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THE EROSION OF TRADITIONAL VALUES: THE BREAKDOWN OF THE JOINT-FAMILY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HINDU COMMUNITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Introduction

Hindu Cosmology

In Hinduism the family institution is primarily based on spirituality. It is regarded as a creation of the Spirit. In its entire significance it represents neither a phenomenon of subjective arbitrariness nor a product of so-called natural law. The family is a religious institution calculated to endow one with the capacities to develop moral and spiritual traits in one's character in the householder, **Grihastha,** scheme of life and to subordinate the lower self to the higher for the attainment of the final goal of life, **Moksha** or liberation.

In order to understand, therefore, the religio-philosophical impact of the family it is imperative to examine the Hindu cosmological principles of **Brahman,** God, **Atman,** the Human person and **Brahmanda,** the Universe.

Since the dawn of reason humanity has applied itself to the formulation and interpretation of the three famous concepts of God, nature and the human person. Hinduism bases it's theological and philosophical ideas concerning the Supreme Being, the Universe and the individual Self on the teachings of the **Sruti** tradition, namely the Vedas and Upanishads, the philosophical treatise of ancient India.

Brahman

Fundamental to the Hindu concept of the natural world is the belief in the One Absolute Reality, designated as **Brahman,** though He is variously called **Paramatman,** the Supreme Soul, or **Param Purusha,** the Supreme Spirit. **Brahman** is essentially viewed as the sole Absolute and transcendental Being or Ultimate Reality (Parampanthi 1955: 31).

Brahman, neutral and impersonal, **Nirguna,** is unconditioned, unqualified, beyond all qualities, beyond space, time and causation, beyond birth and death. **Brahman** is the origin, the cause, the source and sustenance of the universe. The Taittiriya Upanishad states (3.3.1):

> That from which all these things are born, and in which, being born, they live, and into which they all enter after dissolution – seek to know that. That is **Brahman.**

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The Upanishads refer to **Brahman** as both transcendent and immanent. The transcendental **Brahman** designated **Nirguna** or unconditioned **Brahman** is devoid of qualifying attributes and indicative marks and is described in the negative, namely **Neti, Neti,** "not this, not this" (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad). The conditioned **Brahman, Saguna Brahman,** a concession to the limitations of the human mind that is unable to intellectually comprehend the absolute transcendental reality, has been described by positive statements as (Nikhilananda 1968: 35):

> Where form is light, where thoughts ar true, where nature is **Akasha**

The need for the emphasis of the **Saguna,** Personal, aspect of **Brahman** is seen as a means to satisfy the basic religious urges of humanity. **Saguna Brahman** aids the spiritual liberation of persons who strive towards God-realisation; humanity should realise and attain the Impersonal Absolute through the medium of **Saguna Brahman.** According to the Hindu **Shastras,** scriptures, the Formless **Nirguna** assumes various names and forms through which It is popularly worshipped. This is reiterated in the Bhagavad Gita (4.11):

> In whatever way man approach me, even So do I reward them, My path do
> men tread in all ways, O Arjuna!

An important element in Hindu cosmology in relation to **Brahman** is the concept of **Avatar** or the descent of the Divine into human form. The **Avatar** is the appearance of God on earth. The purpose behind the incarnation is said to be to inaugurate a new era built on righteousness and to raise humanity to a higher plane of life.

Atman

The two concepts, **Brahman** and **Atman,** are the two pillars on which rests the whole effice of Hindu philosophy. They are, respectively, the objective and subjective views of the reality behind the world of appearances. **Brahman** is not merely the transcendent luminous Absolute, but is also the universal spirit which is the basis of human personality and its ever-renewing vitalizing power. **Brahman,** the Supreme Absolute, is known through and identified with **Atman,** the inner self of man. The Katha Upanishad states:

> The Supreme Spirit is lodged within one's self though unperceived (1.3.12)

> **Atman** is subtler than subtle things, greater than the great and resides in
> every human heart (1.2.20)

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The Bhagavad Gita (2.24) also asserts the belief in the reality of an infinite Being underlying and animating all finite existence.

> He is not born nor does He die, nor having been, does He cease to be anymore. Unborn, eternal, everlasting, ancient, He is not destroyed when the body is destroyed.

The **Atman** exists in all beings, inanimate as well as animate. As the Isa Upanishad (1.1) notes:

> At the heart of all – whatever there is in the universe, abides the self.

Beings differ considerably, however, in the degree to which the **Atman** present in all, has come to be realised, or to be known, from what it really is. In this spiritual hierarchy the inanimate objects are at the bottom end of the scale; at the top, enjoying a sacred privilege is humanity.

The human person has the tendency to wrongly identify himself with the body, mind and senses complex, not realising that he is the Self, **Atman.** The individual associates his real nature and essence with sense organs, sense objects and sense enjoyment in this world. The individual, whose **Atman** is identical with the Absolute Self, **Brahman,** falsely imposes attributes to himself. The limited and finite qualities of his physical being are imagined as having a separate and independent existence, whereas in fact it is only an appearance. This process of realizing the **Atman** for what it is, the Reality, and our individual being for what it is, is the process of spiritual growth (Prabhavananda 1981: 52).

Brahman appears as many embodied selves **Jivatma,** because of the cosmic nescience or **Maya. Avidya** is the principle of ignorance or appearance which momentarily hides His real nature and essence and this concealment springs from **Maya.** As a result of **Avidya** man wrongly identifies with the mind and body complex as being the true self and hence he becomes subject to birth and death, **Samsara.**

When the wrong identification ceases, the **Atman** realises its basic identity with the Absolute **Brahman;** the individual realises that he is not this body but his true nature is Spirit, the **Atman** or Self which resides in every being. Only when the aspiring **Atman** learns through a process of spiritual discipline to dissociate itself from the ambiguous propensities of the gross body and consequently from passion, lust, greed, etc. the ignorance that stands between the individuals real nature and apparent nature vanishes. The **Atman** realises its identity with **Brahman,** i.e., the realisation that it was always liberated. The nescience responsible for bondage is neither

real nor invincible, it is real only empirically, from the realm of noumena the **Atman** never falls into bondage. Hence it is possible for the self to break the chain of ignorance and attain liberation, **Moksha,** the primary aim of life in Hiduism.

The Hindu View of Life

In the Hindu tradition a person's duties are determined by the stage of life to which he belongs. Life, which is regarded by Hinduism as a journey to the shrine of truth, is marked by four stages, each of which has its responsibilities and obligations covering and effecting a synthesis between materialism and spiritualism, of pursuit and renunciation. Hinduism views life as a process of progressive self-transcendence from the realm of matter, **Anna-Maya Jivatva,** to the realisation of supreme spiritual bliss, **Param-ananda.** Every being has definite eschatological goals to which he should advance through gradual stages of progress both outward and inward. There are two basic paths of life, namely, the path of pursuit and the path of negation of pursuit as leading to liberation. The former is called **Pravritti Marga** and the second is designated as **Nivritti Marga.** The Hindu conception of **Pravritti** or the active life sanctions the yearning for wealth and other material pursuits in strict conformity with the mandate of **Dharma,** right action.

Hinduism maintains that the method of enjoying the active life must not endanger the liberty and privileges of others. The individual must be guided not only by the external laws of religion imposed upon him from without but by the dictates of his own morality which is designated **Svadharma.**

Since the aim of life in Hindu philosophy is seen as a process of progressive self-transcendence from the realm of matter to the realisation of **Brahman** the **Shastras** have evolved concepts and systems to facilitate the attainment of **Moksha** by the individual while being involved in society. The Hindu scheme of life is expressed in the formula, **Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksha,** duty, wealth, enjoyment and self-realisation respectively, which constitutes the four-fold pursuit of existence, the **Purusharthas.**

The first three concepts constitutes the path of **Pravritti,** active life, and have to be achieved in family life. The individual has to be a member of society and discharge his duties as a householder and citizen. While the pursuit of wealth and happiness is a legitimate human aspiration, they should be gained in ways of righteousness, **Dharma,** if they are to lead ultimately to the spiritual freedom of the individual, namely **Moksha.**

The key to the individual and social ethics of Hinduism is the conception of *Dharma*, whose full implications cannot be conveyed by such English words as religion, duty or righteousness. Derived from the Sanskrit root *Dhri* which means 'to support', the word signifies the law of inner growth by which a person is supported in his or her present state of evolution and is shown the way to future development. A person's *Dharma* is not imposed by society or decreed by an arbitrary God, but is something with which one is born as a result of one's actions in previous lives. *Dharma* dtermines a person's proper attitude towards the outer world and governs one's mental and physical reactions in a given situation, it is a person's code of honour. *Dharma* also connotes virtuous action which seeks to elevate a man or woman to the status of Divinity and bestows on him or her the final beatitude of life, which is liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

In order to achieve a synthesis between materialism and spiritualism the Hindu sages evolved a scheme of life known as the *Ashramas* which consists of the four stages of an individual's life, namely, *Brahmacharya,* celibate student, *Grihastha,* family life, *Vanaprastha,* semi-recluse and *Sannyasa,* renunciate, each of which has its responsibilites and obligations.

Family life

The importance of the family institution in Hinduism can never be over-emphasized. Society itself is divided into four *Ashramas* in the Hindu world view, the second of which, *Grihastha* or family life, involves marriage as a discipline for participation in the larger life of society. Family life is very important and necessary in the Hindu scheme of life as a whole since it forms the bed-rock of the economic stability of the nation and supplies the necessities of life to the student, retired individuals and monks.

While the stage of the *Brahmachari* is particularly devoted to the accumulation of *Dharma,* the life of the householder is for the preservation of *Dharma,* the earning of *Artha* and fulfilment of *kama* (Krishnananda 1979: 218).

Fundamentally, Hinduism maintains that the ideal union of husband and wife in soul, thought and action is the foundation of family and social well-being and prosperity. The *Grihastha Ashrama* acknowledges the Hindu belief that marriage is an extremely important stage in an individual's life. In *Grihastha Ashrama* the householder follow the rules of conduct and respect for the elders, teachers, women, kings and monks. The householder lived in conformity with

sacred laws and traditions, reared and sheltered the family and was responsible for the well-being of society at large, while at the same time preparing himself for final emancipation or realisation. In a Hindu home the wife is usually the central figure, the mediator and harmoniser, the sustainer and preserver of traditional social and religious affairs. Even the birth of children is not regarded as the result of mere biological union, it has to be the outcome of spiritual duty (Singh 1989: 77).

Marriage : Vivaha

The *Vivaha Samskara,* Marriage Sacrament, has great significance in Hindu society since its performance among the recognised sixteen *Samskaras,* sacraments, is considered as obligatory. Indeed the very basis of family life rests on it. According to Hinduism, marriage is not merely a holy union or communion, but it is more or less a *Sarira-Samskara,* namely a sacrament sanctifying the body. Manu, the Hindu law-giver, considers it essential that every man and woman must pass through the states of *Sarira-Sadhana.* This will help man and woman in consolidating their personalities as co-partners in family life, and achieving their goals in life (Saraswati 1977: 67). Marriage is seen as a means of spiritual growth, the husband and wife are co-partners in religious life and function. The wife is called the *Ardhangini* – the half part of the body of the husband in a symbolic sense. Manu (9.26) states: "The husband is said to be one with the wife". In all social and religious spheres the wife and husband are taught the necessity of harmony of work, mind and spirit. By working according to the dictates of *Dharma,* which is binding to their conduct and conscience, the couple should strive for individual happiness as well as social stability.

According to Radhakrishnan (1971: 60) marriage is regarded as sacred; the very gods are married. When the Hindu descends from the adoration of the Absolute and takes to the worship of a personal God, his god always has a consort. Shiva is *Ardhanarisvara, Shiva – Shakti,* and His image signifies the co-operative interdependent, separately incomplete but jointly complete masculine and feminine functions of the Supreme Being. The fundamental emphasis on marriage as a means of spiritual growth, is prescribed for the sake of the development of personality as well as the continuance of the family ideal.

The Hindu Community of South Africa

Hindu religion and philosophy as it found expression in the South African context were actuated by the coming of the indentured Indians in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Hindus

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who immigrated to South Africa from 1860 onwards brought with them their religious beliefs and rituals, their culture and civilization, their traditional practices and customs, their ceremonies and festivals. In fact they transported a minute part of India to South African soil.

The Hindu community of South Africa, which comprises about two-thirds of the total South African Indian population of one million, is a monolithic whole responding to a common religious call, namely, Hinduism. Religious practices, as they operate in Hinduism in South Africa, take the form basically of traditional, ritualistic, ceremonially orientated religion. Rituals range from those with a limited material significance performed at home for the family or friends, to that with a great cosmic significance performed at temples for the community as a whole. It constitutes an important and legitimate religious style whose chief functional values are to be found in the feeling that is generated by performance of the ritual. It is through the performance of ritual that a feeling of being linked to the Divine is generated for Hindus.

As a result of the transplantation of Hinduism in a new and different location, the responsibility for cultural, social and religious transmission and the perpetuation of related beliefs and practices was delegated to the religion of the domestic arena which relied on the resilence of its ritual orientation. It is important to note that during the early period of Hinduism in South Africa the Hindu temple served a vital role as it became an important forum for religio-cultural expression. The temple came to be recognised by Hindus as a focus for their religious identity. However, the temple becomes more congregational in character during festivals and during recitals of ancient texts and their exegesis by learned priests. Therefore, although the temple continues to play a vital role, together with the **Ashrams** of other Hindu movements, in the maintenance of Hindu religion and culture, Hinduism as it finds expression in the Hindu community of South Africa today is primarily a home-based religion (Sooklal 1986: 41).

Hence the family unit provides an important paradigm for the continuation and perpetuation of the most fundamental precepts of Hindu religious life in South Africa. The family structure represents a paradigmatic means of socio-cultural integration, appropriation and perpetuation of religio-philosophical ideas form the Vedic age to the South African Hindu context. The family remains a vital dimension for the transmission of religious, philosophical and socio-cultural ideas in the Hindu community of South Africa.

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The Joint-Family : Kutumba

In traditional Hinduism the focus of the worshipping community is the joint or extended family. The role of the joint-family in inculcating and continuing religious and social values and customs has been significant throughout much of Indian history (Ashby 1974: 129).

The Indian family type is distinct from that of other racial groups in South Africa, even when the groups live under similar economic conditions in the same urban environment. The most conspicuous differences between the South African Indian, African and White urban family is the greater strength among the Indians of joint-family ties; the emphasis on arranged marriages; the higher proportion of Indian households occupied by more than one related family; the small number of women, widowed or deserted, living alone with unmarried children; and the virtual absence of people, men or women, living completely on their own (Kuper 1974: 97).

The most important structured kinship unit of South African Hindu society is the patrilineal extended family known as the *Kutumba.* It is with this structured kinship unit that the religious, philosophical and cultural dimensions of religion have been perpetuated and transmitted in the Hindu community. The *Kutumba* is a consequence of a deeply ingrained Hindu kinship awareness which has its origin in the Vedic ideal of the five generation joint-family unit. This *Kutumba* is a highly structured kinship entity consisting of members, all of whom feel bound to a distinct family image with its own peculiar, hereditary, social, ethical, occupational and religious dimensions. In South African Hindu life, the *Kutumba* lays the basis for group solidarity. Socialisation in the *Kutumba,* emphasises the internalisation of discipline and respect for authority. Hence, Hindus do not break easily with tradition, and even the education and professional elite, whose outer forms appear completely urban and "emancipated" are in effect conventional and restrained by *Kutumba* norms (Meer 1969: 71). Traditionally a *Kutumba* included a male head, his wife, unmarried children, unmarried brothers and sisters, younger married brothers, married sons and brothers' married sons with their wives and children. The number of *Kutumba* members living at any particular time varies from a few individuals to well over a dozen.

Structurally the *Kutumba* must be envisaged as a hierarchy with the eldest living partriarch at the apex, and constituting with his wife the highest authority. Next come his younger married brothers and their wives, and then his unmarried brothers, then his married sons and his brothers' married sons and so on to the youngest generation of descendants. The *Kutumba* is

not an aggregation of independent and equal family units, but of graded sub-units interacting through bonds of patrilineal descent and of marriage. In each order, the status and roles of the individuals are further regulated by age and sex, males exercising special privileges over women of their age group, but in turn submitting to the authority of males older than themselves and of women of senior generations. The structure is reflected in a classificatory kinship system characteristic of societies with developed kin responsibility.

Among the majority of South African Hindus the *Kutumba* is divided into a number of spatially separated houses, each group of 'house-people' having their own 'house head' but recognising one *Kutumba* head.

The behaviour patterns in the *Kutumba* vary with consanguinal and affinal links. The strongest effective relationships in Hindu idiom exists between husband and wife, and mother and son. A Hindu wife is subservient to her husband, yet to describe her as inferior is to over-simplify and falsify a highly complex relationship. Wisdom and virtue rather than weakness and inferiority may be said to underly much of her attitude. No one with any perception would deny the tremendous influence exerted by the average Hindu wife who leads by withdrawing, rules by submitting and, above all creates by receiving. While the husband may exercise authority over his wife, he neither owns her nor her possessions. In all spheres his authority is legally, morally and religiously restricted.

Religion reflects the status which the family accords its members and in South African Hindu religion it is the mother and wife who carry out the main ritual ceremonies and devotions.

In a joint household, many of the activities of child rearing are taken over by the grand-parents. Bathing the baby, for example, is the privilege of the grandmother while the grandfather plays an important role in the childs early education.

Thus there is built up in the Hindu family in South Africa a complex network of relationships between different sets of kin with more or less defined obligations, many of which are based not on any writen law of the land, but on the strength of moral and religious ties. The Hindu joint-family functioned as a coherent unit largely because of the role of the women in the *Kutumba* structure. They act as the cement that binds together different domestic units into which the *Kutumba* is divided. The women, by their specific attachment to the home, their constant influence over the children, and their adherence to the traditional rituals retain the family as the emotional and social anchor of Hindu family life.

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Thus Hindu family life has succeeded in maintaining many of its traditions, and thereby projecting an image of greater integration than would be expected in a community exposed to socialization and westernisation.

The Breakdown of the Joint-Family

The structure described above is not designed to give the impression that the Hindu family system works without conflict, on the contrary there are many hundreds of families which do not cope successfully with their internal relationships.

Conflicts and contradictions in the Hindu family system are sometimes reduced, sometimes intensified and multiplied, in the process of adaptation to the present South African milieu. Looked at objectively we see that the strong legal ties of kinship have been replaced by looser ties of association. From the point of view of the individuals concerned, the change is evaluated from two opposed interest levels. Conservatives both regret and condemn the refusal by the younger generation to conform to the standards of *Kutumba* living, but the 'modern' generation regards this non-conformity as a progressive step towards Westernisation. The composition of modern Hindu families shows considerable variation but the range is not haphazard; it is set by the *Kutumba* structure which is greatly influenced by the norms and values of Hinduism.

An important characteristic of Hinduism has been its extraordinary reliance on social structures. It is largely dependent for it perpetuation on institutional forms such as the joint-family and its ritual system. In South Africa the joint-family has come under pressure for a variety of reasons, namely, political, social and economic. Ever since the Indians arrived in South Africa in 1860 they have been subject to a number of restrictions. When the Nationalist government came into power in 1948 it started to spell out its policy of racial segregation. The Group Areas Act No. 41 of 1950 which logically followed on the Pegging Act of 1943 – which forbade Indians to buy more land – and the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946 was promulgated. Apart from the Group Areas Act there are three further Acts of Parliament which affect the compulsory resettlement of Indians, namely, the Community Development Act No. 3 of 1966 which deals with the redevelopment and rehabilitation areas; the Expropriation Act No. 63 of 1975 and Slum Clearance Act of 1966.

No community can feel stable under such circumstances. The Indians had no political rights and thus could make no decisions for themselves. Their movements were restricted, they were

relocated and had no security in regard to their properties. Furthermore, they could always be repatriated to India up until 1961 when the Indians were declared permanent inhabitants of South Africa (Sooklal 1990: 119).

The Indian Community has been affected more than any other group in South Africa by the Group Areas Act. By 1970 about thirty seven thousand Indian families had been required to move to new "Group Areas" which represented almost fifty per cent of the total Indian population of six hundred and twenty thousand at that time. While the government argued that the relocation of Indians was to provide them with better housing and the development of a sound community, the state showed very little concern for any social, cultural or religious values other than that of providing "a roof over one's head".

The economic hardships, social disruptions and political handicaps experienced by the Indians from the very time of their arrival in South Africa generated an identity crisis of major proportions amongst the Indians and this manifested itself mainly in the Hindu community. While the resettlement of the Indians affected the community at large it has had a profound effect on the Hindu in particular, since it meant the break-up of the joint-family unit and this had sever religio-cultural implications. The traditional method of religio-cultural instruction in Hindu homes came to a virtual standstill. The instructional process in Hinduism differs from that in the West. In the latter, education and the dissemination of ideas focuses on the use of the printed word. In traditional Hinduism, however, the focus is on the spoken word. Specifically, the most important context for learning religious culture was the home in which children were taught by example and through story-telling by their parents and relatives. Ritual obligations were learnt by imitation of the elders in the joint-family. The accompanying belief systems were received through oral instruction. Without their elders to inform and motivate them, many young Hindus are ignorant of both the beliefs and behaviours associted with typical home rituals. Many of the rituals, for example the *Samskaras*, sacraments, have fallen into disuse partly because they do not know how or when to perform them or simply because they are unaware of them. Hence the disruption of the joint-family system has also contributed considerably to the breakdown of traditional instructional processes.

In the traditional joint-household the elders especially the grandparents were endowed with the task of ensuring ritual continuity. The younger generation were educated in the performance and observance of traditional home rituals and *Poojas*, prayers, such as the *Samskaras.*

Traditional values such as respect and reverence towards the elders formed an integral part of the education of the child. The younger generation also received their religious education and competency and in the mother-tongue from their grandparents. The joint-family also ensured a close filial relationship between members of the **Kutumba.** However, with the breakdown of the joint-family the close filial bonds of the **Kutumba** have been weakened considerably. This is most evident by the fact that an increasing number of elderly in the Hindu community are being committed to welfare institutes for the aged. In Hinduism it is incumbent for the children to take care of their parents.

Further, in the joint-family the perpetuation of religio cultural values was transmitted via the oral process from the older generation to the younger. It most nuclear households where the parents are no longer resident with their married children the absence of this important instructional process has created a vacuum in the continuation and perpetuation of religio-cultural ideologies.

The forces of Westernisation and secularization has also had an adverse effect on the joint-family unit. In South Africa Hindus have constant exposure to Western family organization and it now seems that many young Hindus prefer the nuclear family system. However, this process has been accelerated by certain external factors about which Hindus could do very little. For example, most Hindus are now employed in commerce and industry and thus demands job mobility. Previously as participants in a rural economy, this had not been the case. As a result it is now more difficult to keep the family together than it used to be (Singh 1986: 96).

The weakening of the joint-family system is not unique to the Indians. It follows from the impact of Westernisation and urbanization and is evident in other sections of the South African population, more particularly the Africans. Yet under urban conditions the Indian family retains a greater coherence than the African, and thus can be related to conditions arising from (1) the process of Indian industrialisation and urbanisation in South Africa, and (2) the structure, functions, and values of the kinship system peculiar to the Indians. More rare than the isolated elementary family is the completely isolated individual. The migrant male labourer, characteristic of the African urban population, is not a social type among the Indians. In cases where a person must live on his own, he will if possible, stay with kin or friends who incorporate him as a kinsman, and if he is married, he will bring his family to join him as soon as possible. No respectable unmarried Hindu girl is allowed to live alone; to do so indicate loose morals. Widows either stay with relations or seek families prepared to have them in the "grandmother" role (Kuper 1974: 113).

In South Africa the 'broken' joint-family is being rapildy replaced by the nuclear family unit especially in the urban areas. In the nuclear family emphasis is placed on individualism as against commitment to the **Kutumba** which was typical of the joint-family. The strong filial bond which existed in the joint-household has given place to individual welfare and progress. Authority over the nuclear household is no longer solely vested in the eldest living partriarch but with the young couple themselves. The cementing factor fulfilled by the partriarch in keeping the family together is also weakened as a result of the break-down of the joint-family. In the nuclear family the values of **Kutumba** are not as prominent as in the joint-househould.

A typical nuclear household comprises of an independent family unit usually the husband,wife and their children. In certain instances the parents may reside with one of the married children usually the son. However, there is also an increasing prefrence amongst the elderly to reside independently while still maintaining contact with their married children. Whilst the children may not be part of a closely structured **Kutumba** as is understood in the traditional sense of a joint-household and share in a common spatial proxmity they generally re-locate within the same geographical area. The primary reason for this is to facilitate easy contact with their parents to whom they continue to look for guidance and advise whenever necessary.

Hence although the nuclear family is today preferred by many younger generation Hindus this does not necessarily mean independence from **Kutumba** obligations, and though kinship ties are inevitably weakened by distance, they are still important in the major social and religious activities. Kinsmen should keep each other, and particularly the parent's household, informed of important happenings in their own homes. A birth, a naming ceremony, a ritual Pooja, prayer, a marriage, a death and its associated ceremonies are recognised as family occasions. Specific relatives are selected for specific duties, but all are expected to be interested. Since Hindu society is family-orientated important decisions must receive the tacit approval of the **Kutumba.** Hence even in the nuclear family the norms and values governing the joint-family system still prevails.

Women who are primarily responsible for the care of home and family are largely responsible for keeping **Kutumba** relationships alive. In South Africa the position of the Indian women has undergone drastic transition in the past two decades. This is largely due to the great effort being placed by the community on the importance of education for women. In the earlier social history of the Indian community of South Africa the nature and pattern of relationships between husband and wife or men and women were in the nature of traditional, unequivocal, social or

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family harmony. The position of women in the joint-family system was largely restricted to the traditional role of housewife, where, women involved in the professional field were in the minority. However, with the realisation of the importance of education and the bearing it exercised on the socio-economic status of the individual the traditional role of the housewife underwent transformation to incorporate an additional dimension of active participation in the professional sphere (Singh 1989: 233).

The concept of education rendered a new meaning to the life of women in that it equipped them with a new degree of self-esteem and confidence in their own individuality and the latitude to exercise their independence and volition. Further, education has equipped the women to play a functional role in the socio-economic life of the family thus according her the status of not being regarded as subservient and wholly dependent on her spouse for her existence. The greater independence of women has also influenced the growth of the nuclear family unit in the Hindu community, especially in the urban areas.

CONCLUSION

The effect of the gradual weakening of the joint-family has led to the erosion of one of the major institutional forms by which Hindus used to identify themselves. The joint-family located Hindus within the context of a worshipping community. It provided the lines of communication through which Hindus could discuss and mutually reinforce their religio-cultural commitments. It also provided the contact between older and younger Hindus needed in order to ensure that the tradition could be passed on from generation to generation.

In the face of cataclysmic changes, if Hinduism was to survive as a meaningful system in the South African context, its survival depended on a radical re-orientation in their thinking. It also depended upon the Hindu community's ability to develop institutional adaptive alternatives. Since the early 1950's such developments could already be seen to be taking place. A new element was introduced in the development of Hinduism in South Africa in the form of organisations manifest in the religious systems offered by the neo-Hindu movements such as the Divine Life Society, The Ramakrishna Movement and the Arya Samaj. The advent of the neo-Hindu Movements introduced a new and much needed element of organised orientation of religion. Although it will not be strictly correct to conceive of religion without its formal, ceremonial, symbolic and ritual aspects, the neo-Hindu Movements seek to direct the focus of

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the devotees to the essential core of Hinduism; its fundamentals and its philosophy. It has paved the way for a re-orientation of the Hindu mind from the formal to the fundamental aspects of religion.

Prior to the emergence of the neo-Hindu movements there was no regular congregational worship in the community. The only occasion that necessitated congregational worship was the celebration of major festivals at the temple, which was also utilized mainly on a private basis. The neo-Hindu movements also introduced a new element, namely, an organised institutional structure, the **Ashram,** for the diffusion of religious ideas in the life of Hindus in South Africa. Henceforth the institutionalized nature of Hinduism as encompassed by the Ashram fulfilled the need for regular congregational worship. The neo-Hindu movements with its sound organisational structure is better equipped to deal with the challenges of adaption necessary in a foreign context. They are fulfilling an important role in substituting the function fulfilled previously by the joint family. It provides the devotees with a sense of community and belonging with its emphasis on regular congregational worship. It also serves to intensify a sense of identify amongst its adherents in that devotees take pride in seeing themselves as members of an organised religious institution.

Another important development in recent years in the Hindu community has been the mass dissemination of religious literature to the community at large by several Hindu religio-cultural organisations. One of the difficulties experienced culturally by Hindus was the loss of competence of their vernacular language. Language amongst the Hindus is an important element in cultural identity. The effect of this loss has been to increase the inaccessibility of religious literature most of which is in the vernacular. However, most Hindu organisations are now translating the Hindu **Shastras** and printing them in the English medium. The inclusion of Indian languages in the school curriculum of Indian schools since 1983 as a result of continued agitation by the Indian Community has also had a positive effect on Hindu community life in South Africa with an increasing number of children learning their mother-tongue.

Satsangs, are now a regular feature of most Hindu temples and organisations. These religious services which caters both for spiritual expression as well as religious education seeks to overcome the vacuum created by the breakdown of the joint-family system. The Hindu community has also been mindful of providing for the religio-cultural education of children which was previously taken care of in the joint-family by the elders. Most Hindu organisations now have a regular children's programme, usually on a Sunday, dedicate to the spiritual education of children.

While the neo-Hindu organisations have been an important stimulus in re-orientating Hindu society in the face of the erosion of the joint-family it should be noted that Hindu society is still governed, to a large extent, by joint-family norms and values. Despite the preference by younger generation Hindus for the nuclear family system traditional religious and social practices are in many cases still maintained. Young couples who have never known life in India, are keen to practice annual rituals and life cycle rites, **Samskaras,** and to educate their own children in the vernacular languages and the religious stories of the epics and Puranas. Changes are bound to occur but there is nothing to suggest that traditional religious forms will vanish from the lives of local Hindus. Its social and behavioural dimensions are as much in evidence among young Hindus as their older relatives: family duty, temple and domestic worship all continue to be practiced. However, the transplantation of Hinduism to South Africa is a dynamic process which has encouraged many Hindus to reassess the meaning and challenges posed by the complexities of contemporary South African society.

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