

Topic 2: Family Structures and Relationships

Contrast Between "Ideals" of Family Life

1. The traditional Indian Ideal.
11. The compromise worked out by Sikhs in the Canadian Situation.
111. The Canadian pattern as viewed by Sikhs.

There is considerable contrast in the traditional pattern of Indian family life and the Canadian pattern. Indians coming to Canada from the villages of Punjab experience this keenly. They have had to make compromises in the Canadian situation; and in fact they maintain a remarkably consistent idea as to what is now right and proper in family life for Sikhs in Canada. (See pattern II.)

The traditional Indian family life has remained for them the beautiful ideal (see pattern I) although in their own life in India they may have experienced personal difficulties within it.

The Canadian family pattern, with its well known and publicized divorce rate and "generation gap" poses rather a frightening threat to Indians proposing to raise their families in Canada. In India, divorce is a disgrace; disrespect for parents a tragedy for them. The stress by the mass media on sexual relations is seen as a symptom of the malfunction of a Canadian system which permits youngsters to choose their own mate on the dubious grounds of sexual attraction (Pattern III).

No chart can represent the individual experience and views of Sikh people here with regard to the traditional Indian ideal of family life (I), the compromise that is respectable and agreeable here (II), or the Canadian pattern of family life as they see it (III) This chart is based on the expressed views of some forty Sikh people (1965-1967) regarding their family life. A pattern for began to emerge quite strongly. Only a few major points can be mentioned here.

I. <u>Traditional Indian Family</u>	II <u>Indian Family in Canada</u>	III <u>The Canadian Family</u>
(How it was supposed to be in India.)	(How it should be here.)	(How Canadian families appear to be.)
1 a) Extended family in <u>patrilocal</u> residence	Extended family in terms of affection, trust, responsibility but <u>neolocal</u> residence.	<u>Neolocal</u> residence, little affection and no obligation to kinsmen, not even for elders who have become dependent.
(b) Family of groom is "higher" than family of bride.	Ideally they should now be equal.	Equal.
(c) Boys only inherit from father.	Mother, sons and daughters inherit.	Mothers, sons and daughters inherit.
2a) Marriage prohibited to any member of the named patrilineages (got) of grandparents.	Marriage prohibited to any member of named patrilineage (got) of father. Some latitude with regard to members of mother's <u>got</u> , so long as the connection is sufficiently remote.	No such rules exist.

1. Traditional Indian
Family

(How it was supposed
to be in India.)

11. Indian Family
in Canada

(How it should be here)

III. The Canadian
Family

(How Canadian families
appear to be.)

2(b) Caste

Must marry your
children into their
own caste.

Ideally marriage takes place
between persons of same
caste. Since Sikhs do not
hold with caste as an ideal,
this is said to be because
of the "cultural" gulf
between castes.

No caste.
Canadians do not
understand caste,
in any case.

(c) Must marry your
daughter to a man
who resides out-
side the village.

Ideally this is good.
No marriage for daughter
should take place with boy
from father's village in
India. A little distance in
residence between betrothed
persons here in Canada is
also good.

No residence rules.

3. In family, older
persons have the
power over and res-
ponsibility for
younger persons.

Hard to control here with
some younger members getting
power through manipulation
of money. It is ideal for
older persons to have power
and responsibility over
younger.

Relative age prece-
dence, and even
precedence by
generation not recog-
nized hence. Disre-
spect for elders
is rife.

4. Precedence of males
over females.

Continuation of this as an
ideal. Runs into difficul-
ties where Canadian born and
educated female marries an
India born and educated man.
Young people are questioning
this ideal.

Men cannot control
women and this has
resulted in much grief
to Canadians in terms
of separation, divorce,
the circumstances of
children.

5. Income: pool and
share.

Income primarily from rents,
wages, profits, not from
land as originally. So there
is no need to pool funds and
leave control in one man's
hands. Father should handle
money for his wife and
children.

Father handles money
for his wife and
children.

1. Traditional Indian
Family

II Indian Family
in Canada

III The Canadian
Family

6. Political Control

Eldest living competent male heads the family and holds final authority. At death this authority passes into a recognized successor -- usually to his younger brother or eldest son.

Ritual respect and consultation with nominal head of family either residing in Canada or India. Actual decision making coming to rest with a man at the time of his marriage.

Elder people's wisdom and desires are disregarded and younger people like their own way.

7. Education:

Most important education for life is given in the home. Here the values of love, respect and responsibility are implanted.

A good living can be made by boys in the saw mills without completing secondary education. Girls may be educated until such time as their real role in life interferes - i.e. "wife and mother". Ideal age for marriage of boys 21; girls 19. This is changing rapidly to a desire for education and its pecuniary status advantages. (In India education is sought after fervently as the road to opportunity.) Women need not complete education since it is questionable whether they should take work outside the home.

8. Expression:

Punjabi food, dress, language. Sikh religion.

As in the cities of India, Sikh women retain Punjabi dress. Men should abandon traditional for modern (western) dress. Beard (and turban) are not considered indispensable symbols of the faith in Canada. Punjabi food is not only preferable, but more nutritional than Canadian food. English language is essential to men who must represent the family to the larger non-Indian community. It is possible for women to keep in touch with all their friends through speaking Punjabi and reading Gurumukhi script.

Topic 2:

Family Structures and Inter-relationships

By Gyan Nath

It is a curious fact that there exists an intimate relationship between societal development, its rituals and practices and its beliefs about the unknown, namely, 'the concept of God.' The Hindu civilization, probably five thousand years old or over, lends support to this proposition. The basic Indian belief is that there is one God who is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. To reach Him, there is no one way. To reach God there must be ways made available to suit each and every individual, and there should be respect for the faith that a person holds. The understanding of this point is crucial in appreciating the Indian tolerance not only for every shade of belief that exists within Hindu religion, but also for the followers of other religions.

The Indian concept of God is so powerful and pervasive that it guides every minute of our life. It is in this sense that Hindu religion is sometimes called a way of life.

There are certain basic beliefs that provide structures and rules for day to day life:

- (a) The whole universe is the creation of the Almighty, and therefore this whole universe is an illusion.
- (b) We each have a soul which is indistinguishable from the Greater Soul. Therefore our quest is to free our soul to know the Greater Soul and to become its part.
- (c) There is a cycle of birth and death and it is through our actions that we can free ourselves from this cycle.
- (d) Since it is through Karma (duty and actions) that we control the life after death, and since whatever we do is to be done as if we are God, the whole of life's actions are to be performed and seen as a duty.

Of course, these are not all the basic beliefs of the concept of Hindu God, but these are more germane to our topic here. From these beliefs we can readily see why it is not only our duty, but our religion, to be faithful and helpful to our own family, relatives, community, country and the world.