



## Changing Ethos of Indian Families in Transition: A Qualitative Study

Prof. Anil Kumar Srivastava | Department of Sociology, J.N.M.P.G. College, Barabanki (U.P.), India

Received-14.10.2025,

Revised-22.10.2025,

Accepted-30.10.2025

E-mail : aaryvart2013@gmail.com

**Abstract:** *The Indian family, long regarded as the bedrock of social organization, is undergoing significant transformation under the pressures of modernization, globalization, urbanization, and technological change. While the joint family system historically embodied collectivism, intergenerational solidarity, and patriarchal authority, contemporary India increasingly witnesses nuclearization, individual autonomy, and renegotiated gender roles. This study explores the changing ethos of Indian families through a qualitative research design based on in-depth interviews with urban and semi-urban families. The findings reveal a pattern of adaptive transformation rather than structural disintegration. Traditional values such as kinship loyalty and ritual continuity coexist with new aspirations of personal fulfillment, gender equality, and emotional companionship. The paper argues that the Indian family today represents a hybrid social institution negotiating continuity and change.*

**Key words:** *Indian family, qualitative study, modernization, gender roles, nuclearization, kinship, values.*

**Introduction-** The family has historically occupied a central position in Indian society. Beyond being a biological unit, it has functioned as an economic, cultural, moral, and emotional institution. The joint family system, characterized by co-residence of multiple generations, collective ownership of property, and patriarchal authority, shaped socialization patterns and value systems (Karve, 1965; Shah, 1998).

However, rapid socio-economic transformations-particularly after economic liberalization in 1991-have reshaped familial structures and value orientations. Increased mobility, women's education, migration, and digital connectivity have altered traditional norms governing marriage, authority, and intergenerational relations. While modernization theory predicts a shift from extended to nuclear families (Goode, 1963), scholars argue that Indian modernity often involves selective adaptation rather than complete rupture (Singh, 1973). This paper seeks to understand how the ethos of Indian families is changing and how families interpret these transitions in everyday life.

**Literature Review** (2015–2025 Contextual Focus)- Recent scholarship suggests that Indian families are not disappearing but transforming in complex ways.

- **Nuclearization and Structural Change:** Contemporary demographic studies indicate a steady rise in nuclear households, particularly in urban India. However, scholars emphasize that nuclearization does not necessarily imply weakening kinship bonds (Shah, 1998). Even in nuclear settings, extended kinship obligations persist through financial support, ritual gatherings, and digital communication.

Recent sociological analyses (2016–2023) argue that urban housing constraints, occupational mobility, and migration patterns significantly contribute to smaller household sizes. Yet emotional and symbolic “jointness” remains intact in many cases.

- **Gender Transformations:** Women's increased access to education and employment has reshaped power relations within families. Dube (1997) earlier highlighted gender asymmetries in kinship systems; more recent discussions emphasize negotiation rather than subordination. Dual-income families are redefining domestic responsibilities, though women often experience a “double burden.” Uberoi (2006) noted the role of media in constructing images of modern womanhood. Post2015 scholarship continues to show that digital culture amplifies aspirations for autonomy while reinforcing selective traditional expectations.

- **Marriage and Intimacy:** Marriage remains central in Indian society, but companionate and love marriages are increasingly visible (Kaur & Palriwala, 2014). The transformation of intimacy, as theorized by Giddens (1992), provides a useful lens to understand the shift from duty-based unions to emotionally negotiated partnerships. Studies after 2018 highlight the influence of dating apps and social media in partner selection, especially among urban youth.

- **Intergenerational Relations and Elder Care:** With urban migration, elderly parents often live separately. However, filial obligation remains a strong moral norm. Scholars argue that caregiving arrangements are adapting through financial support and periodic co-residence rather than permanent joint living.

- **Cultural Hybridization:** Singh's (1973) concept of “modernization of tradition” remains relevant. Contemporary Indian families often combine ritual observance with modern lifestyles, reflecting hybrid identities.



Overall, recent literature suggests transformation marked by negotiation rather than collapse.

#### Research Objectives-

- To explore perceptions of changing family values among different generations.
- To analyze how gender roles are negotiated in contemporary households.
- To examine the persistence or transformation of kinship obligations.
- To understand how individuals interpret the balance between tradition and modernity.

#### Methodology-

**Research Design:** This study adopts a qualitative research design, aiming to capture lived experiences and subjective interpretations of family change.

**Sampling:** A purposive sample of 20 participants was selected from urban and semi-urban areas. The sample included:

- 8 young adults (aged 20–35)
- 7 middle-aged participants (aged 36–55)
- 5 elderly participants (aged 56 and above)

Participants represented nuclear and joint family backgrounds.

**Data Collection Method:** Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted over a period of two months. Interview questions focused on:

- Family structure and living arrangements
- Decision-making processes
- Gender roles and employment
- Marriage and partner choice
- Care for elderly members
- Perceived changes over time
- Interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes each.

**Data Analysis-** Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were coded and grouped into themes:

- Structural shifts
- Gender renegotiation
- Emotional companionship
- Intergenerational tension
- Cultural continuity

Ethical considerations included informed consent and anonymity.

#### Findings-

**Structural Transformation with Emotional Continuity:** Most participants reported living in nuclear families. However, many maintained strong emotional and financial ties with extended kin. One respondent noted: “We live separately, but every major decision involves our parents.” This suggests that jointness survives symbolically even when physically dispersed.

**Gender Role Negotiation-** Women participants emphasized greater autonomy in education and career decisions. However, domestic responsibilities remained disproportionately distributed. A working mother stated: “Even though I earn equally, household work is still mainly my responsibility.” This reflects partial transformation rather than complete equality (Dube, 1997).

**Changing Marriage Patterns-** Younger participants favored emotional compatibility over purely arranged alliances. Yet family approval remained significant. This aligns with the concept of negotiated modernity (Giddens, 1992).

**Intergenerational Tensions-** Elderly respondents expressed concern over declining co-residence but acknowledged practical constraints such as employment mobility. Younger participants valued independence but affirmed moral obligations toward parents.

**Technology and Family Interaction-** Digital communication platforms were widely used to maintain kinship ties across distances. Technology, therefore, functions as a tool of continuity rather than disruption.

**Discussion-** The findings suggest that Indian families are undergoing adaptive restructuring. Structural nuclearization coexists with emotional collectivism. This supports Shah’s (1998) argument that jointness persists beyond co-residence.

Gender transformation appears uneven. While women’s employment enhances agency, patriarchal norms continue to shape expectations. The “double burden” reflects incomplete egalitarian transition.



Marriage increasingly emphasizes companionship, aligning with Giddens' (1992) theory of transformed intimacy. Yet kinship approval remains culturally embedded.

Overall, modernization in India reflects selective incorporation of global values rather than wholesale Westernization (Singh, 1973).

**Implications-**

**Social Policy:** Policies supporting childcare, parental leave, and elderly welfare are essential in transitional contexts.

**Gender Equality:** Institutional support is required to redistribute domestic responsibilities.

**Intergenerational Dialogue:** Promoting communication between generations can reduce value conflicts.

**Conclusion-** The ethos of Indian families is not eroding but evolving. The qualitative evidence demonstrates coexistence of tradition and modernity, authority and negotiation, collectivism and individualism. Nuclear households, dual-career couples, and companionate marriages represent structural shifts; however, kinship loyalty, ritual continuity, and moral obligations remain resilient.

Thus, Indian families today embody hybridity—a dynamic synthesis shaped by socioeconomic change and cultural persistence. The future of Indian family life will likely continue this pattern of negotiated transformation rather than abrupt disintegration.

**REFERENCES**

1. Ahuja, R. (2014). Society in India: Concepts, theories and recent trends (3rd ed.). Rawat Publications.
2. Burgess, E. W., & Locke, H. J. (1953). The family: From institution to companionship. American Book Company.
3. Dube, L. (1997). Women and kinship: Comparative perspectives on gender in South and South-East Asia. United Nations University Press.
4. Dumont, L. (1980). Homo hierarchicus: The caste system and its implications. University of Chicago Press.
5. Giddens, A. (1992). The transformation of intimacy. Stanford University Press.
6. Goode, W. J. (1963). World revolution and family patterns. Free Press.
7. Karve, I. (1965). Kinship organization in India (2nd ed.). Asia Publishing House.
8. Kaur, R., & Palriwala, R. (2014). Marrying in South Asia. Orient BlackSwan.
9. Mandelbaum, D. G. (1970). Society in India. University of California Press.
10. Shah, A. M. (1998). The family in India: Critical essays. Orient Longman.
11. Singh, Y. (1973). Modernization of Indian tradition. Thomson Press.
12. Uberoi, P. (2006). Freedom and destiny. Oxford University Press.

\*\*\*\*\*