

ASPECTS OF FAMILY LIFE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIAN COMMUNITY

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Attitudes of South African Indians towards Westernization and its Effects on their Family Life

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INTRODUCTION

When a group of people emigrate to a new country with a strong cultural environment, one of several possible affects may occur. There could be a deliberate striving to retain the cultural traits inherited from the homelands. Alternatively, there could be a striving to be assimilated into the culture of the group encountered in the new country. A further possibility could be the gradual development by the group of its own peculiar social traits, thus forming a distinct sub-culture in the new homeland. The given effect in a particular case will depend on the peculiar interplay of many complex factors and it is difficult to predict in advance what the outcome will be. A considerable period of time usually elapses before clear patterns in this regard emerge. Only then can any firm conclusions be reached about the process of change in such a situation.

The Indian community in South Africa is an example of an immigrant group, itself of considerable cultural variety, which encountered, not one, but at least two, major foreign culture influences in their country of adoption. Settling mainly in Natal, they encountered, on the one hand, the Zulu culture of Africa and, on the other hand, the "western" culture of the White people. In the event, it appears that it has been the western culture that has exerted a powerful influence on the Indian community.

There is much everyday evidence of the influence of western culture, that is, the effects of a "process of westernization". Obvious, but not necessarily superficial, evidence is the adoption

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of the English language as a first language by Indians. Style of clothing, educational curricula, recreational preferences, acceptance of western music and drama, and many other readily observable acceptances of western cultural items bear evidence of the progressive influence of the process of westernization.

It may be expected that this process would affect all the cultural institutions of the community, possibly in varying degrees. The religious institution, with its tendency towards dogmatic principles, may be expected to show strong resistance against change. In contrast, the family institution may be expected to be more vulnerable to culture penetration, since it is readily affected by such "western" processes as industrialization and urbanization. It appears that this may have been so with the Indian community. For example, it has been noted by Schoombee and Mantzaris (1985) that the attitudes of younger and better educated Indians towards the acceptability, or not, of so-called arranged and also inter-religious marriages, differ from those of the less educated and older Indians. The attitudes of younger members tend to be similar to those of the White "western" community in this regard. This may be regarded as a significant indication of the extent of socio-cultural change taking place within the Indian community.

The above conclusions are only tentative, because they are based on the results of a pilot study. A major study presently in progress should clarify the validity of the conclusions. The following discussion is also based on the pilot study and should thus be regarded as tentative. However, some valuable indications regarding the attitudes of South African Indians towards the "process of westernization" may nevertheless be derived from the data of the pilot study.

DEFINITIONS OF CONCEPTS

The discussion is related to the process of social change, but more specifically to that aspect of it known as "westernization". In this aspect it is necessary to differentiate between "westernization" and "modernization", since the terms are sometimes used synonymously (Eisenstadt, 1966:1-2). If the terms are not synonymous, how can they be clearly distinguished and how can

such a distinction be manifested in an interview schedule and explained to respondents?

The concept of *modernization* has been analysed in detail in two recent articles (Senekal, 1980:5-25; 1983:7-16). Modernization is defined as the process through which a social system is changing towards a state of improved functioning efficiency, i.e., moving closer to, or in the direction of, a hypothetical state where the full potential of means at the disposal of the system is optionally actualized and utilized and as a result of which the social system develops a different level of existence which represents a real or imagined improvement on the previous level of existence (Senekal, 1983:14).

In the above sense modernization is a process of social change which leads to better functional efficiency and an improved level of existence, real or imagined.

In contrast to this, *westernization* is regarded here as change towards a mode of life characteristically found and developed in Western Europe and North America. This mode of life has been strongly influenced by modernization, but many facets such as the fine arts and recreational activities have not necessarily been affected, at least not in all respects. The western way of life is seen as having a number of commonly found characteristics; for example, dominance by the Christian religion, a high degree of industrialization, the nuclear family as the main form, an inclination towards democratic state structures, and a certain unity of values, norms, traditions and customs. The essence of westernization is not to be found only in the economic (productive) sphere, or in continuous technological innovations, but also, to a great extent, in its changing norms, values, traditions and customs.

This point may be illustrated by several examples. In a study undertaken in Toronto, Canada, Nagata examined several integration processes of working class Greek immigrants (Nagata, 1969). He showed that these immigrants integrated sooner in the public sphere and that there was strong evidence of cultural conservatism in their private sphere of life. Thus while certain

patterns of modernization existed in the public domain, westernization was not a strong influence in the private one. Mantzaris (1978) has shown that the integration of younger Greek generations of immigrants in South Africa is more rapid than that of the older generation. This means that the westernization process on the linguistic and cultural levels is greater in younger generations.

Schoombee and Mantzaris (1984) have shown that westernization patterns prevail amongst highly educated and upwardly mobile young Indians regarding their attitudes towards extended and nuclear family systems in South Africa. The same attitudes were noted in another article by the same authors (Schoombee and Mantzaris, 1985) regarding the changing, more "westernized" attitudes towards inter-religious and "arranged" marriages.

Westernization as a concept and material reality is directly related to social change. Lerner (1958), in his pioneering essay on the "passing" of "traditional" society, maintains that the term "modernization" is more operational than westernization, as it includes a "disquieting positivist spirit". For him, the term westernization seems unsuitable in sociological inquiry for various reasons.

However, Srinivas has made several important theoretical points concerning westernization which contradict Lerner's writings. He pointed out that the term westernization is ethically neutral, unlike modernization. Westernization to him does not mean "good" or "bad", whereas modernization is normally used to stress the essential goodness of the "imparted" or "accepted" culture (Srinivas, 1960).

Srinivas' viewpoint seems correct, as westernization, and modernization for that matter, are not one-way processes. The social contact that takes place in everyday life, between various peoples, ethnic and class groups has a direct effect on their behaviour, customs, culture and way of life. It is inevitable that the degree of acceptance and acculturation of various groups towards an "imparted" or "indigenous" culture varies considerably.

A major problem facing the researchers was the concretisation of the “westernization” concept in relation to the respondents. It was accepted that the field workers should ensure that the interviewees were certain what the term meant. Westernization was described to the interviewees as the *process* of acceptance of western values which directly affected their everyday lives on the family, economic, political, ideological and cultural levels. In this way; it was ensured that possible ambiguities related to this concept would be avoided, together with the bias inherent in unclarified and complicated concepts.

HYPOTHESES

The discussion which follows is based on data obtained from a pilot study which preceded a long-term study of the South African Indian family that is at present in progress. Any conclusions reached must therefore be regarded as tentative. However, the careful selection of the sample and the systematic planning and execution of the project increased the validity of its findings and conclusions.

Several working hypotheses were formulated in relation to the project. A first working hypothesis is that:

Older, less-educated and economically deprived Indian persons see westernization as a negative influence on Indian family life in South Africa, in contrast to younger better-educated, economically independent and upwardly mobile persons.

This hypothesis is principally, but not exclusively, based on the research undertaken by Pillay (1972). In a study of Hindu Tamil-speaking females of three generations (grandmothers, mothers and daughters), regarding traditional and westernized patterns of behaviour in relation to health, religion, folklore, social distance and social and vocational activities, Pillay found that the third-generation daughters identified with most of the values that are predominant in the western South African culture and differed significantly from both their grandmothers and mothers. But the mothers, who constituted the second generation and had grown up in two cultures (Indian and Western), seemed to occupy a “marginal” position, neither accepted by, or adjusted

to, either culture. In the case of the grandmothers, who constituted the first generation, the findings pointed to the fact that many aspects of their lives were unchanged and deeply rooted in the traditions of their country of origin.

Schoombee and Mantzaris (1985) have also shown that attitudes of younger, better educated and economically independent persons towards inter-religious and “arranged” marriages have become more similar to those of westerners in comparison to those of older, less educated and economically deprived Indian persons.

A second working hypothesis is that:

South African Muslims regard westernization as a negative influence in their everyday and family life to a larger extent than Hindu and Christian Indian persons.

This hypothesis is principally, but not exclusively, based on the findings of Badat (1983). In a survey of young Muslims in the central business district of Durban, Badat found that the majority believed that western values and way of life were a hazard to the Indian family and should be eliminated. This attitude is also reflected in the fact that for a number of years Islamic religious leaders have come out strongly against the “permissiveness” of South African society in general, which “influences” and “corrupts” the minds of Muslims and, indeed, all other members of society. Uloma Y. Patel of the Durban Islamic Centre, a prominent Indian religious leader, made a point during a personal interview which indicates the strong feelings of the Islamic religious hierarchy. He stressed that Islam is not against the qualities of westernisation or western civilization, such as technology. However, they wished all Muslims to bear in mind all the rules and laws of Islam, i.e., modesty, integrity and piety. These should not be affected *by corruption, which they consider to be an inevitable process associated with the western way of living.* (emphasis added).

SAMPLING DESIGN

A sample of limited size was drawn, since this was a pilot study. A simple random sample of 308 respondents was chosen,

and the questionnaire was administered in areas representing all socio-economic strata of the Durban Indian population. The areas covered were Reservoir Hills (upper socio-economic stratum), Chatsworth, units three and five, and Phoenix (lower socio-economic stratum), and the Central Business District (middle socio-economic stratum). A summated rating scale (Likert scale) was constructed. It should be noted that the data on which this article is based were obtained from only a part of the pilot study questionnaire of fifty-four questions. The characteristics of the sample have been described in detail elsewhere (Schoombee and Mantzaris, 1985).

FINDINGS

As summaries of the data, tables are provided which incorporate the weighted mean (\bar{X}_W) for each question and variable included in the study (age, education, income, occupation and religion). This enables a ready comparison of the findings with the foregoing hypotheses. The response categories are as follows:-



Strongly agree	1
Agree	2
Undecided	3
Disagree	4
Strongly disagree	5

The relevant statements in the questionnaire were:

1. *Westernization has a positive effect on me and my family.*
2. *Westernization has a negative effect on me and my family.*
3. *Westernization has no effect on the Indian family in South Africa.*
4. *Western way of life is synonymous with corruption.*
5. *Western values should be eliminated from the life of Indians in South Africa.*
6. *Westernization is the basic factor leading to the destruction of the family.*

DISCUSSION

Although several studies on westernization and modernization have been undertaken in India, South African researchers have neglected similar studies in this country. Statements with a tendency towards broad generalizations, such as “Indian South Africans have become totally modernized/westernized” or “Their traditional values and culture have disappeared completely”, must be discounted. There are only *some* indications which point to the *decline* of traditional values, norms, and customs, and the present data will hopefully point to the directions that future research on the problem should follow. Can it be assumed, for example, that “western” patterns of living and attitudes have replaced the old modes of behaviour. If so, how does this process affect the family life of Indian South Africans?

It has been hypothesised that older, less-educated and economically deprived Indian persons see westernization as a negative influence on Indian family life in South Africa, in contrast to the attitudes of younger, better educated, economically independent and upwardly mobile persons.

Age

In terms of the first variable involved in the hypothesis, namely age, and relating to the statement *Westernization has a positive effect on me and my family*, it can be seen from Table 1 that the hypothesis is supported. The data show that the $\bar{X}W$ value for the 20-29 and 30-39 age groups is 2,4, while for those in the over-60 age group it is 3,3. The same response pattern predominates in the statement *Westernization has a negative effect on me and my family*.

However, the pattern is somewhat different in relation to the statement *Westernization has no effect on the Indian family in South Africa*. Here, although the 20-29 and 30-39 age categories produced $\bar{X}W$ values of 4,2 and 3,9 respectively, categories 40-49, 50-59 and over 60 produced similar responses (3,5;3,5 and 3,6 respectively). This indicates a strong belief on the part of the younger age groups that westernization does have an effect on the Indian family, while the older group exhibits a similar, but less

TABLE 1

*Age as a Factor in Attitudes towards Westernization
and its Effects on Indian Family Life*

Age in Years	RESPONDENTS		\bar{X}_W					
	N	%	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
20-29	34	11,0	2,4	3,6	4,2	3,6	4,1	3,6
30-39	79	25,6	2,4	3,6	3,9	3,7	4,1	3,5
40-49	102	33,1	2,6	3,6	3,5	3,2	3,4	3,1
50-59	65	21,1	2,7	3,1	3,5	2,9	3,3	3,0
60+	26	8,5	3,3	3,1	3,6	2,8	2,6	2,3
No Response	2	0,7	-	-	-	-	-	-

strong, attitude in this regard. This result tends to confirm the conclusions drawn regarding the first two statements.

Regarding the statement *Western way of life is synonymous with corruption*, it can be seen that the attitudes of young and old differ significantly, the \bar{X}_W for the 20-29 group being 3,6 and for the 60+ group 2,8. A similar response pattern, with the difference between the groups even greater, was obtained for the statement *Western values should be eliminated from the life of Indians in South Africa*. Regarding the final statement, namely *Westernization is the basic factor leading to the destruction of the family*, it can be seen that the attitudes of the younger generations again differ considerably from those of the older.

These findings tend to agree with the findings of Lötter and Du Plessis. These researchers, in an investigation undertaken to assess the socio-economic position of Indians in South Africa, showed that while 86,5 per cent of Indians in the age category 15-29 years approved of the use of contraceptives, the corresponding percentage of people over 45 years of age was 72,5. It is assumed that the use of contraceptives indicates a break from the traditional values and culture towards westernized norms and values (Lötter and du Plessis, 1974:61). These findings also support Jithoo's conclusions on the decline of the extended family (Jithoo, 1975:55-62).

TABLE 2

*Education as a Factor in Attitudes towards Westernization
and its Effects on Indian Family Life*

RESPONDENTS	\bar{X}_W							
	N	%	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Education								
None	14	4,5	3,8	3,3	3,0	2,6	3,6	2,3
Primary	78	25,3	2,7	3,3	3,6	2,9	3,0	2,8
Secondary	140	45,5	2,5	3,4	3,8	3,3	3,6	3,2
Technical	38	12,3	2,3	3,6	3,8	3,9	3,9	3,7
University	33	10,7	2,5	3,5	3,9	3,8	4,1	3,6
Other	3	1,0	1,6	4,7	4,7	4,0	4,0	3,7
No Response	2	0,7	-	-	-	-	-	-

Education

The second variable involved in the first hypothesis was education (see Table 2). Regarding the first two statements relating to the attitudes of respondents to westernization as a positive or negative effect on the Indian family in South Africa, although there appears to be a contradiction in the illiterate group, the difference in attitudes is clear. For Q1, the \bar{X}_W for illiterates is 3,8, while the corresponding figures for Technician and University graduates are 2,3 and 2,5 respectively. The corresponding responses regarding westernization as a negative influence are fairly similar to the above. The apparent contradiction among illiterates (3,8 for Q1 and 3,3 for Q2) may be due to one or both of the following:

- Uncertainty on the part of the respondents without formal education; or
- Bias of a statistical nature resulting from the relatively small number of respondents without formal education compared with those with technical or university education.

The different attitudes towards westernization on the part of respondents of different educational levels is apparent in the responses to the other statements. For example, regarding the

statement *Western way of life is synonymous with corruption*, the \bar{X}_W for illiterate respondents is 2,6, while the corresponding figures for technical and university graduates are 3,9 and 3,8 respectively. The same response patterns predominate regarding the statements *Western values should be eliminated from the life of Indians in South Africa* and *Westernization is the basic factor leading to the destruction of the family*.

Income

The first hypothesis seems to be partially confirmed in the case of *income* as a variable (Table 3). In the first statement, for example, attitudes seem to differ when the very low economic strata are compared with the very high. The \bar{X}_W value for those earning less than R3 000 is 3,2 and for those earning R20-25 000 it is 2,5. However, when the attitudes of respondents in the categories between these extremes are examined it becomes obvious that the hypothesis is questionable. For example, the \bar{X}_W value of respondents earning R4-6000 and R3-4000 is very similar to that of respondents earning R20-25 000. There is also a distinct difference in attitudes among respondents earning R8-10 000 and those earning R10-12 000. The same response patterns occur in the rest of the statements.

The findings in this respect must therefore be regarded as inconclusive, although there seems to be an indication that Indian persons in different income categories do not differ significantly in their attitudes towards westernization. The data also seem to partially confirm Lötter and du Plessis' findings regarding the approval and disapproval of the use of contraceptives. These authors found that the attitudes of South African Indians of different economic positions did not differ appreciably in this respect (Lötter and du Plessis, 1974:61).

Occupation

There seems to be partial confirmation of the first hypothesis as it relates to occupational status and upward mobility (Table 4). If the categories *Professional, Technical, Managerial, Administrative and Clerical* are considered as occupationally mobile, it is apparent that their response pattern does not differ significantly

TABLE 3

*Income as a Factor in Attitudes towards Westernization
and its Effects on Indian Family Life*

Income	RESPONDENTS		\bar{X}_W					
	N	%	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Less than R3 000	42	12,6	3,2	3,2	3,5	2,7	2,7	2,5
R3-4000	54	12,5	2,6	3,5	3,6	3,3	3,4	3,3
R4-6000	76	24,7	2,4	3,5	3,9	3,4	3,6	3,3
R6-8000	50	16,2	2,4	3,8	4,0	3,5	3,7	3,5
R8-10 000	24	7,8	2,8	3,2	3,7	3,1	3,6	2,9
R10-12 000	18	5,9	2,0	3,2	3,6	3,6	3,7	3,7
R12-15 000	16	5,2	2,8	3,0	3,3	3,1	3,7	3,3
R15-20 000	9	2,9	2,8	2,3	3,6	4,1	3,7	3,2
R20-25 000	8	2,6	2,5	3,6	3,6	3,5	3,5	3,5
R25 000+	5	1,6	3,2	2,2	4,0	2,8	3,8	2,2
No Response	6	2,0	-	-	-	-	--	-

TABLE 4

*Occupation as a Factor in Attitudes towards Westernization
and its Effects on Indian Family Life*

Occupation	RESPONDENTS		\bar{X}_W					
	N	%	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Professional, Technical	41	13,3	2,5	3,4	3,9	3,8	4,0	3,7
Managerial, Administrative	14	4,5	2,6	3,9	3,9	3,7	3,6	3,1
Clerical	44	14,3	2,4	3,7	4,0	3,8	4,0	3,7
Sales Persons	31	10,1	2,7	3,3	3,7	2,8	3,2	2,5
Service Workers	27	8,8	2,3	3,5	3,9	3,4	3,6	3,2
Production, Transport	83	27,0	2,5	3,4	3,5	3,3	3,5	3,5
Not Economically Active	38	12,3	3,1	3,3	3,4	2,7	2,7	2,6
Mining	6	1,9	3,7	2,7	4,0	2,5	2,0	2,2
Own Business	21	6,8	2,7	3,1	3,6	2,7	3,3	2,6
No Response	3	1,0	-	-	--	-	-	-

from that of the less mobile categories — *service workers, production, transport, and not economically active*. In the cases of the fourth, fifth, and sixth statements, there is a significant difference in the attitude patterns between those respondents characterised as *occupationally upwardly mobile* and those in the category of own business (mainly traders, cafe owners and restaurateurs). The latter have been called “the traditional middle class” (Poulantzas, 1976, Mantzaris 1978, Mantzaris 1981), and are generally regarded as lacking in upward mobility. This singular trend does not significantly change the assertion that the hypothesis is partially confirmed.

TABLE 5

Religion as a Factor in Attitudes towards Westernization and its Effects on Indian Family Life

RESPONDENTS		\bar{X}_W						
Religion	N	%	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Hindu	194	63,0	2,6	3,4	3,8	3,4	3,6	3,4
Muslim	76	24,7	2,8	3,2	3,5	2,6	2,9	2,4
Christian	38	12,3	2,0	3,8	3,6	3,8	3,9	3,9

Religion

The second working hypothesis held that Muslims regard westernization as a negative influence in their everyday and family life to a larger extent than do Hindu and Christian South African Indians. Regarding the first three statements (see Table 5), the hypothesis is only partially confirmed, since the attitudes of Muslims, Hindus and Christians do not differ to any significant extent. The attitudes expressed in relation to the last three statements confirm the initial working hypothesis for the statement, for example, that a *Western way of life is synonymous with corruption*, the \bar{X}_W for Muslims is 2,6, while the corresponding figures for Hindus and Christians are 3,4 and 3,8, respectively. Regarding the statements: *Western values should be eliminated from the life of Indians in South Africa* and *Westernization is the*

basic factor leading to the destruction of the family, the attitudes are also significantly different. The data also partially confirm the findings of Lötter and du Plessis on the acceptance or non-acceptance of the use of contraceptives amongst Muslims and Hindus (Lötter and du Plessis, 1974:61).

CONCLUSIONS

The question still remains: Is the Indian community resistant or receptive towards the rapid social changes taking place in the political, ideological and economic spheres which dominate their everyday lives. This paper has dealt with attitudes towards westernization as expressed by Indian persons of different religious, economic, linguistic, occupational and cultural backgrounds. Srinivas (1962:53) has shown that westernization had a significant impact on many social groupings in India. The research discussed here suggests that the South African Indian population is at the cross-roads.

There were respondents in all the listed categories who were receptive to the process of westernization. But there were also respondents in all categories who were resistant to such social change. The partial confirmation of several aspects of the working hypotheses nevertheless leads to the conclusion that the Indian community in South Africa is aware of the challenges of westernization and its effects on their family structures.

The investigation seems to indicate that it is especially the younger, better educated, and economically more independent generations who are willing to accept the challenges of such change. The older, less educated and economically less well-to-do members of the community seem to show more resistance to such change. Hopefully, the more extensive and representative research at present being undertaken will clarify the situation more satisfactorily.

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