

**ATTITUDES OF PUNJAB
UNIVERSITY WOMAN STUDENTS
TOWARDS MARRIAGE AND
FAMILY**

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The importance of the institutions of family and marriage has been very well emphasised in sociology. It has been stated that family and marriage are based on biopsychological foundations and have great sociological implications.

India has its typical forms of family and marriage. The joint family is a prominent feature of the Indian society. Marriage is considered to be universal. Divorce, though [legally sanctioned, is not socially approved. People still consider marriage as an indissoluble tie between husband and wife. Widow remarriage is still looked down upon by the people and strict parental control is exercised in the selection of a spouse.

At present profound and rapid changes are taking place in these institutions of our society. It appears that the impact of modern education is being felt by our womenfolk especially in colleges and universities and that they have different attitudes regarding marriage and family in contrast to girls of a few decades ago.

METHOD AND SAMPLE

The subjects were the woman students of M.A., Part I, M.A., Part II and B.Sc, Honours and resident in the Panjab

University hostels. There were 262 woman students in the two hostels. Out of those, eight were married and four were senior employees. The remaining 250 students were taken for the purpose of the interview. The sample falls within the age group of 16 to 28 years.

Copies of a questionnaire on the subject of marriage and family were distributed to the students in their rooms and after a week they were collected. The students were assured complete anonymity as they were not required to write their names or room numbers.

Opinions of respondents regarding the nature, size and structure of the family in which they would prefer to live after marriage were solicited in the questionnaire. They were asked to state their views regarding the selection of a spouse, whether they were free to choose their partners, whether they would like to have the consent of their parents in their selection of spouses and whether they would yield to their wishes if their parents objected to their choice. They were also asked to state their views on the relative status of husband and wife in the family.

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Down through the centuries, the husband of the father has been recognised as the head of the family. The common view is that a certain amount of respect must be given to the head of the family and that his authority must be respected. In this survey we found that twenty per cent of the girls still reaffirmed the traditional view and held that the status of the wife should be subordinate to that of the husband. But 77 per cent of the girls in the survey maintained that both husband and wife should enjoy equal status in the family. In a democratic society, the husband and wife should be on an equal footing as each is a counterpart of the other. Three per cent of the girls held the view that wife should enjoy a higher status in the home as she is the queen of the house.

Attitudes of the respondents towards divorce were considered. In India the very idea of divorce was generally found unacceptable. Even in the Dharamshastra strict fidelity and devotion to the husband are stressed as the guiding principles of a woman's life. Dr. Radhakrishnan says: "The marriage relation should be regarded normally as permanent. Divorce should be resorted to only in extreme cases of hardship, where married life is absolutely impossible. It is a drastic remedy which uproots one's whole life, and involves other lives as well. The dogma of indissolubility of marriage is not final, yet it is the ideal."¹ "Even our national leaders on the floor of the assembly, when the bill was discussed, argued that if the legislation was allowed to interfere with the sacrament of marriage, the institution of marriage would break down."²

The laws of marriage and divorce have been and can be changed and improved but their role is essentially unimportant in India as is evident from the opinions of the girls interviewed. 66 per cent of them do

not favour divorce and consider it to be disgraceful for Indian women to go in for divorce. Twenty-eight per cent of the girls opined that women should seek divorce in case of serious differences as it is really if degrading to live a cat and dog's life. This minority may indicate the direction of change in attitudes that has come towards the concept of divorce.

The students were further asked to state whether or not there should be remarriage after divorce. Again a change in the trend of attitudes is seen when 48 per cent of those in favour of divorce asserted that a woman should remarry after divorce. The following table shows the attitudes of the girls towards remarriage after divorce:—

TABLE 1
ATTITUDES OF RESPONDENTS TO DIVORCE AND REMARRIAGE

Divorce	..	For	Against	Total
For	..	31	30	61
Against	..	53	97	150
Total	..	84	127	211

While about half the girls who were in favour of divorce were also in favour of remarriage after divorce. The other half would not permit them remarriage. But there was some inconsistency in the views of some of those who were against the idea of divorce. For how does one explain only 53 girls who were against divorce were in favour of remarriage after divorce, unless they were really in favour of divorce itself. The majority favoured either divorce or remarriage after divorce.

A change has indeed been brought in the attitudes regarding widow remarriage. The survey revealed that 74 per cent of the respondents were in favour of widow

¹S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1956, pp. 183-84.

²K. M. Kapadia, *Family and Marriage in India*, London: Oxford University Press, 1958.

remarriage and only 24 per cent of them were against it showing thereby that the consensus of opinion was definitely in favour of it. Some of those who favoured it, had remarked that a widow should remarry provided she was very young and did not have any issue or she was illiterate and she had no one to depend upon.

Twenty-four per cent of the respondents were still hostile to the idea of widow remarriage and asserted that in India, a woman married only once in her life and she could think of only one man as her husband. One per cent remarked that the decision whether or not to remarry should be left to the person concerned.

The above paragraphs show that a large majority favoured widow remarriage, whereas a lesser number of girls favoured marriage after divorce. Hence a comparison is made between those who favour widow remarriage and those who favour marriage after divorce.

TABLE 2

ATTITUDES OF RESPONDENT TO REMARRIAGE FOR WIDOWS AND DIVORCEES

	Marriage for Widows	Divorcees For		Total
		Favour	Disfavour	
Favour	..	84	85	169
Disfavour	..	4	50	54
Total	..	88	135	223

Thirty-seven per cent of the girls favoured remarriage for divorcees or widows. But 22 per cent still have the traditional view and believe that there should be no remarriage under any circumstances. One surprising fact is that two per cent favoured marriage after divorce but they were against widow remarriage.

Choice of spouse.—Not much change is found in the ideas of the girls regarding the selection and choice of the future spouse. Previously the choice was left entirely to the parents and a girl had no voice in settling the issue. Even now 99 per cent

of them asserted that they would certainly like to have the consent of their parents. Only one per cent of them did not think it necessary to have the consent of parents.

They were further asked to state what they would do if their parents objected to their choice. Sixty-four per cent of the girls said that they would yield to the wishes of their parents showing thereby that they still had great respect for parental authority. At the same time 22 per cent of the girls said that they would not yield to their parents. Is this an indication that parental authority is beginning to be challenged? Seven per cent of the girls said that their decision would depend upon the circumstances and another seven per cent did not give any response.

Type of family preferred.—Asked about the type of family in which they would prefer to live after marriage, a surprisingly high proportion, i.e. 43 per cent, preferred to live with the in-laws. They opined that there was security in a joint family.

They were further asked to state the nature of their family structure. In order to understand their aspirations, an attempt had been made to establish a correlation between the present structure of the family in which they lived and the structure of the family in which they would prefer to live after marriage.

TABLE 3

RESPONDENTS BY THEIR PRESENT AND PREFERRED NATURE OF FAMILY.

Present Family	Nature of family preferred			Total	
	Nuclear	Joint	Condi-tional		
Nuclear	..	10	25	2	37
Joint*	..	74	69	11	154
Total	..	84	94	13	191

J.F.: Here is meant a family in which besides the respondents' parents and unmarried brothers and sisters, other members like married sons and their children or either of grand-parents or some other relatives live.

The table clearly shows that out of those who come from some type of joint family, 68 per cent would prefer to live in a joint family with their in-laws and only 27 per cent preferred to live in a nuclear family showing thereby that those who lived in joint families had greater preference for such families than those who lived in nuclear families. On the other hand, out of those who came from nuclear families, only 42 per cent preferred to stay with the in-laws. But one thing is worth noting, viz., that the number of students living in joint families was less, whereas the number of students who desired to live with in-laws was greater.

The girls were also aware of the difficulties and restrictions which they were likely to experience in living with their inlaws and presumably because of this 43 per cent preferred to live in the nuclear family lowered the standard of living. They did not like to live with the in-laws, because they wanted to avoid quarrels and misunderstandings with them. The nagging of in-laws often upset the stability of family life. Moreover, living in a joint family lowered the standard of living. They believed that distance enhanced affection, and lent charm to life.

Eight per cent did not give a definite opinion and remarked that it depended

upon one's circumstances. Sometimes the circumstances took such a turn that one was forced to go against one's wishes. Here again six per cent did not give any response to the question.

SIZE OF FAMILY

Regarding the size of the family, the modern trend was towards small size families. At present, there is a tendency to limit the size of the family as the smaller number of children make a higher standard of living possible.

The following table shows the number of children the girls would like to have.

TABLE 4
RESPONDENTS BY IDEAL NUMBER OF CHILDREN PREFERRED

Ideal Size	No. of Respondents
1	2
2	91
3	89
4	34
5	1
6	5
none	7
Total	229

Nearly 80 per cent of the respondents asserted that one should have at the most three children and only a small minority wanted to have more than three children. Still then were six girls who would prefer to have five children.