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FAMILIES OF BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA

Ram P. Srivastava  
Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology  
The University of Calgary,  
Calgary 44, Alberta

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FAMILY ORGANIZATION AND CHANGE AMONG THE EAST INDIANS OF  
BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA<sup>1</sup>

(By Ram P. Srivastava, The University of Calgary)

In North America, generally, and on the Pacific coast, in particular, the term East Indian is used for people who come from India or are the descendants of people who emigrated from India to various parts of the world mainly during the last one hundred and fifty years. Another designation, Hindu, though often inappropriate, is also used synonymously with East Indian. Although over 80 percent of India's population is Hindu, the majority of East Indians in British Columbia (B.C.) are the Sikhs<sup>2</sup> from Punjab, and until quite recently, they accounted for over 90 percent of Canada's immigration from India. Since the early sixties, there has been a considerable increase in the immigration of other religious and socio-cultural groups from various parts of India, and from overseas Indian communities in Fiji, West Indies, South and West Africa, etc. As a category, therefore, the term East Indian includes a wide range of groups of people in B.C.: different religious groups such as Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis and Jews; people speaking different, mutually not-understood languages, and often differing markedly in beliefs, customs and practices. This paper deals primarily with the Sikhs in B.C.<sup>3</sup>, although a large number of comments and observations on the Sikh family organization are also applicable to other East Indian groups. Some of the crucial familistic values would appear to cut across religious, linguistic and other differences among the East Indians.



### Early History of the Sikh Immigrants in B.C.

A look at the early experiences of the East Indian immigrants in B.C. is necessary to understand their attitudes towards the host society, and the manner in which the community has defined its goals. These, in turn have influenced the areas and direction of change in their social organization including the family organization.

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Sikhs had already settled in various parts of the British Empire working as policemen, body-guards and railroad workers. By the end of the century, small Sikh settlements existed as far east as Singapore, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. They had proven their loyalty to the British in dealing with native uprisings and secret societies, and knew that because of this and their recognized ability to do hard work, they would be welcomed anywhere in the Empire. The start of their migration to B.C. is attributed to the Sikh soldiers who after participating in Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897 were being returned to India via Canada to have a look at the Empire (Khushwant Singh 1953:120). The soldiers carried the news to Sikh settlements in the far east and to their homes in the Punjab about the good wages and opportunities of employment in B.C., a part of the British Empire where land almost freely available.

Official records for East Indian immigrants were started in 1904. As can be seen from the following table, more than five thousand immigrants entered Canada, almost all in B.C., during the period, June 30, 1905 to March 31, 1908, after which the immigration came to a virtual stop, the reasons for which are not hard to find.

In 1907, anti-oriental riots broke out in Vancouver. Although these were directed mainly at the Chinese and the Japanese, the East Indians also

TABLE I  
NUMBER OF EAST INDIAN IMMIGRANTS FROM 1904-11<sup>4</sup>

Fiscal year	1904-5	1905-6	1907*	1907-8	1908-9	1909-10	1910-11	Total
East Indians	45	387	2124	2623	6	10	5	5200 <sup>5</sup>

\*9 months, ending March 31, 1907.

received their share of hostility and damage. In August 1907 the Asiatic Exclusion League was formed in Vancouver and there was a public cry to stop all oriental immigration. On the other hand, for the employers, the Sikhs were "much sought after" employees in lumber mills because of their strength and willingness to do hard work. While they were often accused of strike-breaking, or working for lower wages and for which assaults against them by the English-speaking workers became quite common (Reid, 1944:3), Cheng (1931:203) found that the East Indians' wages tended to be higher than those of either the Chinese or the Japanese, and were nearly equal to those of the whites doing comparable work.

However, responding to public pressure from B.C., the Dominion Government sent MacKenzie King to London in 1908 to request the British Government to stop the East Indian immigration at the source (i.e., in India). An emigration act passed by the then Government of India had the necessary effect of checking East Indian emigration to Canada. An attempt was also made in 1908 to persuade the East Indians already in B.C. to leave for the British Honduras where they were to be assisted by the government to settle in a warmer climate. The East Indian leaders who were taken to have a look at the Honduras reported the place to be nothing but a "malarial swamp"

and the offer was thus turned down. To further prevent the entry of the East Indians, two orders-in-Council were passed by the Government in 1910, one requiring the immigrants to have two hundred dollars on landing, and the second requiring the immigrants to come to Canada by a direct passage (continuous journey) from the country of their birth or citizenship. There was no direct shipping between India and Canada, and in 1908, two hundred dollars was a lot of money for the Sikh peasants. Although the East Indians were not named in the ordinances, they had the desired effect. They stemmed the tide of East Indian immigration. According to the Dominion Government, however, the aims of these restrictive measures were (1) to prevent hardship to the East Indians owing to the severity of the Canadian climate, (2) to fight racial friction, and (3) to protect Canadian working man and his higher standard of living.

In January 1912, two East Indians on their return from a trip to India brought their wives and children with them. The Immigration Department would not allow the women and children to land. They were later allowed to land as "an act of grace" which was not to be used as a precedent. Then came the Komagata Maru incident in 1914. The Komagata Maru, a Japanese steamer chartered by the East Indians, came to Vancouver on May 23, 1914, with 376 persons of East Indian origin on board. Apparently these people met the requirements of the two Orders-in-Council. The Komagata Maru was not allowed to dock in the Vancouver harbour, but was anchored in the Burrard Inlet under constant surveillance. While the legal battles were being fought, the citizens of Vancouver passed the following resolution at a public meeting:

That whereas the steamer "Komagata Maru" has been lying in the port of Vancouver from the 23rd day of May until the present date, with a ship-load of undesirable immigrants demanding admission into the

Dominion of Canada; And whereas it is the universal opinion of all citizens resident upon the Pacific coast of the Dominion of Canada that influx of Asiatics is detrimental and hurtful to the best interests of the Dominion, from the standpoint of citizenship, public morals and labor conditions: Be it therefore resolved that this meeting strongly urge upon the Dominion Government the necessity of supporting the rejection of the immigrants aboard the steamer "Komagata Maru" and their immediate deportation; And that stringent legislation be enacted whereby such immigration may, in the future, be entirely restricted from admission to the Dominion. (Italics added)<sup>6</sup>

The Sikhs lost the battle in the courts, which it was ruled, had no jurisdiction in such cases. The passengers on the steamer got impatient, seized control of the steamer and in a small skirmish with the Vancouver Police and immigration officials who tried to board the steamer, some policemen were hurt. A gunboat belonging to the Canadian navy, fitted with six-inch and four-inch guns was brought and anchored alongside the Komagata Maru. After two months in the inlet, the steamer was escorted out to sea on July 23, without being allowed to unload its human cargo. The incident left the East Indians with nothing but insecurity and uncertainty about their future in British Columbia, where they had already been disfranchized, and did not have the right to vote until 1948. A large number of East Indians left B.C. to return home. By 1921, there were only 1,016 of them left in Canada including a hard core of 951 in B.C. When as a result of an Imperial conference in 1919, the East Indians still in Canada were allowed to bring their families, few took advantage of it. Social climate was still far from congenial for raising a family in B.C. For even as late as 1927, the Canadian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan were urging a ban on the entry of all Asiatics. The same year, the Vancouver Sun Publishing Co. published a book, Oriental Occupation of British Columbia, by T. MacInnes whose title speaks for itself and could in parts qualify for hate literature. One should not therefore be surprised to learn that, according to the best East Indian estimates, at the outbreak

of the second world war, "there were no more than fifteen (East Indian) families living in Vancouver" (Mayer 1959:2), and probably no more than thirty in the whole of B.C.

During this first phase of their immigration, the East Indians realized that their survival in a hostile social milieu depended on strong community organization. Unity, cohesion and loyalty to the community were highly valued. The notions of sacrificing one's own interests in order to help "our people" in getting jobs, shelter, hospitality, or even in escaping arrest for illegal entry, etc. acquired almost religious overtones. An existing social institution, the Sikh Temple, was effectively used as a place to rally around. The Sikh temple, traditionally, is not only a place of worship and weekly gatherings, but is also a place where secular affairs of the community are discussed and decisions taken. Several Sikh temples were built in B.C. and California (where the Sikh immigrants went through comparable experiences) at the expense of considerable sacrifice and donations of labor and sometimes one's entire wages. Non-Sikhs from India, the Hindus and the Moslems, also rallied around the temple. The community kitchen and sleeping quarters that are part of the temple were useful to transient members of the community.

Their intense in-group feeling was accompanied by a suspicion<sup>7</sup> of all the Goras (the whites) and any East Indian hob-nobbing with them.<sup>8</sup> They were conscious of their minority status but were also proud of their religious and socio-cultural heritage. They had, and continue to have their ethnocentric view of the Gora's social and moral life-way. They were interested in preserving their values and tradition which were believed to be superior and better. These East Indians, often referred to by the community as "pioneers" or "old-timers", were not only



positively anti-assimilationist but also perhaps resistant to change. It can be assumed that the few East Indian families that lived in B.C. at the outbreak of the second world war had maintained a fairly traditional form of family organization and kinship structure. Most other East Indians lived with other single males in "cook houses", logging camps, or shared apartments. Some of these had their families in India whom they would visit every few years, but would not want to bring them to Canada. ?

The second phase of East Indians' immigration began in 1947 under changed social and political conditions. India's independence in 1947 affected the status of Indians living abroad. Following the world war, there was a change in the Canadian opinion towards the Asians. In 1947, the efforts of D. P. Pandia, an East Indian Barrister in Vancouver, and negotiations between New Delhi and Ottawa led to the East Indians getting the right to vote in federal, provincial and municipal elections. Deportation proceedings against 210 illegal entrants were dropped and they were given the status of landed immigrants. ✓ In 1951, a quota of 150 immigrants from India was fixed to enable East Indians in Canada to bring in their relatives. This was raised to 300 persons a year in 1957, half of which was to be the preference quota reserved for the sponsored relatives of the East Indians in Canada. Further changes were introduced in 1962 making individual skill and merit, rather than the country of origin, as the basis for selection of immigrants.

There were several important ramifications of the above changes in the immigration regulations. The East Indians who were now prosperous as a result of post-war boom and higher wages took advantage of the changed regulations. They visited India, brought their families in larger numbers and also sponsored close relatives. The relatives that could be sponsored

under the Preference Quota included: fiance, fiancée, married children of a Canadian citizen (together with their spouses and unmarried children under 21 years of age), father and mother of a Canadian citizen, grandparents of a Canadian citizen, unmarried brother and sister of a Canadian citizen, married brother and sister of a Canadian citizen (with their spouses and unmarried children under 21), unmarried orphan nephew or niece (under 21 years of age) of a Canadian citizen, married children (together with their spouses and unmarried children under 21), father and mother of a resident in Canada, grandparents of a resident in Canada, unmarried brother and sister of a resident in Canada, married brother and sister (with their spouses and unmarried children under 21) of a resident in Canada, unmarried orphan nephew or niece under 21 years of a resident in Canada (Mayer, 1959:34). The above list shows that landed immigrants had the same privileges as those who acquired citizenship so far as sponsoring relatives was concerned.

The following Table II<sup>9</sup> shows the increase in East Indian immigration over the years. It must, however, be remembered that after the changes in the immigration regulations in 1962, more and more non- ✓ Sikh immigrants have come from different parts of India, and in contrast to the Sikh immigrants, they have tended to settle in Ontario and other provinces as well.

TABLE II  
NUMBER OF EAST INDIAN IMMIGRANTS, 1950-66

1950	77	1956	332	1960	691	1964	2,077*
1951	99	1957	334	1961	772	1965	3,491*
1952	172	1958	459	1962	830	1966	4,094*
1953	140	1959	741	1963	1,131*		
1954	177						

\*Includes persons from Pakistan, Ceylon, West Indies, and South America. The ethnic origin category was dropped after 1966.

### East Indians in the Sixties

As a consequence of changes in the immigration policy making it possible for a larger number of East Indians to enter Canada and the privilege of sponsoring close relatives has had at least five important implications for the structure of the East Indian community in B.C. Firstly, the number of people living with their families in B.C. increased tremendously. In a way, this has tended to change the character of the community. The people living with their families have come to settle and raise their families in Canada. There is a greater willingness on their part to change as compared to the old-timers. Secondly, most of them have been, and have, sponsored their near relatives and have succeeded in "re-creating" their kin universe in Canada. They do not therefore feel lost among strangers, or hostile to the host society. In a majority of cases, they either already are, or soon hope to be with those kin with whom they would interact, if they were at home. A large part of their social and ritual life can be, and is, lived, within the available kin universe. The kin universe also forms an important part of one's resource group. Thirdly, the phenomenon of the generation gap in its literal and figurative sense confronts the community. We cannot but fail to notice the element of discontinuity in the community's membership. The first batch of immigrants arrived during the first decade of the present century, and but for a small trickle between 1920 and 1940, they were followed nearly forty years later by others, who now form a majority in the community's membership. The process of cultural transmission, more particularly the transmission of the adaptive experience from the preceding generation to the next could not proceed effectively. As such, a tremendous gap is discernible in the attitudes of the "newcomers" and the "old-timers",<sup>10</sup> the reasons for which are also fairly obvious. On the one hand, Canada and Canadian attitudes

in 1960's, were not what they were in 1908. On the other hand, life in India, particularly in towns and cities was also not the same in the 1960's as it was in the first decade of this century. The newcomers through their education and urban contacts had undergone a change in their outlook and attitudes to traditional values. For example, while the old-timers attended the temple and religiously stuck to the five symbols of Sikhism (actually, only four, since carrying of the sword in public was against Canadian laws), the newcomers would have their hair cut and beards shaven before they landed in Canada. The newcomers also failed to see hostility and hatred in the goras with whom they worked, or who they came into contact with. Therefore, they generally could not share the old-timers' view of a "threat" to the community, or the need to stick together and avoid the goras. As a matter of fact, a large number of the newcomers wanted to establish social relationships outside the community. Consequently, numerous problems, not quite relevant here arose when the leadership of the community gradually passed into the hands of the newcomers. Fourthly, the newcomers introduced another differentiating element in the community structure. After 1957, a large number of non-sponsored immigrants that began to enter Canada under their own steam, were skilled and professional people, as compared to the old-timers, a majority of whom were uneducated and brought with them the peasant ethos, characteristic of the villages in Punjab.<sup>11</sup> This was true to some extent, but only for some of the sponsored kin soon after 1947. For it must be remembered that under changed conditions in India even the sponsored kin had more schooling and greater exposure to urban influences than the old-timers. One of the important implications of this differentiation is in the area of aspirations for upward mobility and the willingness to accept changes that are relevant to goal achievement. The significance of these



elements to understand changes in the family organization will become clearer in subsequent pages.

Lastly, the small but growing category of "Canada-born" East Indians has important ramifications for the community. The small trickle during the inter-war years included a very small number of wives and children. The category of Canada-born was small and had little impact on the community as a whole. However, since the early fifties, a much larger number of families have entered Canada and there are now many more children in their late teens and attending high schools and colleges. We could perhaps, for good reason, also include in this category all those children who entered Canada with their parents in the fifties, had most of their education in Canada through schooling and exposure to mass media, especially television, and are much closer to the Canada-born in ethos and world view. This category, then, is no longer insignificant numerically. It consists of persons who are still in their late teens or early twenties. They are often confused between the two cultures that they have grown, or are growing into. Their lack of fluency in their own mother-tongue (Punjabi) limits their participation in the temple rituals and their interaction with their India-born kin. Sometimes, probably trying to reject their ethnic affinity, they stay away from the community affairs, and, by and large, have so far had very little impact on the political affairs of the community. Their impact on the family organization, however, has been tremendous. They are the ones who are often accused of contributing to stresses in the traditional social organization. While there are differences between the old-timers and the newcomers, there is no real breach so far as core familial values are concerned. It is a different story with the Canada-born (including those raised and schooled in Canada); there is a tremendous gap between them and

the rest, leading to conflicts and change.

I was made aware of some of the significant aspects of this phenomenon in the early sixties while interviewing members of the Executive Committee of the Khalsa Diwan Society (KDS)<sup>12</sup>, one of whose meetings I was invited to attend. Rumour had it that around then (1959), leadership of the community (KDS) had passed from the hands of the old-timers and conservative segments to the newcomers who were more liberal and radical<sup>13</sup>. The meeting that I attended was devoted to the discussion of two major issues: (i) arrangements to start Punjabi language classes for the children to be held in the 2nd Avenue Sikh Temple, and (ii) the collection of funds and planning for an East Indian Community Center. It was argued that the children growing up in Canada must be able to read, write and speak fluently in their mother-tongue, "so that they can understand their religion and learn to be proud of their culture." It was mentioned in the discussions that there was also a need for a community center "where the children, and the young boys and girls from within the community could have an opportunity and a place to meet each other." This was in response to a concern for the negative attitude of the Canada-born towards arranged marriages. Despite reservations, the members of the community generally agreed that the community center could go a long way towards confining marriages based on love and free choice at least within the community.

There seemed to be a general agreement among the several members of the KDS Executive, interviewed after the meeting, on the following matters of long range interests: (These could perhaps be described as generalized "goals" as defined by the community and the "means" that should be employed to achieve these goals.)

- (i) It is extremely important for us to retain our identity as Sikhs and East Indians. To retain our identity, we must have a large and "growing" community.
- (ii) To keep the community growing, we must prevent our people from getting "lost" into the white Canadian society through intermarriage. (One of the members said jokingly that it is the white girls,<sup>14</sup> not white men, who now are the biggest threat to our community, and but for our strong disapproval of intermarriage, the community would disappear in no time.)
- (iii) Furthermore, to keep the community growing and keeping our culture alive, brides and bride-grooms must always be "imported" from India, where marriages could either be arranged by common relatives, or the prospective 'boy' or 'girl' should be sent to India to get married there.
- (iv) Close relatives, as permitted in the quota, should be encouraged and sponsored to come to Canada and assisted in their settlement here.

It was assumed under (iii) and (iv) above that the flow of spouses and relatives between Canada and India would help in the maintenance of the cultural vigour, and braking the assimilative forces that are at work in the community.

- (v) The leaders further made it clear that although they admired and respected the old-timers for their courage in "sticking it out and opening up Canada for the East Indians", they could not agree with some of the views of the old-timers, particularly their attitude towards the white society and their "refusal to change by sticking to tradition for its own sake". The leaders seemed to think that

the East Indians should adopt a middle course. While on the one hand they should avoid imitating Canadian ways and resist assimilation, they must also remember that "what was good and useful in India, in 1900, is not necessarily good and useful in Canada today. They must be willing to change and make necessary adjustments in their thought and action."<sup>15</sup> The desire to retain community identity is not seen as a contradiction of the above but is viewed as something necessary "to retain our rich cultural heritage and avoid the pitfalls and evils of the white society such as pre-marital sex, 'fatherless' children, unstable families and divorce, rebellious and misguided youth without any respect for elders or tradition." Needless to say that the East Indians are extremely concerned about the possibility of some of these "evils" creeping into their own community because of the attitudes of the Canada-born towards their family, kin, religion and other institutions. Having grown up with East Indian values at home and Canadian norms and values outside, the Canada-born are not only questioning the "relevance" of East Indian "old, traditional ways" in the Canadian milieu, but are also rejecting them in favour of Canadian patterns, chiefly those that are considered important in the teen sub-culture. We shall return to this subject in subsequent pages.

#### Family and Marriage in the Total Context

In non-industrial societies the institution of family plays an extremely important role as an agency of social control and as a mechanism for cultural transmission. Traditionally, the East Indian family managed to regulate the conduct of its members by means



of a variety of sanctions, including the religious ones. Some of these sanctions, mechanisms and roles must undergo a change when families have to function in an urban-industrial milieu. Considering the short span of time that has elapsed since the post-war settlement of East Indian families in B.C., it is probably too soon to answer all the questions that may be raised concerning the areas and direction of change in the East Indian family organization. However, it might be useful at first to look at the trends discernible in the areas of marriage, family and kinship in the new social milieu, and then see if it is possible to come to certain generalizations.

Almost all East Indian marriages are arranged by the parents, or in their absence by other older relatives. In a majority of cases the spouse is sought in India with the help of relatives and matrimonial advertisements in Indian newspapers. Since it is considered desirable for every boy and girl to get married, and since it is one of the most important, almost semi-sacred, responsibilities of the parents and even older kin to arrange these marriages, everyone including fictive kin (friends and friends of the families) join in the search. There are individuals, particularly older ones, who take great pride in being match-makers. Since they are often approached by the parents of both boys and girls looking for a spouse, the match-makers get to know the "matrimonial market" and are not only able to bring the two parties together, but also sometimes act as a go-between in the initial stages. The match-makers do not work for a fee but for goodwill. Although match-making gives a person a

certain degree of influence with the two families and their near kin, all match-makers agree that as soon as the marriage is over and there are problems between the newly-weds or their families, the match-maker begins to be blamed for it all.<sup>16</sup> However, there are probably rewards in the shape of excitement, a sense of achievement, and possible goodwill which is some kind of a social reserve to be drawn upon and utilized at some future date, that this avocation continues to attract people. The match-maker in B.C., of course, is different from his counterpart in the Punjab in at least two ways. One, he has to be economically well-off to be able to visit India every now and then (maybe every two or three years), and second, to have an extensive network of friends and relatives. In several instances, the match-maker is actually helping to link together the offspring of two of his own distant or sometimes fictive kin.

#### The Arranged Marriage

The "traditional" arranged marriage has evolved into a number of variants. Ideally, the Hindu marriages were supposed to be arranged when the bride and groom were relatively young (before either attained puberty). The suitability of a proposed marriage was judged by the parents and older kin (both patri-lateral and matri-lateral) and the astrologer. It was the responsibility of the former to see that the rules of caste and sub-caste endogamy, the rules of gotra (clan) exogamy, and the incest taboos governing the union of persons within prohibited degrees of kinship were observed. The union within prohibited degrees of kinship generally included fictive kin, and one

of the extensions of this taboo, combined with the fact that most often the families belonging to the same caste in a village also belong to the same clan results in village exogamy.

It was also the responsibility of the parents and older kin to see that astral and terrestrial elements likely to affect the happiness of marriage were taken care of. For example, they had to see that the families getting united through the proposed marriage were equals or near-equals in terms of social status and financial well-being. This was supposed to facilitate the adjustment of the boy and the girl. They were expected to make sure that the boy was healthy, intelligent and free from physical deformities. The girl was similarly looked at in terms of physical attractiveness and temperament, health and freedom from physical deformities, and in terms of being "well-versed in domestic affairs."<sup>17</sup> Hypogamy, and the size of the dowry paid to the boy's kin often compensated for any shortcomings in the girl. One of the basic elements in marriage was that there was no prior commitment on the part of the boy or the girl to each other. They were not only supposed not to have known each other, but even not to have seen each other. The system emphasized the acceptance of the girl and the girl's family and kin by the boy's family and kin. Ideally, the boy's and the girl's acceptance of each other as husband and wife followed, with an assurance they had been judged and found suitable for each other by their "wise" elders, and were now indissolubly united to each other. The traditional Sikh marriages were in no way intrinsically different from the traditional Hindu arranged marriages in form, ideological content, or meaning.

Urban living, liberal education, mass media (chiefly the ever-popular Indian movies with boy-meet-girl and the love-at-first-sight romance themes), and the changing laws relating to marriage have gradually altered the pattern of arranged marriages. The new laws prohibit the marriage of girls below the age of fifteen and boys below the age of eighteen. The increase in age at marriage coupled with the influence of movies, education and liberalism, is related almost in direct proportion to the desire on the part of boys and girls to have greater say in the choice of their marriage partners. Increasingly, the parents and kin have kept pace with the times to accommodate these desires. Therefore, when the East Indians go to India to choose a spouse, they participate in an already changed pattern. Depending upon the 'strictness' of the girl's parents but still within the framework of the arranged-marriage pattern, it is possible for the boy's female relatives, whose judgment he would trust, to see the girl; it is possible for him to see a photograph of the girl; or it may even be possible for him to have a look at the girl in a public place or in her home in the company of other relatives. In rare instances, it may be possible for him to be left alone briefly with the girl (perhaps with ears and eyes glued to the keyhole) to let him have direct conversation with the girl; and in extremely rare instances, it may be possible for him to meet the girl, though seldom under different conditions a second time. There are two important considerations in these procedures. One, that the boy should be able to satisfy himself as far as the girl's appearance and attractiveness are concerned. Secondly, if for some



not as per FIJIAN  
 reason the boy wishes to say "no" to the proposal, the girl is not  
 offended since she is not 'supposed' to have known that she is being  
 looked at for matrimonial purposes.

The East Indians, mainly the boys, who go to India to get married are generally not too happy with these procedures. There is no provision for elaborate courtship even within the changed pattern. While the India-born East Indians get along with the arrangements since the formal consent of the boys is now generally considered necessary, the Canada-born East Indians find these procedures entirely unsatisfactory. There have, however, been some instances when the Canada-born boys and girls agreed to arranged marriages on the basis of the above mentioned procedures. There were two main reasons for the pre-1947 Canada-born to have generally gone along with arranged marriages. As indicated earlier, they shared the community's ideal to marry within the community and since there were few eligible mates available in British Columbia, they had to go to India and accept the existing system there. The stereotype of the India-born woman also helped. It was believed that compared to a Canadian or Canada-born girl, the India-born was shy, thrifty, willing to give in to her husband, and less likely to be free with members of the opposite sex. The Canada-born boys and girls accepted these arrangements also because non-acceptance could entail annoying their "old man," with all its unhappy consequences including the risk of being disinherited. In some cases, the Canada-born, after experiencing rejection in the wider society, decided to return to the folds of their own community.

The marriages of Canada-born girls did and continue to present

some difficulties to their parents. Even though there were not many Canada-born girls of marriageable age before the 1950s, it is possible to see at least three kinds of marriages of the Canada-born girls that were reported and often discussed by the informants. Firstly, there were the marriages (arranged, though in all probability the boy and girl knew each other but did not have any extensive courtship) between the Canada-born girls and the Canada-born boys.

Case A. J.B. and his Canada-born wife who did not know each other personally and whose marriage was arranged by their parents, had a happy home, two children, and a lot of appliances. The couple had a wide circle of friends, the majority of whom were white Canadians. "We feel more at ease with our Canadian friends, particularly where fun and recreation is concerned." They had not been to the temple since their wedding and they were not worried that their children could not speak Punjabi. They had visited India and would like their children at some stage to learn something about Indian history and culture.

Case B. K.M. and his wife, on the other hand, though both Canada-born and whose marriage was also arranged, did not seem to be getting along well. They had two children and a substantial inheritance. They broke off after about ten years of marriage. The husband complained that the wife was too free with money and men; the wife complained that the husband could never accept she was his "equal" and had similar rights and freedom of action as he had.

In both cases, there were tremendous personality differences. One might expect that the marriages between the Canada-born boys and girls would work out better. Perhaps a crucial variable here would be the extent to which the Canadian pattern has been internalized by

both husband and wife. However, on the basis of the few instances of this kind of marriage, it is difficult to make any generalization.

The second type of marriage was that arranged between Canada-born girls and India-born boys. Compared to the first, there were relatively many more instances of this kind. In several of these marriages, a boy, generally educated, was chosen by the relatives in India (similar procedure has been and continues to be followed for the marriage of post 1952 India-born men) and sent to Canada under the Preference Quota category for fiance and fiancée. There have been a few cases (Mayer, 1959:18) where the Canada-born girl refused to marry the boy brought for her. One of them ran away from home and went to some place in Eastern Canada. However, the few families which I got to know where the husband was India-born and the wife a Canada-born girl, seemed to involve educated (with some education in North America) and professionally trained India-born men. The community has a way of keeping in touch with Indian students at the University of British Columbia. In the past, a number of students have married Canada-born girls. These boys were generally considered to be adaptable, and because of their education and training could easily fit in with or come fairly close to the ideals and aspirations of the Canada-born girls. Four husbands out of the five in this category that I knew agreed that the Canada-born wife helped them to adjust and adapt to the Canadian way of life.

Case C. The case of G.L. who was selected and sent out to Canada to marry a Canada-born girl proved to be somewhat unhappy. The girl had graduated from High School and was

very much liked in the small community in which her family lived. G.L., when he arrived, stayed with the girl's family. Although G.L. had a couple of years of college education in the Punjab, he was, because of his accent and bad English, virtually unintelligible to the girl's Canadian friends. She could understand and speak some Punjabi, and the two of them could communicate. She knew she had to give in to her parents' wish. They were married, much to the shock and surprise of the girl's friends, within two weeks of G.L.'s arrival in Canada. G.L. stayed with his father-in-law for a couple of months. Then his wife decided to move to Vancouver, where she took up a job and tried to put G.L. through school. He could not enter the University; instead he had to go to college for make-up courses. Somehow, he could not make it, and left his wife and two children and ended up as a labourer in a saw-mill somewhere in the interior of B.C.

In most of the other marriages involving Canada-born girls and India-born boys, the girls generally had achieved upward mobility through marriage, and the boys found their Canadianized, middle-class wives generally helpful in their professional advancement.

The third type of marriage involving Canada-born girls has been inter-ethnic. There are indeed more men than women, both Canada-born and India-born, who have married outside the community. For various reasons mentioned in preceding pages, all these marriages where one of the spouses was a white Canadian were viewed with disfavor. It was generally believed that these individuals and their children were lost to the community. The informants discussed two cases of Canada-born girls having married white Canadians. In both cases, lack of parental control was blamed for these marriages. The



informants never mentioned these marriages as unions based on "romantic love." They were always referred to as girls having gone astray. Men, on the other hand, who married white girls were considered to have been fooled and trapped. Ideally a man was expected to go around and enjoy himself within reasonable limits in the white society without getting involved in a marriage.

The attitude towards inter-ethnic marriages, as well as marriages based on romantic love and free choice, is gradually changing. A reference was made in the preceding pages to the teen sub-culture and the idea of a community center. While it was never clearly mentioned by the leaders, it was often implied that the community center would function as a place where "our boys and girls would be able to meet each other" and dance and sing together; and even if these meetings led to love-marriages, it would be a lesser evil than if the boys and girls continued to go with white boys and girls for recreation, and married outside the community.

A fairly large number of East Indian boys and girls are in their late teens and early twenties today. They are, by and large, closer to other teenagers in their love of music, adventure, romance, and excitement, than to their own traditional East Indian values. The parents have only had limited success in controlling the behavior of their boys and girls. Being able to date and to be able to go out on dates is a critical issue in almost every East Indian family with teenage children. Even where parental permission is not granted, frequent school dances provide an opportunity for the boys and girls to meet outside of school hours. Even if they are not able to go

out on dates in the evening, they can and do meet their friends and sweethearts at other hours. The parents, on the other hand, while refusing to let the girls go out on dates, and by disallowing their boys to date girls, often talk about East Indian values and ideals. This frame of reference and the idiom employed in communication is completely unintelligible to the Canada-born children.

Case D. A.K. refused permission to his teenage daughter to go to a school dance in my presence. When the daughter asked why she could not act like all the other girls, she was told quite firmly: "We are different and I have told you this before. No East Indian will marry you if he finds out that you have been associating with other boys." The conversation ended abruptly when the girl was told not to argue with the father and to give the respect due to him.

Three years later, one day A.K.'s daughter did not come home from school and phoned him to say that he should either agree to let her marry one of her school friends whom she loved, or she was simply going to live with him until she could marry him without his consent. Faced with Hobson's choice, A.K. agreed to let her have a wedding, but would have nothing to do with her thereafter. Needless to say that A.K. viewed the whole thing as a loss of face and cut himself off from the community as well for some time.

Anxiety and concern over not being permitted to go out on dates was expressed by almost every teenager I talked to. While the parents dreamt and talked about arranging their marriages, most of the Canada-born teenagers seemed to be bent upon refusing to have anything to do with arranged marriages. One of these girls, attending a university, said, "we have to keep quiet and stall until I am 21. Then I am on my own." One of the parents said that he would not

take his teenage daughter with him to visit other East Indian friends because "she is always talking against us for not letting her go out with boys; this is so embarrassing."

There is a growing opinion that the East Indians are no longer as hostile to intermarriage as they once were. There are several East Indians whose white wives have not only identified themselves with the community but have also contributed immensely to community affairs. The Canada-born, who are by and large more Canadian than East Indian in their views and attitudes, do not view intermarriage with a horror. Many of them are quite favorably disposed towards it, although it must be emphasized that what the Canada-born really want is the Canadian pattern of marriage based on free choice and romantic love, rather than intermarriage per se. It seems likely as Mayer (1959:28) aptly pointed out that "opinion may slowly change towards treating intermarriage as a link, rather than a severance." The attitude of treating intermarriage as a catastrophe leading to severance of all ties is certainly changing, though slowly. More data (and perhaps more time) is needed to see the direction in which the present generation of Canada-born would go, and the kind of link it would provide between East Indians and the Canadian society.

Cont. on P. 26

### Families, Households, and Kin

The nuclear family is the basic unit in the family organization of East Indians in B.C. Although much has been written about the idealized joint families in India, they do not seem to be as numerous as one would like to believe. Indera P. Singh (1958:503) found only three joint families in Daleke, a Sikh village studied by him. In B.C. most households are composed of nuclear families often with the addition of an old mother or father, or an unmarried brother or sister.

Joint households that are sometimes met with in B.C. should really be viewed as only temporarily 'joint.' Kinship obligations and notions of hospitality are often responsible for the larger households that we sometimes come across in B.C. Under the rubric of kinship obligations we can see a number of temporary (generally recognized by all parties as temporary) arrangements. Both patrilocal-virilocal and matrilocal-uxorilocal residence are acceptable patterns but only temporarily and depending upon the circumstances of the husband. The obligation of the father to house and to give a start to his son-in-law (if he has recently arrived from India and has no other close relatives) or newly married son are also assumed by the oldest or one of his older sons. These may seem to be joint families but in reality they represent a combination of hospitality and role-obligations, a host-guest relationship in which any assistance, financial or manual, towards living together is to be accepted by the host only with extreme reluctance. There are indeed variations in the warmth and content of relationships between the kin. A brief description of the following cases will illustrate the point.

Household A. C.L. came to Canada in 1957 with his wife and three children. Two more children were born in Canada. He sponsored his unmarried younger brother to come to Canada six years ago. He is employed but he lives with his brother and helps him financially to meet other family obligations. C.L. is the oldest brother in a family of several brothers and sisters. Four years ago, C.L. and his brother sponsored two of their unmarried sisters, and a married sister and her husband. They were all living together in one house. C.L.'s married sister and her husband were the first to part after about three months. During this period C.L.'s brother-in-law was unemployed and was in no position to help. One of C.L.'s sisters got married to someone who was already in Canada and moved out. It is understood that C.L.'s remaining sister and brother would also move out when they get married.

Household B. A.D. came to Canada in 1956 with his wife and three children. He started a business which flourished. He sponsored his brother in 1959. The latter came to Canada with his wife and two children. They all moved in with A.D. and were treated as guests for some time. A.D.'s brother was already working for him and had an income. He therefore moved to the basement suite in A.D.'s house and set up a separate kitchen. After about six months, A.D.'s brother with wife and children moved out, following some disagreement. This happened after A.D.'s brother had found another job.

Household C. S.R. came to Canada in 1958. He was joined by his wife and four children in 1965. His oldest son, 21, and an older daughter, 19, started working soon after. His other children, a boy and girl, were in school. In 1969 S.R.'s relatives in India found a boy, whom S.R.'s family had known briefly in India. He was brought to Canada to be married to S.R.'s oldest daughter. The boy lived with S.R. for about four weeks before he was married. He lived with S.R. for about six months. While still unemployed (although S.R.'s daughter worked) they



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moved to a small basement suite, much to the displeasure of S.R.

Household D. VIC is an old-timer and retired. He owns a small apartment block and several houses. He has two sons, a daughter, and several grandchildren. The house occupied by Vic and his wife also has three suites that are rented. One of Vic's sons lives in the same city with his wife and children, in a duplex that was a wedding gift from Vic.

The above cases would show how kinship obligations are perceived and the efforts that are made to meet these obligations. Space is not always an important reason for married sons' or daughters', or brothers' and sisters' moving out. It is recognized that moving in with a kin is a temporary arrangement and that once they are on their own they would move out, although in most cases the 'hosts' would show mild displeasure to convey the polite gesture (sometimes with genuine feelings) that  
"we are sorry and unhappy to see you go."

Kinship obligations go beyond the elementary family and secondary kin. Although the East Indians are patrilineal, matrilineal cousins are also spoken of and treated as classificatory brothers. Sisters and sisters' children are sponsored and helped almost as often as are brothers and brothers' children. Affines also receive considerable attention. Indera P. Singh (1958:503) noticed the "shifting of stronger ties from consanguineal to affinal relationships . . . a shift from 'turban relationships' to those of 'skirts'."

Among the various elements of continuity and discontinuity in the family structure, there are two that deserve special attention. These are the relationships within a household and the woman's position. It is generally agreed that parental authority is gradually eroding. It was pointed out in the preceding pages that while there was no

real breach between the old-timers and new-comers as far as core familistic values were concerned, there was a real gap where the Canada-born and the India-born were concerned. The lack of fluency in English on the part of the parents and the lack of fluency in their mother-tongue on the part of the Canada-born contributes not only to a communication gap, but even leads to lack of respect for the parents' views (which are not always understood) and a lack of respect for the parents and 'age! The diverse influences, already mentioned earlier, to which the Canada-born are subjected lead them to reject some of the East Indian values and the assumptions behind them. For example, the close relationship between age and wisdom that forms the basis for respect and obedience is generally rejected. While the India-born parents would like to 'control' and 'discipline' their children, the children wonder why their parents cannot treat them with equality and respect as they do in television shows, or why they cannot call their father by his first name, or call him "a silly old fool" like Jimmy does next door! Be that as it may, the Canada-born consider their parents to be too authoritarian and lacking in understanding. The parents complain of rebellion among the youth, "something that their boys and girls cannot help picking up from white Canadians." However, it would be wrong to infer that the East Indian community is going to fall apart as a result of some kind of war between the generations. Actually, here we are talking about the conflicts and stresses that are being faced by the first generation of India-born immigrants raising the first generation of Canada-born children. Conflicts are in the process of being resolved, and accommodations and compromises are

being worked out. The idea is to get along with the old man and "stall an arranged marriage" until one is 21 (now reduced to 19) is one such compromise. The parents themselves are gradually relaxing their strictness and acceding a limited amount of freedom to their children where meeting members of the opposite sex in their age group is concerned.

The position of the East Indian woman should also be looked at both in terms of traditional and the emergent-urban pattern in India and in B.C. Indera P. Singh (1958:502) describes the women of his Sikh village as "upright and manly" capable of handling tremendous responsibilities in the absence of men; for example, looking after their families and even managing agricultural operations, and as being "supreme ruler inside the home." Nonetheless, the men are the "undisputed heads and whether they consult their women folk or not depends on their discretion." The above would seem to be a fairly accurate description of the traditional situation. However, as was indicated earlier, the new-comers who entered Canada after 1950 had undergone a change in their outlook and attitude to traditional values as a result of their education, westernization, and urban contacts while still in India. These are the people who are heads of households today in B.C. and, according to most informants, their attitude towards the status of women did not change enough to satisfy their wives. Many of these wives are educated and although not many go out to work, they, in the Canadian context, are unwilling to treat the husband as "master and lord." The women freely object to their husbands' heavy drinking, returning home drunk with friends and demanding food, and gambling, etc.

They demand to know the income, how and where it is and how it should be spent. The husbands often resent it, and view these developments as a challenge to their authority, even though a good majority of them give in to these demands. In the traditional pattern the conjugal roles are differentiated, but in the Canadian context, chiefly in a nuclear family situation, the role relations are undergoing a change increasingly in the direction of equalitarianism and reduced differentiation. There are two things, however, which are significant in this context. The individual orientation of the husband and wife are important in their relationship. I have seen families where the women would simply not sit down and eat with the men and the rest of the family. They must feed the men and boys first. This particular practice is often considered symptomatic of woman's inferior position. Similarly, there are men to whom the male role implies superiority and authority over the members of his family. It would perhaps be correct to say that the husband-wife relationship is undergoing a change but there are important elements of continuity in the emerging pattern, perhaps more than in the parent-child relationships discussed earlier. There have been a few cases of conflict, desertion, and divorce, but these are neither numerous nor do they indicate any serious malady capable of undermining or leading to a breakdown of the family organization.

An important aspect of the East Indian family organization in B.C. is the manner in which most families are part of a kinship network. The people encouraged, sponsored, and helped their close relatives to come and settle in British Columbia. It became possible because



of an economic boom in B.C. in the fifties and early sixties, and because of the provision of a Preference Quota for near relatives made in the immigration rules. The kin dominated networks, which are often composed of the same individuals even for different purposes, act as effective agencies of social control, regulating the behavior of their members, and thus contributing to the dynamics and the maintenance of the organization.

The social ties of the Canada-born, however, in these kin networks are rather tenuous, and this fact, among others, is likely to have important ramifications for the future of East Indians in Canada and their social organization.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>The fieldwork on which this paper is based was done during 1960-61 and 1967-69. Grants from Canada Council and the Leo and Thea Koerner Foundation enabled me to be in residence at the University of British Columbia as a visiting lecturer from September 1959 to June 1961. I am grateful to Dr. H.B. Hawthorn and Dr. Cyril S. Belshaw for their help and encouragement during my stay at U.B.C. and through the years. Fieldwork during 1967-69 was made possible through grants from the Koerner Foundation and the President's Research Fund at Simon Fraser University. I am also grateful to my numerous East Indian friends for their time and hospitality.

<sup>2</sup>The Sikhs are followers of Sikhism, a religion based on the teachings of Guru Nanak (1469-1539) and nine other gurus that followed Nanak. (Guru = teacher; Sikh = discipline.) As a result of persecution by the Mogul Emperors, particularly Aurangzeb, the last Guru, Gobind Singh (1666-1708) converted the Sikhs into Khalsa (army of the pure) and gave them the five symbols (Kakka) to indicate their membership in the Khalsa. The five symbols are: long hair, comb, shorts, iron bracelet, and a small sword. Sikhism as a religion emphasizes simplicity in ritual, equality of all irrespective of caste, and pursuit of Truth. The B.C. Sikhs often speak of their temple (Guru-dwara) as "church" and their Holy Book (Granth Sahib) as "Bible" when talking to others in English.

<sup>3</sup>The terms "Sikhs in B.C." and "East Indians" have been used interchangeably in this paper. The term East Indian is used in all government records.

<sup>4</sup>Immigration Facts and Figures. Ottawa, 1911. Pp. 8-9.

<sup>5</sup>Total number of immigrants of all nationalities into Canada over the same period was close to 1,764,000. The population of British Columbia at the time of the 1911 census was 392,480. The census of 1911 also revealed that only 2,342 East Indians were left in Canada, by the time of the census; others had either returned home or perhaps migrated to California.

<sup>6</sup>"Sikhs Besieging Canada," The Literary Digest, Vol. 49. Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1914, Pp. 95-96.

<sup>7</sup>Based on interviews. There are some discrepancies in the dates and sequence of events. Events are given here as remembered by the informants.

<sup>8</sup>The East Indians did have their friends among the Gora; the generalized response, however, was one of suspicion.

<sup>9</sup>Based on Canada Yearbooks, Immigration Statistics, and Reports of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

<sup>10</sup>The terms "old-timers" and "new-comers" are no more than mere terms of convenience to describe pre-1920 and post-1947 immigrants. There was a small trickle of immigrants between 1920 and 1940, presumably comprised of dependents, spouses, students, and perhaps visitors.

<sup>11</sup>For a short account of a Sikh village in Punjab, see Indera P. Singh, "A Sikh Village," Journal of American Folklore, Vol. 71, No. 281 (1958), pp. 479-503.

<sup>12</sup>Khalsa Diwan Society is an elected body which manages six temples in B.C. Its offices are located at the 2nd Avenue temple in Vancouver. Elections are held every year in January.

<sup>13</sup>Out of the seven members present, six were without long hair or beards. At the time (1959) it was a radical thing for the B.C. Sikhs to cut off their long hair and shave off their beards.

<sup>14</sup>The reference here is to a stereotype, that East Indian boys who grew up in India where the sexes are segregated do not know how to cope with white girls who are supposed to be aggressive, and "want to catch our handsome, strong, and hardworking boys."

<sup>15</sup>Statements in quotes, without a reference at the end of the quote, are from interviews with informants.

<sup>16</sup>The study of match-makers is a fascinating subject in itself. The manner in which this role is used politically would be dealt with in a separate paper.

<sup>17</sup>This is a term commonly used in matrimonial advertisements in Indian newspapers, and emphasizes one of the desirable attributes in a wife, and the traditional differentiation of roles where domestic chores are concerned.

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