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**MODERNITY AND THE HINDU EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM:
A PROBLEMATIC INTERACTION**

by

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MODERNITY AND THE HINDU EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM: A PROBLEMATIC INTERACTION

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The influence of modernity and industrialization upon family structure has furnished a lively and long-standing topic of discussion among sociologists, social anthropologists, and historians alike. Conventional sociological theory holds that with the advent of socio-cultural modernity comes an inevitable breakdown in traditional family structure. More specifically, the view has prevailed that the extended family system typical of an agrarian, pre-industrial economy must inevitably give way to a smaller, more adaptive nuclear family system once a modern industrial economy begins to develop. The intricate network of identities, roles, and relationships constitutive of an extended family, it has been argued, are gradually eroded by the inexorable effects of urbanization and industrialization and the concomitant emergence of a scientific technological culture.

Kingsley Davis, for example, argues that "...urbanization represents a revolutionary change in the whole pattern of social life. Itself a product of basic economic and technological developments, it tends in turn, once it comes into being, to affect every aspect of existence."¹ He further claims: "Urbanization is so widespread, so much a part of industrial civilization, and gaining so rapidly, that any return to rurality, even with major catastrophes, appears unlikely."² Consequently, or so he alleges, the eclipse and eventual disappearance of traditional patterns of life typical of rural agricultural societies are as irreversible as they are inevitable.

In similar fashion, Linton argues that industrialization and technological advances, which bring in their wake economic improvements, are nevertheless socially disruptive in

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the most profound and abiding sense imaginable. Such a change, he argues is:

always destructive to a joint family system. This can be seen even in Europe, where the early Roman and Germanic families were not unlike the oriental joint families. Such families broke down under the impact of developing mercantilism with its increase in individual opportunity, while their complete destruction came with the rise of modern mechanized civilization. Here in the United States we have reached the low point in a process of breakdown of kin structure which has reduced our functional kin group to the primary, biologically determined one of parents and children.³

"The greater the opportunities for individual economic profit provided by any socio-cultural situation," he adds, "the weaker the ties of extended kinship will become."⁴

The case of India, as it turns out, however, is arguably anomalous. Modernism has been making inroads into the country's traditional culture for well over a century. An extensive industrial infrastructure is already in place and has been in process of expansion throughout most of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, as will be shown, something very much resembling the traditional Indian extended family, undergirded by the usual system of reciprocal duties, obligations, responsibilities and shared sense of identity or kinship, remains largely intact. To the extent that this remains the case--that is, to the degree that one can point to the remarkable resiliency of a traditional familial structure in the midst of an otherwise transformed socio-economic order--its persistence remains to be explained. Moreover, if a persuasive case can be made for the proposition that India does afford an exception to the general rule, current views regarding the alleged inevitability of its disappearance will need to be revised.

India's Emergent Modernity

Typical symptoms or signs of modernity have long prevailed within the Indian context.

With the advent of British rule, India was introduced to new technological knowledge which for Indians resulted in unprecedented urbanization. Robert Crane, among others, has noted that whereas in 1921 approximately 11 percent of the Indian population was urban, in 1941 it increased to 13 percent, and in 1951 there was a further increase to 17 percent. In concrete terms, the 17 percent signifies sixty-one million people:

Between 1921 and 1941 the total urban population grew by 33.5 percent, while in the most recent decade its rate of growth is even more rapid. Moreover, in 1951 there were five "million" cities in India, whereas there had been two such cities in 1941. Furthermore, while the urban population was growing by one-third between 1921 and 1941, the general increase of the population was only 15 percent. Thus there is a strong trend toward urbanism, of which the most recent decade has seen the greatest development.⁵

Similarly, Kingsley Davis has documented that in India the fastest urbanization has occurred since 1941.⁶

Nevertheless, there are persuasive indications that the traditional Indian extended family remains robust, that a family structure rooted in a rural, pre-modern culture remains alive and well. Milton Singer, for one, judges the Indian extended family system to have proven itself remarkably resilient in recent decades and still adaptive to cultural change today. In the midst of a rapidly emerging fully modernized industrial state, he points out, Indian culture preserves family patterns that otherwise one might be led to believe would be fast disappearing.

Nor can the persistence of the traditional family be attributed simply to cultural lag. Traditional family roles retain their force in urban and rural settings alike, maintaining a hold upon the professional classes and urban proletariat as well as among the rural peasantry. The question then is how to account for the resilience of the traditional family in an otherwise transformed social structure?

This paper attempts to explore some of the primary factors responsible for the enduring

vitality of the traditional extended family system in India. An attempt will be made to show that the Indian family is in fact a functional adaptation to the forces of modernity. Precisely because modernity accentuates social alienation and cultural discontinuity, the traditional family structure appears to provide a needed corrective in terms of a sense of place, personal identity, self-worth, social role, and duty in modern life. Further, it is conjectured that within the Indian experience an accommodation and adaptation of the old with the new is likely to continue.

Defining the Joint Family

Classical Hindu literature clearly attests to the fact that India's joint or extended family system existed in India in antiquity. Accounts of family life given in the epics *Rāmāyana* and *Mahābhārata*, for example, prove without doubt that even in 1,000 B.C. the joint family system prevailed; and it has continued to do so in an unbroken pattern down through the millennia.

The question is generally raised: What is a joint family? How should the joint family be defined? What makes a family a joint family? Is a family consisting of parents, sons, and daughter-in-laws without children to be classified as joint or nuclear? Some maintain that such families are nuclear because joint families consist of at least three generations. On the other hand, there are those who classify such families as joint, because in their opinions these families represent only a phase in the domestic cycle of births, marriages, and deaths in which nuclear families will grow into joint families.

Various definitions of a joint family have been offered by modern scholars. Of these, Irawati Karve's definition is most succinct and precise. "A joint family is a group of people who generally live under one roof, who eat food cooked at one hearth, who hold property in common and who participate in common family worship and are related to each

other as some particular type of kindred."⁷ B. R. Aggarwala notes that a specific authority structure also characterizes the Indian extended family system. In a joint family, the members "are under the authority of the elder in matters of family and religion, joint investment of capital, joint enjoyment of profits, and of incurring birth, marriage and death."⁸

Significantly, however, Aggarwala parts company with Karve in arguing that it is *not* necessary for all members to live under the same roof and eat out of the same kitchen in order for them to qualify as a joint family: "For management of business a brother may stay at Calcutta, the father may stay at Delhi, a cousin may stay at Madras and the grandfather at the native place, and manage the affairs allotted to them."⁹ This geographical dispersion, he notes, by no means should be regarded as a disintegration or disruption of the joint family itself. As he phrases it, "What constitutes the essence of a joint family is their common way of living or way of living common to their constituents."¹⁰

I. P. Desai¹¹ and Milton Singer¹² stress mutual obligations. Desai criticizes the census approach where "family is understood as a conglomeration of individuals whose classification can be decided solely on the basis of number of persons composing it."¹³ He contends that "the type of family is not to be determined by the fact of co-residence, commensality or the size of the group. It is, rather, the felt and apparent *relationships* among the members of a family and the ties between one household and another that most meaningfully defines the family of either given household."¹⁴

Singer, for his part, considers the more abstract concept of the joint family as "a social structure embedded within the framework of a specific kind of social system." As a social structure, a joint family is "a network of social relations among persons related in specified ways."¹⁵ These social relations assume the form of a set of customary mutual obligations that define appropriate norms of behavior.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that the discussion here will not be concerned with

types or subsets of joint families, for example, patrilineal and matrilineal variations. For present purposes, it is enough to note that a group of persons is a "joint family" if they are held together by a discrete and stable network of social obligations. Factors such as joint residence and joint property are only relevant insofar as they form a part of the total structure of obligations. In short, the presence or absence of a particular feature does not necessarily determine or define whether a given aggregate of persons constitutes a joint family. A three or four-generational group of persons related by blood, makes up a joint family when they are held together by what may be termed, a "joint family principle."*

The Alleged Disintegration of the Joint Family in India

As previously noted, according to numerous Western social theorists, the process of modernization fragments the extended or joint family into nuclear family units. This seems to have been the common historical pattern prevailing in Europe, at any rate; and early research on the transformation of rural societies elsewhere has appeared to substantiate the general thesis. Further support for the notion that the structure of the extended family is functionally adapted to an agricultural society but dysfunctional in an industrial society has been forthcoming from numerous statistical analyses showing a marked increase in nuclear families in industrial countries. Hence it is hardly surprising that predictions to the effect that the Indian experience will conform to the same pattern abound. A breakdown of the joint family in India has long been forecast. Others assume that such a breakdown is in fact already occurring and that the Indian traditional family has begun breaking into smaller, isolated family associated with the Western model of urban society. Aileen Ross in *The Hindu Family In Its Urban Setting*, for example, unequivocally purports to show "how industrialization and urbanization are forcing changes into its structure and relationships, and causing many families to break down into smaller units."¹⁶ That breakdown, the

author contends, entails movement out of the main family and the establishment of separate homes.

This view, however, has been challenged by several studies showing there is no close link between industrialization and urbanization, on the one hand, and the particular form a family assumes, on the other. Especially noteworthy is M. S. Gore's analysis of Aggarwal families, traders and merchants by occupation, who live in and around Delhi.¹⁷ His study included both urban and rural residents as well as residents from "fringe" villages.¹⁸ Gore organized his urban sample into "local" and "immigrant" families, and non-urban units into "fringe" and "rural" families, applying the term "family" to both nuclear and joint aggregates of people. A total of 499 families participated in his survey: 399 in the main sample and another hundred in an additional sample. The latter families consisted of professionals and office workers not engaged in traditional occupations whose educational level was shown to be substantially higher than that typical within families comprising the main survey.

Two hundred and sixty three out of 499 respondents were from nuclear families and 22.6 percent of these were previous residents of joint families.¹⁹ Responses to queries on living arrangements and the position of women in the family exhibited a clear preference for traditional modes or habits of living. Members of the nuclear families reported consistently that they did not oppose joint family living or look upon it with disfavor. Rather, they indicated they had moved away from the joint family for occupational reasons, or had parted on the death of both parents, or after all the brothers had been married and settled, or simply as a matter of "mutual consent."²⁰ They lived in nuclear style families only out of necessity; and practical considerations alone made it impossible for them to participate as member of a joint family family on a daily basis. Overall, as Gore noted, the tendency among all respondents was to interpret the joint family ideal as still signifying filial and not simply fraternal solidarity.²¹

From his analysis of familial organization and structure, Gore drew two conclusions.

He found, first, that the families in his sample still largely conformed to a "pattern of joint living in behaviour, role, perception and attitudes."²² Secondly, while conceding that urban residence and education do seem to introduce a certain measure of variation in the structural patterns observed, Gore argues that the variability noted was more a matter of attitudinal change than overt changes in behavior or conduct.²³ Respondents with a high school or college education, for example, were more favorable to the suggestion of family change. However, urban residence, in itself did not favor family change.²⁴ In fact, Gore's study suggests that within the main sample, composed by those of limited education engaged in traditional occupational pursuits, *rural-urban differences were not apparent* [emphasis supplied].²⁵

In Singer's study, 19 industrial leaders and members of their families living in the city of Madras were interviewed to determine the degree to which they adhered to old family ideals and values despite their location in an urban setting.²⁶ They came from a variety of religions and castes: nine out of the nineteen were *brahmins*, four were *kshatriyas*, one was a Gujarati, one an Andhra Kamma, one a Mudaliyar, two were Muslims, and another was a Syrian Christian. Seventeen out of the nineteen were heads of industries in the private sector. Singer's sample included both the general manager of a public sector industry, and a state minister of industries. Others held leadership positions in manufacturing, textiles, transportation, heavy industry, and so on. Thus, the study consisted of a group of individuals playing an important and significant role in industrial development.

Singer utilized a genealogical method for studying social change, collecting and tracing basic demographic and social data through genealogies. Singer argues that "the genealogies, when collected to include basic demographic and social characteristics such as age, sex, kinship terminologies and behavior, personal names, clan names, local residence, migrations, and social groups also provided systematic information about social

organization which could be later analyzed and internally checked."²⁷ In so doing, Singer felt he could avoid several "sterile assumptions" common to similar research. He notes:

One of these is the assumption that modernization is an abstract force, in the form of industry or urbanism, confronting the force of traditionalism in the form of traditional societies and traditional cultures. Another is that such confrontation must lead to the breakdown of the traditional social and cultural forms, or, if in a particular case this breakdown does not occur, then the forces of traditionalism must have been too strong and we should expect a failure of modernization and a persistence of the traditional forms.²⁸

Rather than simply setting forces of modernization against traditional family institutions, Singer alleges that the use of genealogical data allows one to scrutinize adaptive responses to industrialization by traditional institutions without prejudging the incompatibility of the traditional joint family system with industrialization and urbanization.

A pattern of intergenerational change dominated the families selected for Singer's study. He found that all respondents were born in non-urban areas and had later moved to metropolitan areas. Twelve out of the nineteen lived in nuclear family households. Married daughters lived with or near their husband's families; married sons lived away from the home. In all cases, with one exception, the trend signified preference for fewer children.

The evidence of intergenerational change might lead one to ask, as Singer puts it, "Are there any intergenerational changes that indicate a structural change in the joint family system associated with urbanization and industrialization?"²⁹ The evidence of intergenerational change in family size, composition and residence might lead one to mistakenly conclude that "this trend is functionally associated with the move to the city and industrial entrepreneurship."³⁰ However, if we raise a different question as to whether there is any evidence of intergenerational *persistence*, we discover that such evidence is

not hard to find. Seven of the nineteen families lived in a very large or moderately large joint families. Married sons, who lived away from home, did not live very far distant. Moreover, contact was maintained with both urban and non-urban relatives by frequent visits on the occasion of a birth, a wedding or a death in the family, not to mention attendance at various religious and social functions.

Thus, though superficially the quantitative evidence might appear to have indicated a structural shift to a nuclear family dispersion, in the sense of an array of nuclear households supplanting a single original joint family, qualitatively, the evidence for structural *persistence* seemed equally strong because "families living in nuclear households continue to maintain numerous joint family obligations and, for the most part, continue to subscribe to the norms of that system."³¹ Singer concluded that "structural change and structural persistence are *not* mutually exclusive phenomena, that *both* are occurring simultaneously" in the Indian context.³²

Singer identifies several kinds of adaptive processes by which families maintain or modify joint family structures in an industrial or urban setting:

1. "Compartmentalization" refers to the maintenance of religious and traditional values at home, while allowing a departure from tradition at the work place, illustrated, for example, by the consumption of alcoholic beverages and meat dishes, the wearing of Western-style clothes, and so on. This process, however, it might be noted, is not restricted to industrialist elites; even lower class workers commonly maintain separate standards for conduct in the work sphere as distinct from those adhered to in the domestic arena.

2. "Vicarious ritualization" represents a second adaptive process cited by Singer. An industrialist employs professional priests to perform daily rituals on his behalf, observances in which his wife and children participate without his doing so, thereby leaving him more time to conduct business affairs without diminishing the importance of

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daily worship. He does not reject his religious duties but delegates them to others.

3. A functional separation of commercial "ownership" from "control" is yet another expedient, one allowing a company to be organized as the subsidiary of a parent company owned by the family. Whereas nominally the entire family owns the company, one member is made the controlling figure for a particular subsidiary. Seventeen of the nineteen companies in Singer's study were family firms. This system has striking parallels with the structure of the joint household: the father or the eldest male is the head of the joint family and makes all the important decisions.

4. Occasionally this parallel is extended directly to the operation of an industrial or mercantile enterprise as a whole. "Household Management in Industry," i.e., the traditional joint family system and its practices, Singer maintains, offer some distinct advantages for organizing an industrial enterprise.³³ In seven of the nineteen families under study, family sons and grandsons were being differently trained so that their skills could be utilized in different branches of the company's operations (for example, administration, fiscal management, engineering, product development, sales, and so on). The entire family owns the property, and although the head of the family only owns a share of the family property, he is the controlling authority and makes all the major and policy decisions. This parallel clearly exhibits, notes Singer, that in the Indian context the joint family managements practices extend to the industrial arena.

5. As older family members retire, they are replaced by younger members of the family. "Cycles of Authority," though theoretically ideal from the point of view of controlling a family, of course is liable to disruption by any number of possible contingencies, including the lack of heirs, worker discontent prompted by nepotism, the reluctance of younger family members to tailor their careers to a predetermined plan, and so forth.

The modern Indian city, observes Singer, "has simply become a new arena for the working of the joint family."³⁴ Nobody can deny that there are "structural congruities

between the joint family system and the requirements of modernity.³⁵ The extended family system "provides a nucleus of capital" and "a well-structured pattern of authority, succession, and inheritance based on the relationships of father and sons."³⁶ Also, mutual consultation and consensus are deemed important when making decisions.

Whether the traditional joint family practice will be maintained by future generations remains to be seen. However, it seems apparent that the future of the traditional Indian joint family does not depend on any increase of nuclear-type families, nor does the persistence of a joint family system necessarily undermine economic change and growth. People are neither rejecting joint family living *in toto*, nor are they turning unqualifiedly to the nuclear family system. Further, among some groups, the number of nuclear families has increased because of economic variables rather than because of any popular reluctance to maintain joint family obligations.

There is also ample evidence to show that city life does not necessarily cause the disintegration of the joint family system. Agarwala, in his study of Marwadi communities, found in big metropolitan centers for over a century, claims that this "community is an outstanding example of the obdurate continuance of the joint-family and caste-system in spite of industrialization, technocracy and Western education and in some respects, rather because of them."³⁷ Aiyappan makes the same point when he states that "higher castes and higher income groups in the city have a greater percentage of joint families and family solidarity is stronger among them."³⁸

This phenomena, however, is not limited to India's upper classes. Men who migrate to large metropolitan cities to look for work typically tend to maintain close connections with their families in their ancestral villages. The urban household is considered to be *a part of*, or a geographical extension of, the joint household sited in the village, and not a segment of the family that has broken off from the family for reasons of individual personal gain or benefit. At times male workers move to the city alone, leaving their wives and children

behind. Yet virtually all major decisions regarding education, employment, weddings, and the like are made only after due consultation with the father who resides in the village. Everything happens only with the express authorization of the eldest male member of the family. These transplanted urban workers return to their respective villages for religious and social functions, and eventually return there to retire. Karve states:

...Instead of founding independent families in the towns where they are employed, they tend to keep their ties with the family at home. They send money to the impoverished farmers at home, send their wives home for child-birth and go themselves for an occasional holiday or in times of need. The urge to visit the family for certain festivities and at sowing and harvesting times is so great that there is seasonal migration of mill-labourers in all industrial towns. Even if a man earns good wages it is difficult for him to find a bride from a decent house if he has no family with some land in some village.³⁹

Although these studies arrive at varied conclusions, they clearly demonstrate there is little significant increase in truly independent nuclear households in urban areas. Ishwaran's study of Shivapur, a multi-caste village in south India, revealed that for every 100 nuclear families there were 118 extended families. Despite a substantial number of "elementary" [nuclear] families, he notes, people still favored the extended family system: 86.5% favored the extended family system, 11.0% were in favor of the nuclear family system, 2.0% were indifferent, and 0.5% chose not to respond. He observes that the "nuclear families are strongly buttressed by extended kinship. Far from being isolated and atomized, the urban nuclear family is organically fused with the extended kinship network."⁴⁰ His study arrives at the following conclusion: "In India the traditional family system still exists as a functional unit in most ways except residentially. At the interaction level, practically every elementary family is closely dependent on its extended kinship configuration, for all its major activities."⁴¹

Likewise, Joan P. Mencher, in her study on women agricultural laborers and land owners arrives at the following conclusion: " It should also be noted that even when they [women] do not actually live within extended kin there is a tendency (at least in the nucleated village) to live close to the extended kin most of the time."⁴² Mencher further notes: "Most of my informants over the years could not conceive of spending a night alone in a room, or being without others around all of the time. It is a matter of deep cultural attitudes which in this case tend to override the need for autonomy."⁴³

To recapitulate, the major thesis herein offered is that it is a mistake to equate the appearance of nuclear living units with the supposed disintegration of the extended or joint family in India. As one scholar argues: "Despite the prevalence of a large number of nuclear families, empirical evidence suggests the Indian attitudes and values are still generally in favor of the joint family.... Even though nuclear groups do exist in India, nuclearity is not the prevalent pattern of family."⁴⁴ The most meaningful characterization or interpretation of an extended family acknowledges the primal role of shared identity, the fabric of interactive relationships and duties and obligations, a lived sense of "continuity" and inseparability, as these are experienced by those who interpret and define themselves as members of a common family unit. While it remains true to observe that economic considerations in fact have necessitated the creation of quasi-independent living arrangements or units in urban areas, their existence in no way has diminished the authority or force of familial kinship ties. Phenomenologically speaking, as it were, the point to be kept central is that the fundamental identity of a family inheres in a shared consciousness of that identity by those involved. Consanguinity, not literal physical conjugation, is the critical variable defining a family.

It is often difficult to disentangle the changes that may arise as a result of industrialization, and the changes that might occur or have existed prior to industrialization. In his *Foreword* to Gore's book, W. G. Goode points out that "family changes occur without any substantial impact from industrialization...[and that] changes in family patterns

themselves may be important in facilitating urbanization-industrialization."⁴⁵

Factors Contributing to the Persistence of the Indian

Extended Family

Processes of urbanization and industrialization do not appear to have affected the Indian system to the same degree or perhaps in quite the same way as they have affected modern Western societies. Therefore, it seems imperative to examine possible factors contributing to the persistence of the Indian joint family system. And even if the Indian extended family *is* in fact moving towards the nuclear family system, it remains worthwhile to consider some of the factors at work retarding this process.

First and foremost, it is important to note that despite extensive urbanization life in India still revolves around the village. India's economy has been primarily an agricultural one, reflecting a production system requiring only rudimentary specialization at best and, for most of those engaged in subsistence agriculture, little technological knowledge. Farming neither requires nor permits extensive opportunities for geographical mobility. Hence, traditional village society works--or, rather, has been sustained in the past-- without benefit of any appreciable need for extensive or prolonged formal schooling. In the natural order of things, the farmer learns by doing, by direct first-hand observation and experience, by reproducing received customs, traditions and modes of organizing labor. Economically, the advantage lies with a multi-generational family in which young and old alike work cooperatively in raising livestock and foodstuffs.

Secondly, the custom of early marriage has tended to contribute to the stability of the family. Roles in a joint family are clearly defined. People are expected to live by the rules. There is always a built in baby-sitter to take care in crises or in times of emergency. Each son, after getting married, has been expected to bring his wife home. All eat from the same

kitchen, live in the same house, and share from the same common income. Mandelbaum amplifies the same theme in observing:

In the joint family there is immediate aid to tide a member over illness; there is the increased efficiency of pooled labor and economies of a single kitchen and household; and there is greater strength to ward off encroachments from others. Domestic rites and celebrations can be staged more elegantly by a large family, and the resulting prestige enhances all within the family.⁴⁶

Thirdly, India's traditional caste system has tended to impede both geographical and social mobility. Even among the wealthiest, and educated families very seldom are marriages performed outside the caste. Defined by geographical as well as social boundaries, caste has served to buttress the stability of the Indian social order by conferring upon it an inflexibility and rigidity only rarely found elsewhere in pre-modern societies. As Ross notes, for example, although internal migration in India has been extensive in terms of the numbers of people involved over time, it has been small in proportion to the total population. In consequence, India has not been subjected to massive disruptions associated with large-scale internal migrations, as have many other countries. Chief among the many forces responsible, of course, has been the caste system itself--any long-standing suppression of social mobility tends to circumscribe geographical mobility as well.⁴⁷

Although unquestionably the stability and seeming permanence of the Indian social hierarchy have been purchased at considerable human cost, it likewise remains evident that the caste system has slowed popular acceptance of such familiar Western notions as egalitarianism, equality of opportunity, individualism and initiative--all potentially subversive of traditional society. Hence, together with the subcontinent's comparative geographical isolation from Europe, India has managed to insulate itself from at least some of the more unsettling consequences of the very same Industrial Revolution it has now embraced.⁴⁸

Fifthly, traditional Indian laws of inheritance have tended to work in favor of the joint household. As Mandelbaum comments:

[The] ideal of filial-fraternal solidarity has been reinforced by being built into the chief textbook of Hindu law, the *Mitakshara* of the twelfth century. Under this code each male is entitled to an equal share of the family property from the moment of his birth; hence all brothers are copartners, each entitled to the same share his father and brothers have. Joint ownership is assumed by law, and the assumption usually implies, though it does not require, joint residence and joint social and economic activities.⁴⁹

Finally, and most importantly, psychological and ideological factors ought not to be overlooked in attempting to account for the stability and persistence of the joint extended family in the Indian context. Traditionally, it will be recalled, a person's status has been thought to depend on his family's reputation and social standing, not upon type of employment or any of the other indicators of personal status that have figured so significantly in Western societies. This is to say, among other things, that a person's reputation largely depends on his family's reputation. In turn, family authority more often than not proves decisive in controlling major decisions affecting the life of any individual family member. A person's sense of self generally develops within the family, and he or she feels a strong identification with the family. Marriage, rather than being simply a relationship between two atomistic persons, for example, is fundamentally a relationship between two families. The self-identity of each partner is not something separate and apart from the identity of the family with which each, respectively, has been a part.

Particularly appropos here is Ross' comment on the remarkable perseverance of traditional Indian mores:

Many customs, and much of the social structure, historically isolated from modern technological and industrial developments, have remained essentially the same. Such deeply laid patterns of behavior do not respond easily to change. Some of the more superficial aspects may alter fairly

readily-- grandsons, for example, may ride tractors when their grandfathers used bullock carts--but underlying ideologies and deeply embedded patterns of relationships are more resistant.⁵⁰

The essential truth of Ross' observation about "embedded patterns of relationships," of course, is most aptly summarized and explained by the Indian notion of *dharma*--those normative and regulative principles for the ordering of the social world that have been revered in Hindu thought since antiquity. Thus, the stability of the joint family system in India is partly insured by social and economic pressures and partly by *dharma*.

In its most concrete and particularistic application to society, *dharma* implies a complex web of obligations and prescriptions applicable to all, though varying by social class, obligation, gender, age and position or context. However, the *dharma* of a given individual, for example, may change according to time and circumstances. In fact, it is supposed to change from age to age. Again, there is one set of norms laid down which governs one's behavior during a time of stress, which might be very different from what would be expected of one in ordinary circumstances. The *Santi Parva* of the epic *Mahābhārata* clearly emphasizes this point. It is stated that "in response to the demands of time and place what is proper may become improper, and what is improper may become proper."⁵¹ Thus, whereas Westerners may tend to dichotomize rigidity and flexibility, persistence and change, Indians see no problem whatsoever in speaking of stability and rigidity as aspects of the same function. Radhakrishnan subsequently reiterates the same point when he says that: "We are today in the midst of a Hindu Renaissance, waiting for a new SMṚITI, which will emphasize the essentials of the Hindu spirit and effect changes in its form so as to make them more relevant to the changing conditions of India and the world."⁵² Hence, potential for change is an essential element in Indian philosophy, as one of the aspects of *dharma*. The importance of this element of flexibility cannot be underestimated: it certainly made it less difficult for the members of a joint family to

challenge, to interpret, to understand, to comprehend, and ultimately come to terms with the traditional values and mores. They are not outside their tradition, but they transcend those elements that no longer have relevance, validity, or value in their present situation. Their life-style mediates between, or better yet, arbitrates between that which was and that which is yet to be, and that which is in process of coming into being.

In closing, a few words about the categories of "tradition" and "modernity" are in order. These categories imply a distinction or contrast that is presumed to be self-evident and intuitive. In ordinary discourse it is commonly assumed that the concept of tradition is to be juxtaposed against, or exists somehow in a state of tension with, that of modernity. The attempt to apply these categories in certain real-life situations or contexts, however, is fraught with difficulty.

It seems to me that those who maintain that the Indian extended family system is or will disintegrate into the nuclear family unit presuppose that tradition and modernity are opposed to each other. These analyses of social and political change juxtapose modernity and tradition with the intent of underscoring or highlighting the tensions between the two in the lives of people. In an anthropological or sociological sense, for example, one is inclined to associate tradition with parochialism, with reliance upon pre-scientific or non-scientific modes of apprehension and ways of understanding the world, with a shared social reality dominated by relatively inflexible, long-established customs, manners, and more. Tradition connotes or is associated with stereotypical role models, a sharp distinction between male and female prerogatives, and unquestioning acquiescence to age-old and time honored-differences which are presumed to be self-evident between maleness/femaleness, masculine/feminine, and between men/women. Reason, progress, science, flexibility, and openness on the other hand, connote modernity. And, thus, the analysis proceeds and hinges upon the interplay of these two sets of ways of living in the world.

Tradition is, by and large, a crystallization of important surviving modes of thought or action prevalent for a considerable period of time in history. Thus, in its conventional sense, traditional connotes stability, stasis, a relatively unchanged and unchanging cultural order. Literally, it means "adherence to what was." The reference is to life-styles, modes of thinking, intellectual ideas, gender-linked roles, forms and patterns of social organization, cultural ideology, or whatever. To speak of a tradition is to speak of a cultural, sociological and ideological configuration committed to its own maintenance. Its tendency is to resist change that is perceived, rightly or wrongly, to threaten those core values on which the society is built. Apropos here is Max Radin's definition of tradition:

Strictly and properly speaking . . . a tradition is not a mere observed fact like an existing custom, nor a story that exhausts its significance in being told; it is an idea which expresses a value judgment. A certain way of acting is regarded as right; a certain order or arrangement is held desirable. The maintenance of the tradition is the assertion of this judgment.⁵³

It seems to me that a negotiable sense of modernity implies an element of self-consciousness, the element of choice: of options, alternatives, selections. One can begin to speak of modernity within a traditionalist context at the point when people begin to become self-conscious about their place in a tradition. One enters into a dialogue with the past. One is not seeking to escape one's past but rather seeking to use it in ways that seem defensible in a new set of circumstances. One promising clue to understand modernity lies in the idea of 'critical spirit'. And, 'critical spirit' means 'self-critically aware'.

Let me illustrate this point with an example. At one point the North American Indians knew only the tribal way of life. They led an isolated life, devoid of external influences. They lived through the conventions of their culture and knew no other alternatives. At the point when they had to make choices among alternatives, they began to learn how to live within their own culture, while in some sense achieving a vantage point permitting them to perceive it from the outside inward as well as from the inside out. They became self-

conscious and entered into a dialogue, so to speak, with their own culture. At this juncture, it was not a matter of becoming modern Indian and securing a job on Wall Street, wearing a three-piece suit and carrying an attaché case, nor was it a matter of carrying an attaché case adorned with a head feather, but, rather, a matter of the extent to which they would remain faithful to the traditions of the past and to what extent they would break traditions for the sake of what was new--new possibilities in the future, for creating and expanding alternative ways of living a life. And, it is here, that we have a meeting of tradition and modernity.

In this sense, even in the Indian context, modernity manifests itself as a willingness and an ability to discriminate among elements of the past. An Indian woman may opt to retain her allegiance to many important cultural, social, religious, philosophical, and ideological traditions, live with them quite comfortably and willingly embrace them while rejecting other elements of the past. It is not an 'either-or' dilemma. A modern working woman— independent, goal-oriented, educated, self-motivated, assertive, and accustomed to decision making— may still prefer to live in a joint family. A recent survey conducted by the Delhi branch manager of Pathfinders, dispels the stereotypical prejudices: "What came through was a revelation of sorts: most working women attached precedence to family over their jobs, and preferred to live in joint families where their children would be looked after."⁵⁴

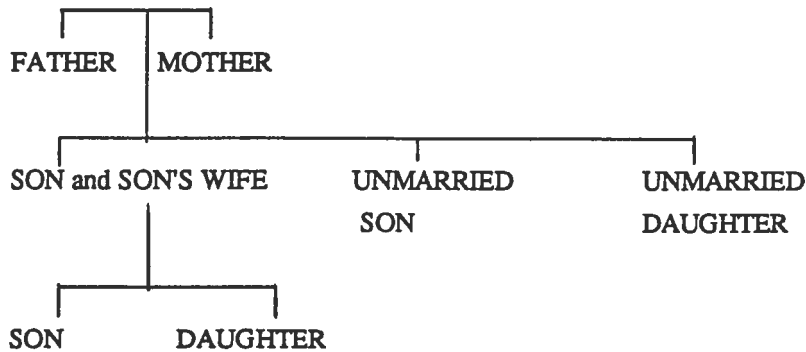
The impact of industrialization and urbanization on the Indian joint family has been limited. It has not brought about its disintegration. Goode very aptly observes:

Of prime importance, perhaps, is that...change has been taking place in the face of relatively little industrialization. The changes have been too many, and in too many parts of the total kin and family structure, to be attributed solely to industrialization--or, for that matter, to urbanization, since India had cities for thousands of years. We must recognize the extent to which many indigenous Indian ideological forces have been at work, perhaps usually in the same direction as the forces whose origin was essentially Western.⁵⁵

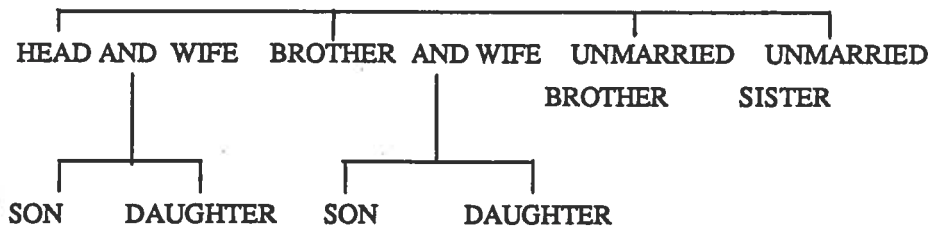
Perhaps, scholars have overemphasized the role of industrialization and urbanization. Although the joint family is not disintegrating as some scholars assume, it is undergoing a lot of change. It is not an exaggeration to say that the future of the joint family may depend upon the way the tensions and conflicts on the ideological and economic levels are resolved. Perhaps, we should look internally rather than externally to account for the phenomenon of change. This, however, should be the topic of another study.

***THE JOINT FAMILY**

TYPE A



TYPE B



Type A is an ideal type of joint family. It consists of a man and wife, their unmarried sons, unmarried daughters, married sons and wives and their children. In this type, the parents are still alive.

In Type B the parents are dead and the brothers live together with their families and children.

One might be tempted to view these two types as two discrete types of joint families. However, it would be helpful to regard them as two out of three or four cycles in the life of

a family. These two types may be followed by a third cycle in which a joint family might separate into individual families, when the unmarried brothers and sisters are educated and settled down. These individual families are very much like the Western nuclear families. However, we must not forget in this context that when the sons get married, they eventually bring into existence their own joint families. In short, a joint family is not simply a specific type of household, but points to a system of mutual obligations and relationships. In other words, the joint family principle describes a process which continues even though the physical composition of a household is passing through the seemingly nuclear phase.

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NOTES

1. Kingsley Davis, "The Origin and Growth of Urbanization in the World," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. LX, No. 5 (March, 1955), p. 429.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 437.

3. Ralph Linton, "Cultural and Personality Factors Affecting Economic Growth," in *The Progress of Underdeveloped Areas*, Bert F. Hoselitz, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), pp. 83-84.

The distinction between the social structure of the city and that of a village accounts for this phenomenon. Davis argues: "The continuance of urbanization in the world does not mean the persistence of something that remains the same in detail. A city of a million inhabitants today is not the sort of place that a city of the same number was in 1900 or 1850. Moreover, with the emergence of giant cities of five to fifteen million, something new has been added. Such cities are creatures of the twentieth century. Their sheer quantitative difference means a qualitative change as well." Davis, "Origin and Growth of Urbanization," pp. 435.

4. Ralph Linton, "Cultural and Personality Factors Affecting Economic Growth," p. 84.

5. Robert Crane, "Urbanism in India," *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. LX, No. 5 (March, 1955), p. 463.

6. Kingsley Davis, "The Origin and Growth of Urbanization in the World," p. 435.

7. Irawati Karve, *Kinship Organisation*, Deccan College Monograph Series, "(Poona, India: Deccan College Post-graduate and Research Institute, 1953), p. 10.

8. B. R. Agarwala, "In a Mobile Commercial Community," in "Symposium: Caste and Joint Family," *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Sept., 1955), p. 142.

9. *Ibid.*

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10. *Ibid.*

11. I. P. Desai, "The Joint Family in India - An Analysis," *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. V, No. 2 (Sept., 1956), pp. 144-56. See also his article "An Analysis," in "Symposium: Caste and Joint Family," *Sociological Bulletin*, vol. IV, no. 2 (Sept., 1955) pp. 97-117.

12. Milton Singer, "The Indian Joint Family in Modern Industry," in *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, eds. (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1968), p. 423-27.

13. I. P. Desai, "The Joint Family in India - An Analysis," p. 145.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

15. Milton Singer, "The Indian Joint Family in Modern Industry," p. 426.

16. Aileen Ross, *The Hindu Family in Its Urban Setting* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), p. x.

17. M. S. Gore, *Urbanization and Family Change* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1968).

18. The term "fringe" connotes families living in the villages around Delhi, whereas the term "rural" signifies the residents of the villages lying outside Delhi and in the districts of Hissar and Rohtak. In short, with couple of exceptions, villages classified in the "fringe" category are in greater metropolitan proximity to Delhi than those under "rural" category.

19. M. S. Gore, *Urbanization and Family Change*, p. 120.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 232

23. *Ibid.*

24. Jean L. Comhaire, "Economic Change and the Extended Family," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 305 (May, 1956), p. 45.

"One of the consequences expected from the introduction of a money economy and from urbanization is the dissolution of the joint family...But if the threat to the extended family-or even to any form of family-looks obvious, the degree to which other institutions, and more particularly the small patrocentric family of the Western type, are going to replace the old-style family offers ground for considerable doubt. In the Western world, everything combined to bring about the triumph of the nuclear family. Institutions inconsistent with the needs of an industrial society were slowly undermined, and the extended family broke up the more easily that Indo-European societies had a millenary tradition of simple kinship structures." Comhaire demonstrates that the African native middle-class family in Leopoldville, Belgian Congo, has not yet disintegrated into a nuclear household.

25. M. S. Gore, *Urbanization and Family Change*, p. 151.

26. Milton Singer, "The Indian Joint Family in Modern Industry," pp. 424-52.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 427.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 431.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 437.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 436.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 438.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*, p. 441.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 444.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 445.

36. *Ibid.*, p.

37. B. R. Agarwala, "In a Mobile Commercial Community," in "Symposium: Caste and Joint Family," *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Sept., 1955), pp. 141-42.

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38. A. Aiyappan, "An Tamilnad," in Symposium: Caste and Joint Family," *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Sept., 1955), p. 121.

39. Irawati Karve, *Kinship Organisation in India*, p. 12.

40. K. Ishwaran, "Interdependence of the Elementary and Extended Family," in *The Indian Family in Transition*, edited by John S. Augustine (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd., 1982), pp. 7-12.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

42. Joan P. Mencher, "Women Agricultural Labourers and Land Owners in Kerala and Tamil Nadu: Some Questions about Gender and Autonomy in the Household," in *Gender and the Household Domain: Social and Cultural Dimensions*, edited by Maithreyi Krishnaraj and Karuna Channa (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1989), p. 138.

43. *Ibid.*

44. K. Ishwaran, "Interdependence of the Elementary and Extended Family," p. 19.

45. W. J. Goode, "Foreword," to M. S. Gore's, *Urbanization and Family Change*, p. vi.

46. David G. Mandelbaum, *Society in India*, Vol. I, *Continuity and Change* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), pp. 36-37.

47. Aileen Ross, *The Hindu Family in Its Urban Setting*, p. 26.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

49. David G. Mandelbaum, *Society in India*, p. 35.

50. Aileen Ross, *The Hindu Family in Its Urban Setting*, p. ix.

51. Ram Sharan Sharma (tr.), *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in India* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1959), p. 111.

52. "Foreword" Pardharinath H. Prabhu, *Hindu Social Organisation, A study in Socio-Psychological and Ideological Foundations*, 4th ed. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan,

1963), p. ix.

53. M. Radin, "Tradition," *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 15 (MacMillan: New York: 1935), p. 63.

54. *India Today*, November 30, 1990.

55. W. J. Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns* (New York: The Free Press, 1970), pp. 268-69.