Changing Family Forms, Patterns and Emerging Challenges
Within the South African Indian Diaspora

Sultan Khan

INTRODUCTION

Calcutta and Madras may be dubbed the “cooler catchment” centers for the British colonial trade in indentured labor destined for the southern tip of Africa. It was a weathered form of slavery based on voluntary contractual labor relationships—a more civilized version of slavery which was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833. It took the form of a systematic but brutal coordination of capital accumulation using predominantly the single sex indentured labor system. Commencing in 1860, hordes of male laborers were shipped to the port city of Durban in South Africa to cultivate and process sugar on the coastal belt of the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Indentured labor helped set the economic foundation for the processing of raw material for the present day global multi-billion rand sugar enterprise on the altar of family life, kinship ties, social networks and relationships. The social, political and economic hardships of indentured laborers were endured beyond the period of early British colonialism and well into the apartheid era. Today in the post-democratic South Africa and particularly in 2010 this group celebrated its 150 years presence in the country reflecting on its hardships, triumphs and accomplishments. As a community in the country, it owes its presence to the early family forms of marriage and family life which ensured its reproduction and hence its continued presence in the country. The early family form helped preserve and promote cultural identity over the hostile political years resulting in a sense of community.

A second stream of immigrants took a free passage to South Africa from around the 1870s onwards in the tracks of their indentured counterparts in pursuit of trading opportunities. They were primarily Hindu and Muslim traders originating from Gujarat who set up retail shops in urban areas in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng (formerly known as the Transvaal) including small towns. They saw themselves not as part of the working class or peasantry in South Africa, but as a commercial bourgeoisie to accumulate capital and return to India where their roots remained. Unlike their indentured laborer counterparts, they maintained their caste divisions and consciousness. They succeeded in maintaining their family structure and identity through close family links in India. Often women and children followed once the men were established in the colony. Men sought their wives in India while daughters were sent to India in marriage. Contact with village and community were close, resulting in close contacts and links with India (Ginwala, 1977).

1 School of Sociology and Social Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban 4041, South Africa.
Given that the Indian diaspora has two sets of historical presence in the country comprising different ethnic, religious and class groups, it may be argued that a uniform analysis of the evolution of the family system and family life will differ based on these differences. This is partially true and is aptly captured by Singh (2007) who asserts that on the question of how “the Indian family” reconstituted itself and concomitantly re-established semblances of the regionally based customary norms and practices will remain an ongoing challenge to historians and social scientists for analysis. Its nature, durability and flexibility however, has been shaped by events and circumstances in the context of a hostile social and political condition that pervaded South African society through colonialism and later apartheid. Considering these common experiences for the two streams of Indian immigrants, much resemblance exists on how the family adapted and responded to these social and political conditions. The early analysis by Kuper (1956) on the Indian family life has as much relevance today as it did before. Kuper (1956) asserts that despite the diversity prevalent within the Indian diaspora, the family as a social institution has certain characteristics common to all sections of the diaspora so one can speak without reservation of the “Indian Family.” In comparing these two streams of Indian immigrants, Burrows (1952) observed that they have equally strong family cohesion and traditions. Notwithstanding this, he concludes that it is much greater amongst Hindu families since they tend to cling onto remnants arising from the old caste system which is linked to family units. On the other hand, he observed that an economic class distinction has arisen amongst the Muslim passenger Indians on the basis of wealth. In contrast, their indentured counterparts struggled to climb the economic ladder. In terms of family structures, the Muslim family tends to be more patriarchal and tolerant of polygamy whilst the Hindu family continues to be matriarchal in nature. Such observations suggest some social differences within the different groupings of Indians within the diaspora, whilst certain aspects are common.

More recently, Vahed and Desai (2010) in their study of identity and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa amongst Indian South Africans conclude that a common shared experience under apartheid rule had reinforced a sense of “Indianness” within the diaspora suggesting that in an indirect way it helped to preserve and transmit this sense of identity over generations. Undoubtedly, the family is the most basic social unit to have ensured for this to happen. It is within these scholarly frameworks on Indian family life, that this paper examines the changing forms, patterns and emerging challenges within the contemporary South African Indian diaspora.

This paper commences by tracing the early evolution of family life amongst the first and subsequent generations of Indians, followed by an examination of their marriage and family structure. Thereafter, the origins of the nuclear family are examined followed by an analysis of their family stability and the resurgence of attitudes towards the extended family form. Lastly, the paper reflects on some of the post-apartheid challenges confronting the Indian family. In terms of methodology, the paper draws from both secondary and primary sources of information on the South African Indian diaspora and reflects on common aspects of family life and factors that affects its structure and form. The paper does not purport to be exhaustive as sociological analyses on the Indian family in South Africa context and its specificities are few. This is largely due to the fact that empirical studies on diverse family forms in South Africa are inadequate due to the lack of longitudinal data (Ziehl, 2001). Considering South Africa’s cumbersome race classification and fragmented statistical
management systems for the different race groups, vital statistics on marriage and family are either poorly recorded or non-existent. This situation in the post-apartheid era continues to persist, with policymakers attempting to ensure that vital statistics on marriage and family life are maintained and comprehensive enough for reliable analysis for the different population groups. Where it does exist, concern is expressed on its standardization and interpretation of key analytical variables as these vary from time to time (Bah and Rama, 1999). Nonetheless, this paper is constructed from data sources that are considered reliable and cited with frequency to provide insight into the changing family forms, patterns and challenges facing the Indian family system in the post-apartheid South African context.


derapy of Indians in the Natal Colony

The first batch of immigrant Indians were indentured laborers who reached the colony of Natal on 16 November 1860 in the ship, SS Truro. A total of 342 indentured Indians were on board. Thereafter, between 1860-61, five more ships brought in a total of 1,360 men and women (Sulliman, 1997). These were the first of the 152,184 “human cargo” to be shipped to the shores of Durban over 51 years comprising 62 percent males, 25 percent females and 13 percent children (Ministry of External Affairs, 2000). They were subjected to a contract which included free transport from India, an agreement to work for 10 shillings a month for three years (later extended to five years), free food, accommodation and medical attention (Burrows, 1952).

Insofar as their ethnic and religious composition was concerned, two-thirds were Tamil and Telegu speaking Hindus originating from Mysore and surrounding areas. The remaining came from what is now known as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. Only 12 percent of the total population of this cohort of immigrants were Muslims, while some two percent were Christians. Insofar as literacy was concerned, many had no formal education but managed to sustain strong memories of their customs, traditions and rituals which they preserved diligently (Ministry of External Affairs, 2000). Their settlement patterns spread across the city, the colony and outside of it. In the city they settled largely on the periphery of white owned estates such as Riverside, Cato Manor, Clairwood and the Magazine Barracks. Insofar as the colony was concerned, they were largely settled on the coastal belt of Natal to work on its fertile land for agricultural purposes. Hence they were settled in white owned estates on the coast in towns such as Isipingo, Umzinto and Umkomaas to the South of Durban. To the North of Durban they settled in towns such as Verulam, Tongaat and Stanger (Maharaj, 1994). In other parts of Natal, some indentured Indians settled in the province’s capital in Pietermaritzburg and hinterland towns of Dundee, Newcastle, and Ladysmith.

Around the 1870s a second group of free passenger Indians began streaming into the colony in search for economic opportunities. They followed in the footsteps of their indentured counterparts who were by now the trailblazers of Indian presence in the colony. Within this group there were a fair number of Gujarati speaking Hindus but a large proportion were Muslims originating from the Gujarat districts of Surat, Kholwad, Rander, Kathor, Baroda, Bardoli and Navsari (Randeree, 1997). They constituted about 10 percent of the total Indian population and were comprised mainly of traders (Ministry of External Affairs, 2000). These Muslims were mistaken by the colonial whites to be Arabs due to their pronounced dress and features. Nonetheless, both religious groups enjoyed enormous trading opportunities,
privilege of movement in the city to pursue their business interests and ventured both into remote towns of the colony and the Transvaal where they set up trading posts. Many of them owned family businesses that engaged the services of better educated extended family members as compared to their indentured Indian counterpart. The latter group was less educated and lacked capital to make any significant investment in business (Bawa, 2006). To illustrate the economic strength of Muslims of passenger Indian origin in the early years, it is worth analyzing the financial investments made in the retail sector. In 1885 the number of retail shops owned by Muslims in the city of Durban increased by 60 percent compared to those established earlier by their indentured Indian counterparts (Khan, 2009). As a result of economic prosperity the trading-class of Indians were later joined by a professional class in response to their changing social, political, and economic needs. Accountants, lawyers, teachers, priests and other professionals supplemented this already established Indian business community both in the colony and in the Transvaal (Ministry of External Affairs, 2000).

In contrast, the social and economic condition of the early generation of indentured Indian families was thwarted due to widespread exploitation. Long hours of work on daily food rations, living in cramped regimented dwellings constructed of stone and zinc, or wattle and daub, poor sanitary and health conditions, absence of medical care facilities, racial prejudice and physical abuse took its toll on the well-being of these so called “strange looking people” from Asia. Social and health related problems in the form of suicide, crime, drug and alcohol abuse, mental illnesses, violence, infidelity, desertsions, tuberculosis, diseases, infanticide, and death related to burns were some of the many hardships encountered by the early settlers (Meer, 1980) that militated against the preservation of family life and values.

Socio-cultural and religious dilemmas were also a major source of challenge. Given the diversity of languages spoken in the colony (Tamil, Bhojpuri, Gujarati, Telugu, Urdu, Kokani, and Meman—a dialect of Sindhi) (Mesthrie, 1990) it restricted social interaction within certain linguistic groups and at the same time excluded others. Where certain linguistic groups were in the minority it is not surprising that they would be isolated from the dominant ones. Being in a strange land and stripped of social networks and religious and community support structures further added to their social isolation.

Given the unequal ratio of males over females which in 1885 was 2:1 for the entire indentured population, it further added to this isolation as the prospect of forming intimate relationships became remote (Palmer, 1957). Although some arrived as a family unit, many were single males, socially engineered by the colonialist masters so that they would remain unencumbered for a longer duration of time to sell their labor. It was perceived that family life and accompanying familial responsibility would distract them from providing undivided commitment to their colonial master’s pursuit for economic gains. Females were often obliged by economic necessity and sometimes fear to cohabit with a number of men simultaneously without the protection of marriage for the explicit purpose of male sexual gratification (Meer, 1972). Provision for the recognition of marriages whether contracted in India or in South Africa was non-existent. In the absence of such institutional mechanisms to recognize marriages it was not uncommon for men and women to form short-term unions and separate as soon as quarrels occurred. This situation was exacerbated when the coolie agent in assigning laborers arbitrarily paired any male or female together and assigned them for indenture as husband
Changing Family Forms, Patterns and Emerging Challenges

and wife (Palmer, 1957). In many instances formal consent was provided to the coolie agent out of convenience in order to overcome the fear of loneliness which accompanied this form of labor arrangement. Getting men to accept responsibility for children born within a relationship was often difficult due to the denial of paternity. The limited number of women among the many men often escalated into competition for companionship resulting in violence, suicide and murder (Palmer, 1957).

However, on 14 March 1913, a Cape Supreme Court judge gave a decision that only Christian marriages were legal in South Africa and that rites carried out under a religion which recognized polygamous marriages were illegal. This reduced large numbers of women to the status of concubines (Palmer, 1957) which during the apartheid era and even to this day, is a politically contested issue.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY STRUCTURE

Considering that between 1860 and 1911 that the actual proportion of males to females was 66:34, it comes as little surprise that the structure of the indentured Indian family was influenced by this demographic trend. This situation was further influenced by demographic changes implemented through the repatriation scheme post indenture resulting in a decline in the male population. As a consequence, more males than females returned to India. In addition the high death rate of the older male population and immigration restricted to the wives of males already living in South Africa further reduced the male population size.2 Hence these trends in the shifting male population may be considered as a period of demographic maturity within the diaspora, with the male-female ratio gap closing in.

Despite the male-female ratio gap closing, finding a spouse within one’s religious and ethnic grouping was a difficult encounter. This was especially so in the early years of indenture resulting in marriages outside of ones religious group. Marriages registered in 1872, 12 years after the arrival of indentured Indians, recorded the highest marriage statistic between Muslims and Hindus. A total of 67 percent of recorded marriages was between Muslims and Hindus (Meer, 1980). These cross religious marriages presented another source of challenge for the next generation to preserve its religious and cultural sense of identity. Strong attempts were made to preserve religious and cultural identities making marriages across religion and language lines almost taboo (Desai and Vahed, 2007). For instance, not only Muslim marriages across religious lines attracted opposition, marriage between and amongst their merchant class community was strongly discouraged. Although some social mixing was taking place between and amongst the different Muslim groupings during religious occasions, a distinct line was drawn on marriages outside of these groups. Inter marriage amongst Memon and Gujarati speaking Muslims was discouraged. Within these two groupings the choice of marital partners was often determined by village identity and for purposes of cementing business and commercial interests. It was almost taboo for Memons and Gujarati speaking Muslims to marry Muslims originating from the South Indian indentured group. Those marrying a South Indian Muslim were either, dispossessed by their families, ostracized, or banished from extended family networks. Marrying a Kolcha, a derogatory status accorded

2 Padayachee (1999) in his analysis asserts that the ratio of males to females began to even out providing the precondition for a balance in the marriage market which set the foundation for the emergence of monogamous family forms within the first generation diaspora.
to non-Muslims of Indian extraction was a violation of family and village pride. However, over time with education, social stratification and greater individual choice on marriage partners, some degree of tolerance emerged for religiously and ethnically mixed marriages, including marriages with non-Muslims. In many instances, where religious boundaries where crossed due to marriage, it was incumbent for the non-Muslim spouse to embrace Islam (Khan, 2009). Although the main reason for the prevalence of endogamous marriage was to preserve religious group identity it also helped to solidify social ties between and amongst families. In this instance the choice of a marital partner was more a family arrangement than an individual decision. As far as the marriage form was concerned, monogamy was generally the rule among all faith groupings, with some differences especially amongst those belonging to the Islamic faith. Cross-cousin marriages were prevalent to some extent amongst those of South Indian descent, and those belonging to the Islamic faith (Mesthrie, 1990). Endogamous marriages even to this day continue to be a trend for the different groupings of Indians.

On completion of indenture some signs of family life began to emerge. Given the choice between re-indenture, a free passage home to India, or freedom through a small plot of freehold land, many settled for the last although the promise of land ownership was not honored in all cases (Burrows, 1952). Nonetheless, amongst those that completed their indenture and chose to remain in the country, some used their savings to purchase land from their former White masters especially in the rural small towns. Some also opted to continue living on White-owned farm estates in the service of their former masters. Those that acquired land enjoyed the opportunity to set down family roots with some degree of permanency through the establishment of both formal and semi-formal houses. Through land ownership it is not surprising that from the 1920s to 1930s a large number were dependent on it for a living. On the other hand, the vast majority of the landless migrated to the urban centers to seek employment in the formal wage economy especially in the manufacturing sector which saw an economic boom just after the First World War. Many rented accommodation in the city center. To illustrate the extent of urbanization, Landy et al., (2004) noted that in 1936, only 37 percent of Natal Indians were working in the agricultural sector as compared to a mere five percent in 1970. They assert that the original rural orientation of the migrants, during this period of urbanization implied important cultural changes resulting in a loss of their rural values which was tantamount to losing Indian values.

During this period, the type of family structure which was almost in its second generation of family life was characterized by the extended unit. This extended unit comprised males related by descent living on jointly owned property. Kuper (1956) describes this as the *kutumbham* which included not only a patriarchal head with his wife and unmarried children, but also his unmarried brothers and sisters, his younger married brothers, his married brothers and his brothers married sons with their wives and children.

A distinct feature of the extended family form was its ability to respond and adapt to rapid urbanization followed by rapid industrial growth just after Second World War. The unemployed and those skilled and semi-skilled moved to the city as a family unit as the agricultural sector began to decline. Kuper, in a 1945 survey of Merebank and Springfield in Durban inhabited predominantly by Indian families reported that 47 percent of households took the form of extended families. This suggests that physical mobility and resettlement hardly had a negative impact on the extended family system. Perhaps one can explain the prevalence of such high
levels of social cohesiveness arising largely out of the financial dependency on the head of
the household, lack of sufficient housing in urban centers, care of the aged, unmarried
women, children and the benefit of sharing resources in an extended household. The extended
family promoted income pooling through co-residence resulting in social cohesion within
the newly established family within the diaspora.

Within the extended family form, women occupied a central position especially in the urban
household where the head of the family engaged in wage labor outside of the family. They
took charge of child rearing responsibilities, supplemented household incomes through
urban market gardening activities, promoted religious values and practices, worked as
domestics in more affluent Indian households and in factories and participated actively in
the education of their children. Even when the male head of the household left for India to be
reunited with kith and kin, or upon death or desertion, the wife continued to serve as the
matriarch within the extended household. Hence an important sociological analysis that can
be drawn from this is that in the early evolution of family life, the extended family served as
an economic, psychological and social safety net upon which strong family values were
established. It served as the foundation for the emergence of the later nuclear family form.

ORIGINS OF THE NUCLEAR FAMILY FORM IN SOUTH AFRICA

The foundations of the extended family were disrupted by the Group Areas Act of 1950
which forcibly removed and resettled communities in the urban centers where Indians were
largely located during this time. The disrupting effect of forced removals just when the
indentured Indian family form was taking shape in the different facets of family life may be
considered a social trauma that had far reaching sociological consequences for its future
form. It may be asserted that this premature disruption in the maturing phases of the extended
family form was a catalyst that gave rise to the nuclear family form. As early as 1940 in a
survey of 400 families, Burrows (1952) noted that every woman over 25 years and every male
over 30 years were married. Such a finding strongly suggests commitment to family life which
set the foundation for procreation within the institution of family and the establishment of a
sense of community. In confirmation of this assertion, an analysis of the population growth
rate for the Indian community attests to this. By 1951 the number of Indians in the Province
had grown from 100,918 in 1904 to 298,000 (66 % population growth rate) as against 97,109 for
Whites in the same period to 270,000 (64 % population growth rate) (Burrows, 1952). This
trend suggests that the Indian community had a natural population growth of 66 percent
when settled into family life.

It will be noted from Table 1 that that largest child birth rates were recorded between the
periods 1902-21 and 1922-41 with a mean child birth rate of 5.16 and 4.15 respectively per
family.

Given that the diaspora began to reproduce itself as noted from the increased birth rates, it
provides a strong indicator of it having committed itself to family life. This was short lived as
it was disrupted by the implementation of the Group Areas Act. The magnitude of disruption
to family life can only be illustrated by the extent of forced removal and resettlement of
Indians in the city. By 1978 it was estimated that some 140,000 Indians in Durban alone were
forcibly removed and relocated (Gordon, 1979).
Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1878-1901</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902-1921</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-1941</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>2.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-1961</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962-1981</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Many who had settled and began to be socially rooted into functional communities were stripped of their family bonds and social support networks and relocated to sterile and monolithic public housing estates. In the city of Durban, Springfield, Merebank, Chatsworth, and Phoenix public housing estates were established primarily to house working class Indians. In contrast, affluent Indians of different ethnic and religious backgrounds established palatial homes within close proximity of white suburbs.

Public housing estates comprised multi-storied blocks of flats accommodating some six to eight families from different parts of the city. These flats were developed in keeping with Western standards, spatially restrictive with few rooms and contrary to the desires, needs, ideals and practices of families that were required to live in them (Butler-Adam and Venter, 1985).

The uprooting of families and resettling them in public housing estates created uncertainty, anxiety, and moreover the disruption of the joint and extended family systems. This situation, in the main, had devastating effects on the elderly and resulted in the breakdown of the traditional way of life which was reconstructed in the early years of indenture, forcing families into a nuclear family system by virtue of the public housing design. A 1978 survey by Butler-Adam and Venter (1987) suggests that 80 percent of Indian families were living in nuclear family units. This finding may be closely corroborated with that of Meer’s study in 1984 which suggests that about two-thirds of the working married women lived in the nuclear family form and one-third in the extended kind. When one compares this to an earlier survey by Burrows in the 1940s on the Indian family structure, it provides much insight on the actual attrition of its family size due to the negative effects of forced removals. Every single family comprised on average of six households in this period (Burrows, 1952). These findings strongly attests to the nuclearization of the Indian family as a result of resettlement into space constrained public housing flats that made little provision for the extended family to co-exist. In addition, given the physical structure of these public housing flats, extended and joint families could no longer reconstitute themselves. Moreover, given its overcrowding, all hopes for its re-emergence were dashed.

Bhana (1997) highlights that this traumatic experience resulted in strained relations amongst family members due to separation from the central parental authority which was lost in the sudden shift to the nuclear family system. A once settled community founded on the norms and values of the extended and joint family forms was uprooted from kin, the social cohesion derived from organic communities and social networks (temples, churches, mosques, schools,
cultural, and sporting amenities) and forced into dormitory like sleeping cubicles in the public housing estates designed solely for working classes. This took place without the right or opportunity for one to choose one's neighborhood and neighbors. To this end, Butler-Adam and Venter (1987) in their study confirm that families removed from thriving, viable and often conveniently located communities were often relocated in areas that were foreign and alienating.

Butler-Adam and Venter (1987) also assert that the design features of public housing affected family life by introducing stress. The lack of formal room for entertaining guests and with bathrooms and toilets being combined into a single room was a source of intra-family alienation and discord. Often a bedroom was converted into a guest room at the cost of overcrowding and the combination of bathrooms and toilets severely reduced its usability and hindered effective family functioning during peak family routine times. Consequently the impact of public housing estates on Indian family life highlights that it had made no provision for the patriarchal homestead as it was designed for the wage dependent, smaller nuclear structures and over time led to overcrowding.

Living in public housing estates altered the role of the family from the previous extended or joint family system in which the father (breadwinner) had now to pay off monthly installments, maintenance cost, purchase furniture, and other household items often on credit. Suddenly, this movement from the extended and joint family system meant that the father now had direct responsibility for the care of his family. The newly founded nuclear family had now to adjust to new role patterns and economic responsibilities. Since the majority of the Indians were moved to residential areas a distance away from their places of work, it increased travel costs and further strained family budgets which were already stretched by higher rents. Sudden provision had to be made for children who were acquiring a taste for expensive designer Western clothing within the urban context which had to be balanced with the need to provide for higher education. It therefore became inevitable for mothers to find unskilled or semi-skilled employment to supplement rising household costs, in the rapidly emerging industrial sector on the borders of the newly developed townships.

The emancipation of Indian women from the traditional homestead and their entry into the labor market was most noticeable in this period. Indian women constituted 69 percent of all women employed in garment manufacture in Natal, i.e., 24,408 Indian females as compared to a total of 11,066 African, colored and white females worked in clothing factories in the province (Chetty, 1987). At the time of the study, 59 percent of all economically active Indian females in metropolitan Durban were employed in the manufacturing industry. Insofar as their economic plight is concerned in the clothing industry, Chetty (1987) notes that the average Indian family of six needed Rs 412 a month to cover the costs of basic needs and immediate essentials. None of the clothing workers interviewed in this study earned anywhere near that sum.

A tough day at the factory, unattended children, poor pay, long distance traveling for work, anxiety of lone travels on a poorly serviced public transport system demanded much emotional and psychological energy which the working Indian mother would have been better off had the support of the extended and joint family was more accessible. Inevitably, this placed enormous stress within this emerging dual earner family restricting its ability to fulfill their newly found responsibility outside of the extended family.
Living outside of the extended family had a profound influence on some of the traditions and practices revered by the earlier Indian household. Resettled in social wastelands with a notable absence of functional human contacts and basic urban facilities, the emerging Indian nuclear family had to surmount many social challenges insofar as preserving its sense of identity. This was especially so in light of it being outside the watchful eye of the extended family which would otherwise have been socially pressured into conforming to forms of the traditional Indian value system. The nuclear family was exposed to acculturation through the permeation of Western cultures. For example a study by Schoombee and Mantzaris (1987) highlighted that the attitudes of younger and better educated Indians towards the acceptability or not of arranged and inter-religious marriages differed from those of the less educated and older Indians. The attitudes of younger members of the Indian community tended to be similar to those of the White “Western” community in Durban. Such a finding attests to the extent of socio-cultural change taking place during this phase of nuclearization process of the Indian family (Schoombee and Mantzaris, 1987). Insofar as attitudes towards the use of contraceptives are concerned, the same authors highlight that 86.5 percent of their respondents in the age category of 15-29 years approved of such practices and so did 72.5 percent over the ages of 45 years. Such a finding suggests that use of contraceptives was a break away from the traditional notion of Indian values and culture in support of Westernized norms and values. It also suggests a decline in the influence of the extended family in preserving traditional values and the attrition of family size through birth control measures in keeping with nuclear family norms.

Two studies strongly allude to the permeation of Western culture and its influence on the Indian family system. Hofmeyer (1982) in his study asserts that Indians belonging to the Hindu religious grouping have suffered a major set-back due to the collapse of the extended and joint family systems. He concludes that in the joint family system, religious instructions ideally advanced informally by a process of osmosis through participation of its family members. In the nuclear family system, in the absence of elders to inform and motivate the younger generation of Hindus resulted in ignorance of both the beliefs and behaviors associated with long held home rituals. Similarly, Schoombee and Mantzaris (1987) in their study cite the views of the Muslim clergy who considered that Western values and way of life were a hazard to the Indian family due to the permissiveness of South African society which influenced and corrupted the minds of Muslims. More recently Singh and Harisunker (2010) in their analysis of Indian women’s response to dress codes in Durban suggests that within the Hindu community younger females tended to exercise their right to choose Western wear over traditional clothing. This suggests a need to breakaway from the rigidity of the past, but at the same time not compromising their appreciation for traditional wear on special religious and family occasions. The same perhaps can be said to hold true in certain respects for Muslims of Indian origin.

**FAMILY STABILITY AND THE RESURGENCE OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EXTENDED FAMILY**

Like all other social groups, family instability within the Indian diaspora is as a result of marital discord and eventually breakdown. Based on the earlier discussions, it is apparent that a host of socio-historical factors influenced the structure and form of the Indian family system within the South African diaspora. Primary amongst them are the early historical
factors that shaped and styled the family as a social unit, followed by urbanization, forced removal and relocation into public housing estates, acculturation and the adoption of Western forms of culture and the passage to the nuclear family form from the traditional extended/joint family system. These events have had serious sociological impacts on the stability of the Indian family system resulting in marital breakdown. Table 2 which contains the marital status of Indians since their early arrival to their post democratic presence in South Africa provides some interesting trends. For the period 1878-1901 the highest divorce/separation (6.67%) was recorded. This trend needs to be understood within the context of socio-historical factors wherein the family as a social institution was being established for the first time. Trends in family stability can be noted for the period 1902-21 with the lowest (0.32%) record of divorce/separation and thereafter peaking again to 1.98 percent for the periods 1922-41. What is significant is the percentage of divorce/separation rapidly increasing for the periods 1942-1961 to 4.2 percent. One might explain such a dramatic increase in divorce/separation trends for this period being attributed to the political and economic pressures emerging from World War II, rapid urbanization within the country and the migration of Indians to urban centers in search of employment, forced removal and relocation and the nuclearization of the Indian family resulting in stress factors for such a high trend of divorce and separation being recorded for this period. For the period following (1962-81), one notices a lower percentage of divorce/separation but once again a gradual increase may be noted by the year 2001.

Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Divorced/Separated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1878-1901</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902-1921</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922-1941</td>
<td>1.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1942-1961</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1962-1981</td>
<td>1.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Through re-adaptation of the data from different sources, it provides a longitudinal trend on divorce/separation incidences for comparative purposes. It also confirms the assumption that in the early evolution of family life amongst the Indian diaspora, it was characterized by high levels of family instability.

In light of recent data on the distribution of household types within the Indian diaspora generated by Amoateng and Richter (2003) from the 1996 Census as depicted in Table 3, it is interesting to note that the divide between extended and nuclear family households for both rural and urban localities for Indians in South Africa had undergone some change. Contrary to the findings of Butler-Adam and Venter in their 1978 survey in the urban center of Durban that highlighted that 80 percent of Indian families were living in nuclear family households, the findings of Amoateng and Richter (2003) closely resemble trends observed in Meer’s earlier study conducted in 1987 which suggests that two-thirds of married couples lived in nucleated households during this period.
However, what is significant from the data in Table 3, is that there is an almost even split in nucleated families for both urban/rural localities (62.1% and 63% respectively). Insofar as extended family households are concerned, their prevalence is slightly greater in urban localities (27.6%) compared to rural areas (25.3%). This is not surprising, considering that in urban localities residential mobility is often affected by housing market demands forcing families to live in extended family arrangements. More significantly, the study by Amoateng and Richter (2003) attests to the sustained traditional mode of living in extended family households amongst a fair proportion of Indians close to a century and half presence in the country as a diasporic community. When this trend is compared to the studies of Burrows (1952), Butler-Adam and Venter (1987) and Meer (1984) it may be concluded that with the passage of time, the extended family living arrangements to a certain extent continued to be a preferred choice for many within the Indian diaspora in South Africa.

A more recent study by Singh (2007) comprising 150 respondents from two and three generation households on their attitudes towards extended and joint family living arrangements in the city of Durban provides startling results. Of the sample, an overwhelming 112 (74.66%) respondents expressed positive attitudes for such a living arrangement. A wide range of qualitative responses such as: “this is how we always lived”, “it is only natural for us to live this way”, “our religion demands it of us”, “it is customary to live this way”, “we have no other choice”, “we want to live on our own but close-by to our parents”, “until the family grows too big”, “until we are able to afford living on our own”, “I would want to live with my mother/parents, but not my in-laws”, “who will look after my parents when they are old?”,” for a few months/years after marriage until we understand our rituals well enough”, and “until my wife understands what my parents expects of us as a married couple” suggests a preference for extended and joint family living arrangements amongst a significant proportion of Indians in Durban.

Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Extended</th>
<th>Non-Family</th>
<th>Nuclear</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted and calculated from Amoateng and Richter, 2003, p.246.

One of the major conclusions that can be drawn from Singh’s (2008) study lies on the political realities that the Indian family finds itself in the post-apartheid era. Singh asserts that in both the apartheid and post-apartheid era the Indian family was dealt with a double blow. Apartheid restricted Indian families to land ownership through artificially created shortages that was brought about through the Group Areas Act of 1950. Such shortages led to higher land prices and higher property taxes that constrained emerging middle class Indian families from intergenerational expansion of their personal and familial resources. In the post-apartheid South Africa, inflated property prices and the high levels of violent crimes has constrained access to property, hence a strong preference for joint and extended family living arrangements (Singh, 2008). One may add to this analysis the rapid mushrooming of informal settlements in and around apartheid created affluent Indian suburbs and public housing areas resulting in a phenomenal drop in property markets, drop in service delivery standards and escalating
levels of violent crimes in the neighborhood. This has left many Indian families feeling trapped in their neighborhood resulting in the resuscitation of attitudes towards bigger household formations in response to the insecurity experienced in nucleated family forms and the high risk of being victims to violent crimes.

POST-APARTHEID CHALLENGES FOR THE INDIAN FAMILY

The Indian family as a whole in post-apartheid South Africa is faced with several social, political and economic challenges. The newly found democracy in South Africa has removed all structural constraints that the historically disadvantaged families were once exposed to during the colonial and apartheid years. Historically, the Marriage Act of 1961 was the only law which provided for the recognition of marriage as defined by the South African legal system. The Act was racially and culturally biased in that it did not recognize relationships formalized according to indigenous African rites ("customary" marriages) as well as relationships formalized in accordance with Hindu or Muslim law. Large sections of the Indian diaspora were victims of such a legal system. With the passing of the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act, Act 12 of 1998 which came into effect in November 2000 (Budlender et al., 2004) some measure of relief appears imminent for the recognition of religiously ordained marriages. To provide some indication on marriage trends, the Community Agency for Social Enquiry study of 1998 cited by Budlender et al., (2004) at a national workshop towards improving registration of divorces and marriages in South Africa is worth a reflection. In the survey, 34 percent of the respondents cited that their marriage was in keeping with civil law, 37 percent customary law and 44 percent religious rites which points to the direction of national marriage trends (Bah and Rama, 1999). Specifically within the Indian community, Budlender et al., (2004) cite that as at 1996, 26,396 and 22,499 marriages were concluded by traditional rites within the Muslim and Hindu communities respectively for persons aged 16 years and above. Such a trend suggests the need for legal reform within the framework of family law within the country.

Sloth-Nielsen and van Heerden (2003) assert that the new South African Constitution (1996) has liberalized child and family law but it does not expressly protect the right to family life. Instead the constitutional provision on dignity, equality and concern for marginalised groups in South African society has heralded a wide range of revision on the legal meaning of family, how the law should protect family members and the reshaping of relationships between family members including children. The authors assert that whilst there was an absence of rights to protect family life, the constitution had advanced developments in areas such as domestic violence, custody allocation of children, recognition of same sex marriages, religious and customary marriages and the status and rights of illegitimate children. Given that South Africa represents a wide range of multi-cultural and multi-faith communities, the rationale for not prescribing the right to family life is argued on the grounds that families are constituted, function and are dissolved in a variety of ways hence precluding the need for constitutionalizing it (Sloth-Nielsen and van Heerden, 2003). As consequence, South African family law is undergoing piecemeal revisions to accommodate the diverse family and marriage arrangements in the country.

Interestingly, insofar as the Muslim community is concerned, polygamy is contested in terms of the Constitution since it guarantees the right to freedom of religion to all South
Africans in respect of customs and traditions prescribed therein. It is on the basis of the latter that the foundation for the recognition and application of religious family law systems is to be found, allowing for religious groups to lobby for legislative recognition without constitutionalizing the right to have any system of family law recognized by the state. Muslim Personal Law (MPL) provides men with the justification to practice polygamy, although monogamy is generally the rule for adherents of the Islamic faith. Polygamy is supported by legislation in certain Muslim countries which include but not limited to infertility or long-term illness of the first wife and excessive wealth on the part of the husband making it possible for him to support widowed or divorced mothers (Moosa, 2009). In the case of South Africa, Muslims of Indian and those of Malaysian origin are currently in the process of lobbying the constitutional court for the recognition of Muslim Personal Law, which if accepted will provide protection to both women and children within a polygamous family relationship.3

Since South Africa’s reintegration into the globe after four decades of isolation, outward migration of individuals and families both to national and international destinations is providing new challenges to the present shape and structure of the Indian family. Cross provincial migration of single males and females over the democratic years has increased due to new employment opportunities emerging outside of the province. Many find partners in the host province and set up nuclear family households away from their parental home. Although cross provincial migration is voluntary based on individual choice in search of new economic opportunities resulting in permanent residence through marriage and commitment to family life, a recent announcement by government to implement a controversial Employment Equity Act, if implemented, is anticipated to have serious long term consequences for the social cohesion of Indian families in KwaZulu-Natal. The Act seeks to replace the regional racial demographic for employment equity with a national benchmark which in numerical terms translates to some 300,000 Indians in KwaZulu-Natal would have to move to other provinces in the country to find employment in the near future (Naidoo, 2011). Considering that the province of KwaZulu-Natal has the highest settlement of Indians who have established social and family networks over successive generations, will now have to relocate and resettle elsewhere in the country. In essence, an attempt to redress employment equity at a national level may be dubbed as another form of forced removal for the Indian community which is similar to that experienced in the apartheid era with far reaching social consequences for family life.

At a global level, increasing numbers of well educated young adults are known to leave the country in search of better employment opportunities. These include single males, females and young married professional couples. According to Pattundeen (2007:25) the most widely cited reasons are crime, perceptions of high living costs and levels of taxation; and the perceived decline in the standard of public services. The most favored countries of destination are the English speaking first world nations such as the United States, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand. In the last three decades the vast majority of skilled

---

3 It must be noted that the Muslim community in South Africa is not in full agreement with the MPL and gender rights group have shown strong opposition to this Bill as it comprises women’s right in a variety of ways. The strongest support for this Bill originates from Muslim theological bodies who entrench the position that the MPL embraces all facets of family life in keeping with divine prescriptions that is not compatible with secular family law provisions in the country.
emigrants from South Africa have been in the most productive age-groups of 25 to 45 years. Interestingly, Pattundeen (2007) notes a growing trend amongst Indian females to work abroad as opposed to the conventional expectation of the young female adult to “get married and settle down” to family life. Additionally, the changing roles of the Indian women within the family as subservient housewife and dutiful daughter or sister has changed in the post-apartheid South Africa due to better levels of education and economic pressures to work.

Vahed and Desai (2010) in their analysis of identity and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa amongst the Indian diaspora provide an interesting account of an emerging class structure and shifting identities that has an influence on families and family life. Their analysis transcends earlier ones that were traditionally rooted on ethnic, language and religious variables within the family scholarship. They observe that class divisions among Indians were becoming wider in the post apartheid South Africa and families in the former townships are responding to increased residential mobility to elite suburbs due to changes in their economic status. They assert that middle class Indian families living in the old neighborhoods of Chatsworth and Phoenix in Durban and even Lenasia in Johannesburg are now moving into the formerly white areas like Queensburgh in KwaZulu-Natal and Robertsham in Gauteng, while more affluent Indians are moving to Houghton in Gauteng and Umhlanga in KZN. In this generation of Indian families one finds that their children attend private schools where the annual school fee per child is often more than what a working class Indian can expect to earn per annum as household income. Expensive cars and homes, linkages to non-racial elite with business interests that span the globe are what some Indian South Africans have come to see as a “normal” lifestyle. Poor Indians from township schools compete with rich Indian children with unlimited resources for limited places in schools, universities and on the job market. In essence, such an analysis attests to the changing social structure of the Indian family classified by class characteristics more than ethnic and religious as in the past.

Beyond the emerging class dimension within Indian families, in the post-apartheid era one finds although not very significantly, but to a limited extent, cross-racial marriages and trends towards cohabitation within the Indian community. Although it is difficult to estimate the nature and extent to which these relationships prevail across the different race groups in the country, what is evident is that such relationships are now open and no longer a hidden secret. Naidoo (2007) an Indian female, in a reflexive account of her experience in a cross-racial relationship speaks about her cohabitation with a white Afrikaner male. Although her family does not disapprove of her relationship, including her extended family, she encounters racial stereotypes spilled over from the apartheid legacy on her “Indianness” and her partner’s Afrikaner ancestry. Insofar as her future is concerned, she avoids asking the question as to what her children will be. Such a reflection in a changing socio-cultural South African context is a strong indicator of emerging racial blending within Indian families in the future. Insofar as transnational marriages are concerned, the post apartheid inward migration of single male Pakistanis into the country has shown increasing prevalence of marriages between Indian Muslim females and Pakistani males. Some of these marriages are known to be out of a genuine commitment to settle into family life, whilst in other instances it is a marriage of convenience to secure either a work permit or South African citizenship (Khan, 2009). Whatever the reasons might be, in both instances what is evident is the emergence of cross-racial and transnational family forms within the Indian community. Insofar as cross-racial marriages are concerned, spouses are not compelled to undergo race classification as in the apartheid
dispensation which prohibited mixed marriages. Hence with the emergence of blended families it basically means that couples can retain their racial classification and identity.

CONCLUSION

The paper highlights the changing family forms, patterns and emerging challenges within the South African Indian diaspora over the past 150 years. It examines the early family form and life under a repressive economic system of indenture and how it surmounted the many political, economic and social pressures to preserve its family life and identity well into the post-democratic political dispensation. During the different phases of its evolution, the Indian family system was able to adapt to a wide range of social forces transforming itself from the initial extended/joint family system to the nuclear form. Nuclearization of the Indian family system was a direct response to forced removal and relocation into public housing estates designed for Western family living standards for the vast number of working class Indians. However, for their more affluent counterparts, relocation into palatial homes in suburban areas helped preserve the extended family form. The paper highlights that in the post democratic era, given the high levels of insecurity arising from residential safety issues, dropping property prices prompted by escalating crime levels, there is a re-emergence of the extend family form. At the same time new trends and patterns reflected in the emergence of transnational and trans-provincial families due to high levels of individual and family mobility has also impacted on its social cohesion and structure. Given the emergence of extreme class differentiation within the Indian diaspora, the paper suggests new forms of analysis of the family system, beyond the approaches adopted by family scholars in the past which focused on religion, ethnic, caste and historical factors. Emerging trends in the form of mixed racial marriages, blended families, transnational families, advocacy for the recognition of polygamous marriages, cohabitation and single parent households calls for a refreshed look on family form and life in the South African context. An area not explored in this paper is gay and lesbian marriages which relationship was once considered taboo and kept a secret in the past. Under a more liberal constitutional dispensation, such couples are breaking the silence and coming into the open even to the extent of formalizing their relationship by taking religious marital vows. South Africa is dubbed the Rainbow Nation with varying levels of diversity and new identities emerging post liberation. The family within the diaspora is not immune to such social changes and it is important for family scholarship to keep abreast in its analysis beyond the dual notion of the extended and nuclear family form being the traditional forms of family life in the South African context.

REFERENCES


