Challenges of Family Life in Modern India and the Role of Value Education to Build a Happy and Stable Nation

- Fr. Cajetan D. Menezes

The concept of Family and family values are deeply rooted in the Indian culture. India has for centuries been a place of healthy family life. Many have been and are still poor and may have only the bare minimum to survive; but even such poor people value family life very highly. Family is a precious value in our society. All major religions practised in India hold that marriage is sacred and encourage and support the members to live healthy family life.

For most Indians, family life is noble and they all consider it as a way of life designed for them by God himself and ingrained in the order of society. Therefore, by and large, they accept whatever happens for them in the family as the will of God. Illness, death, and even poverty are accepted to some extent in that spirit. Couples, on the whole, respect and love each other; they mostly stay faithful to each other as adultery is considered very immoral. Marriage vows are observed with due care and respect. Even today the Indian family is stable. Divorce is not sought as the normal remedy for family problems. Parents live for their children and are, generally, prepared to make any sacrifice for them. Elders live at home and generally families care for them in their old age.

In this paper we will analyze the changes that are taking place in the Indian society and the dangers the family is facing in India. There are several factors impacting family life, I will briefly mention a few.

I.   Factors impacting Family Life In Modern India

Industrialization and Urbanization

Family life is not the same in India as it used to be years ago. Industrialization and urbanization have influenced every quarter of the family. Fortunes of the economy is rural India fluctuates depending on the monsoon and agricultural income. Inflation is high and expenses are sky-rocketing and very many families find it difficult to make ends meet. Living conditions for migrants to urban centres is inadequate and inhuman.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

Substance abuse, particularly the abuse of alcohol, has become widespread in Indian culture in recent years. In fact it was a big poll issue in the recent elections in Punjab. It has taken the lives of so many individuals and destroyed so many families. Many families have already lost or are losing key male member(s) and/or financially wiped out due to the alcoholism of those members.

Increase of Violence in our Homes and society

There is an increase of violence in our society. The recent violence against women has shocked both women and men alike. It's no longer just a women's issue but a human justice issue. Besides, in our homes too, a serious concern is about the status of women and the manner in which they are often unjustly and unequally treated by male family members and society at large. A related concern is that these abusive practices have frequently been, and continue to be, justified in the context of cultural norms, religious beliefs, etc. Perpetrators of violence are getting younger and the problem widespread. Besides enforcement of laws, we need a change of mindsets that detests any form of violence and promotes a culture of love and life.

Sexual Revolution and Pornography

Pre-marital and extra-marital sex seems to be very much on the increase. Sex is not considered as a gift of the Creator and is taken out of the context of marriage and family. It has become a commodity to be used and enjoyed. People have lost their respectful attitude toward sex even within marriage. A spouse is often considered by many as a pleasurable object than as a partner for life. Indians don't want to address the issue of marital rape and incest. Women seem to have lost their identity and may even be ready nowadays to sell their bodies to pleasure seeking individuals; many men do not look at women as dignified persons created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1, 26), but consider them as a commodity for pleasure. The new plague of pornography further degrades the human person and sacredness of our sexuality. Many marriages are impacted by the addiction to pornography, and this is contributing to the sexual violence in our homes.

The sense of respect for the other is slowly vanishing from society. L. Melina (2003) observes: "The search to enjoy the meeting of the other is replaced by the more immediate, superficial search for pleasure."[1] This commercial attitude toward sex has revolutionized sexual morality and ravaged marital relationships. Unfaithfulness among marriage partners, pre-marital sex, teenage pregnancy, use of artificial birth control methods, abortion, prostitution, rape, same sex marriage and divorce have all increased as a result of this new found sexual morality. The availability of pornographic materials within the sanctuary of one's own home and even inside one's bedroom whether it is through Internet or CD, has made sex a cheap commodity and has endangered the stability of the family.

Long Distance Marriages and Single Parent Homes

In recent years more couples live separately than in the past. They are separated and live apart in India or in countries overseas mostly for the sake of jobs. Separation also happens between parents and children. These separations affect the well-being of families and the healthy and even normal development of children. Sometimes they even cause total dissolution of families, when bad behaviours such as extra-marital relations and/or drug or alcohol abuse develop as a result of the separation of couples. Children in such families are often left without proper guidance or role models, creating a great void in their personality development and even subjecting them to mental illness such as depression or paranoia. In India many young couples are forced to live separately immediately after their wedding for the sake of keeping their jobs. This separation during the prime time of their love relationship, often turn out to be very damaging. This also happens very often in the case of new born babies. Mothers leave their babies with a surrogate mother, sometimes even during the early weeks after the delivery. It has been proved that such babies generally lack normal development. Generally separated couples have less family life satisfaction compared to couples living together.

Communication Media and Mobile Technology

Before the seventies, India had only a few sources in multimedia: newspapers, magazines and movies; television was not at the reach of Indians in general. There is a deluge of such media in recent years: from newspapers and other printed materials to television and cinema, and from internet to cyber clinics and smart phones to tablets. Even those

media sources that existed before the seventies did not deviate very much from the traditional social mores in those years. Movies, TV shows and other news media have become part of the Indian panorama and they have become very decisive in shaping up personalities and lives of families. Child rearing practices have changed due to the influence of the media; adolescents and young adults repeat what they see on the screen – be it sex or substances. Multimedia has influenced the structure and lifestyle of the family. In India, the News Media have almost created a new culture which is not agreeable with the traditional family culture. Use of mobile phones and social media have had an negative impact on families.

Globalization

The world has shrunk into a tiny island, thanks to the high tech achievements. Whatever happens in one part of the world is transmitted to the other end immediately. As a result of this sporadic transmission of news, mores and customs, it is difficult for families to keep the members safe from their influences. Western culture is eroding the corridors of Asian cultures. Indiscrete globalization means globalization of everything, ethics included. Import of unethical values is tantamount to taking poisonous drinks. The Indian culture is already tainted. A debased morality and the emanating emancipated culture devoid of right family values will create a chaotic society as it has already done in the West. Due to globalization countries are forced to accept inadvertently any foreign culture and value system.

Gender Discrimination

Equality of sexes is very basic to healthy family relationship. Laws in our country talk about equality of sexes, but it falls by the wayside when a husband doesn't accept his wife as an equal. Inferior-superior mentality of couples among themselves and towards their children leads to master-servant relationship in the family. P. Chempakassery (2004) says, "The man and woman being the images of God are equal to each other and equality is a prerequisite for family life, which is built on interpersonal relationship. The relationship between a master and a slave is not interpersonal and there can be no family built on their relationship."[2] The negative mentality towards the female gender prevailing in some parts of India runs counter to the equal status given to humans by God the Creator who created

both the male and the female in His own image and likeness (Gen. 1.27). This inequality of sexes and the maltreatment meted out to women in families have severely affected family relations. Generally women are sufferers in the family.[3]

Changing Family Pattern

The Indian family has been a dominant institution in the life of the individual and in the life of the community[4]. With urbanization and modernization, this face of the Indian family is changing. Younger generations are turning away from the joint family structure. Modified extended family has replaced the traditional joint family. This new system does not demand geographic proximity or occupational involvement and does not have a hierarchical authority structure. Whereas it only encourages frequent visits, financial assistance, aid and support in childcare and household chores, and involvement and participation in life-cycle events such as births, marriages, deaths and other celebrations. The familial and kinship bonds are thus maintained and sustained[5].

The extended families, the newest version of the joint families of the old differ perhaps particularly in the nature of membership. The seniors including the grandparents live in the extended family; however, it is not a family of families as the joint family used to be. The extended families take care of the seniors as they try to follow the mores of the joint family system. These extended families do not seem to have abandoned or lessened the beliefs and values of the traditional Indian family culture. The seniors are unwelcome in nuclear families and they have to look for other means for their support. Many children opt for the nuclear system of family life as they are not prepared to look after their parents or as they have to move out for other reasons. Although the President of India has given her consent to the 'Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act' which punishes children who abandon parents with a prison term of three months or a fine, future is grim for elders in India[6].

Decline of Spirituality

Religion should be a way of life leading one to the Creator of the Universe. It should be able to liberate people from attaching themselves to anything straying them from God. It

should help them with the spiritual strength necessary to manage the stresses of this life and to sublimate their present wishes and longings for their union with the Ultimate. It is to help people to attain a spiritual experience, to enjoy through the daily events of ordinary human experiences the presence and strength of God in their lives already here on earth. It is not simply to give any emotional satisfaction of having achieved something here and now. Instead it should rekindle in them the hope for the future and staying always concentrated on the Ultimate.

Although we see some signs of religious revival in India, it is more of ritualism, individuals and families seem to be more frustrated, more tensed and depressed. They seem to lack the inner strength, founded on deep-rooted faith and trust in the all providing and loving God. Ritualism seems to be on the increase, while true spirituality is declining. The inner spiritual strength being drained out, families and individuals are left without any hope. They are frustrated and consequently take refuge in other resources looking for relief. This decline of genuine spirituality has its toll on family life; more divorces and even more suicides.

These trends weaken the value system and fabric of the family and nation:

To sum up, industrialization, urbanization, and modernization have been instrumental in changing Indian family structures, values and lifestyles. As Ganeswar Mishra describes, middle and upper middle class families have been undergoing a dramatic transformation because the younger generation is questioning power issues, traditional roles, hierarchical relationships, obligations, loyalty, and loyalty to kinsmen and the elderly[7]. With changing times, the Indian family structure, functions, traditional division of labour and authority patterns have also altered; women have emerged to be more independent and self-reliant and children more assertive and free. The Indian family is presently less unified and more fractured. They are not able and sometimes not willing to look after the elders as they used to do in the past.

There has been a decline in the value system of individuals and families resulting in the decline in social and moral conduct of individuals in society. This has resulted in increase in crime in society, lack of peace in families and dissatisfied individuals. Thus dissatisfied individuals and decline in values in families has larger ramifications for the stability of the country.

Value Education to strengthen Families and build the nation

For a strong and ethical nation we need to have effective human formation programmes to support families to teach values to its members. In these challenging times, Value Education is needed for a well ordered society: Schools and colleges must play a proactive role in inculcating value education and help built stable families and good citizens.

The great Nobel Laureate Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Education gives wisdom. Morality and spirituality are the essential components of wisdom. Values are essential in all fields of education, religion, politics and society. For restructuring of society and nation, value based politics and value based socialization and economic processes are highly essential. But we are living in such a society where politics are floating with inhuman nature without any ethics and science. This results in outcome of meaningless work, characterless education, trade without any honesty, and even worship without sacrifice. The entire socialization process is badly affected by these odd behaviours. For example science has lost its temper for well being of human, politics are done for personal gains and trade becomes a cheating process to exploit the customers. Today education has become a process for acquiring a degree for professional purposes. Sometimes it loses path for making human resource. Religion becomes a tool for personal benefit. All these evil processes lead to destruction of human race. To overcome all these odds we must give stress on value education. About the Indian education system the educationist say that we are providing education only to the mind and not for character. As a result average Indians have little character and no discipline. If they are to build a nation they must learn both.[8]

<u>Families Failing in their Duty to Transmit Values to the next generation</u> For the various reasons discussed in this paper earlier and the family is getting overwhelmed by the rapid changes and unable to transmit values in an effective manner.

What Values do we want to transmit for making a good society as well as nation we should give importance to the following values:

1. **Family and Social values**: It means respect for the institution of marriage and family. Respect for equality of the spouse. Respect for parents and elders in the home. It

means social norms in respect to individual behaviour, conduct, duties and responsibilities towards others. Social values provide stability and uniformity in the society. We should keep up the values such as human dignity, social equality, good manners, patriotism, kindness, social responsibility, dignity for labour, peaceful living, sacrifice and cooperation. These values guide us for making a good society. These values have to be taught and role modelled by members in the family, and teachers and staff in educational institutions.

2. **Cultural values**: Cultural values are those values which can help to conserve and preserve our culture and tradition. In educational institutions cultural values may be developed by providing cultural activities like dance, drama, songs, etc. The feat of these activities can contribute for building the society in a positive perspective.

3. **Spiritual values**: It emerges mainly from moral values such as truthfulness, right conduct, peace, love, non-violence, honesty, trust, prayer etc. Sense of right and wrong is the vital point. Education should be such way so that pupils can acquire spiritual values from their teachers and parents. In this context the Kothari Commission of 1964-66 may be referred which recommended the necessity of developing spiritual values through curricular and co-curricular activities in students.[9] Family has to inculcate spiritual values and practice rituals for the child to learn from birth. Parents and grand-parents should be good role models as values are not taught but caught.

Educational Institutions should engage parents in the Value Education Programme: The primary responsibility of transmitting values to the child belongs to the parents. Society and Institutions help and assist the parents to transmit values to the next generation. The Educational institutions through the active participation of the P.T.A. (Parent Teacher Association) should involve parents and assist them in their primary task. Giving each other feedback, for effective implementation and follow up of the value Education programme will help build better citizens for the future.

Conclusion

Today value education is specially needed for the young people. Children and Youth can play a pivotal role in nation building. It is said that stable families and well formed youth

and children are the backbone of a nation. Thinking for welfare of others not only makes one brighter but also brings in benefits for the individuals, families and society. Today most people have become self-centred and they always think for their own, resulting in degradation of family and society and ultimately the nation. Unstable families and self-centred individuals cannot help in nation building. We need to have systematic strategy through our religious and educational institutions to support family in inculcating the right values through a comprehensive Value Education Programme to build happy and stable families and a strong and prosperous Nation. Want to conclude with the famous words of St. (Mother) Teresa of Kolkata: "... to build World peace, go home and love your family."

Jai Hind!

Footnotes

1 L. Melina. "Anthropological and MoralImplications of *Familiar is Consortio* and Its Effects on Subsequent Thinking", *Indian Journal of Family Studies.* 1/1 (2003) 14.

2 Chempakassry, P. "Marriage and family in the Creation Account", Indian *Journal of Family Studies.* 2/3 (2004), 18.

3 Hui, C.H. and Triandis, H.C. (1986). "Individualism – Collectivism A study of Cross-Cultural Researchers" Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 17:22-248

4 Mullati, l. (1992)."Changing Profile of the Indian Family." In The Changing Family in Asia: Bangladesh, India, Japan, Philippines and Thailand, ed. UNESCO, Bangkok; Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific.

5 Nandan, Y. , and Eames, E. (1980). "Typology and Analysis of the Asian-Indian Family." In The New Ethics: Asian Indians in the United States, ed. P. Saran and E.Eames, New York: Prager.

6 http://www.indianofficer.om/forums/current-sies/5843 – problem-old-age-india.html

7 Mishra, G (1995). "Reflection on the Continuity and Change in the Indian Family System." Trends in Social Sciences Research 2:27-30.

8 Goswami, Dev PitambarDr., Value Education For Nation Building, *an abstract of the foundation day lecture by Dr. SriSri PD Goswami at the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute for Youth Development, Sri Perambadur, Tamilnadu during November, 2014*

9 Cf. Goswami, D. P. Dr., Value Education For Nation Building, 2014.