be recognized for their energy, enthusiasm and new knowledge and the elderly must be respected for their wisdom and practical knowledge.
- 9) Correct judgment and common sense must be cultivated in children right from childhood.
- 10) Opportunities for making personal decisions and evaluating the choices be made and carried out.

- 11) Children must be brought up with consideration for their aesthetic, moral, intellectual and emotional development.
- 12) Boys and girls must be brought up at home with equal participation in the household duties, given equal treatment and respect.
- 13) A sense of compassion for the elderly and those less fortunate due to cosmic, social or economic situations must be part of children's curriculum.
- 14) Sacredness of sex, beauty of growing up and happiness of family life must become experiences for children in families.
- 15) Lastly, there must be the conviction that every parents in this world has a privileged duty of being an agent of re-creating the society and transforming the world.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have examined the concepts of family values, types of family and different factors in society affecting family values. We have also looked at the concepts of culture and religion and how important and inter-connected they are in the value formation of individual and to the network of society.

We have dedicated a great deal of time to the study of Indian society and the role of family values. Lastly, we have focused on some important points on the role of parents in the formation of values in different areas of human life. Through the family the mothers role in forming human and divine values in children and in transforming the society is pointed out. However, concern is expressed for the need of family and society, taking a co-operative and co-responsible role in value formation. The chapter ends with recommendations for parents to take initiatives in making families agents of change in the society.

References

Bhasin, Kamla, Edited (1972), *The Position of women in India*.

Bird, Joseph and Lois (1983), *To Live as Family: An Experience of Love and Bonding*.

Fromm, Eric (1973), *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*.

Mascarenhas, M.M., *Pariwarik Jeevan Shiksha (Hindi)*, Vikas Publication House.