

The family of the Lahotis could be an ideal example of shared values and family harmony. The joint family continues to survive through five generations, and presently consists of 94 members from three generations. They live in Yellandu, in Andhra Pradesh. Most of the family members are involved in a variety of businesses owned by the family, while some of them are employed elsewhere.

The Family

In 1925, Shri Hiralal Lahoti, an enterprising young man from Rajasthan, came to settle down in Yellandu, Andhra Pradesh. He had heard of the rich mineral reserves of the region, and was confident that he would make his fortune here. At first he opened a general store. Gradually, he built his textiles, iron nail manufacturing, and food grains businesses.

His son, Bansilal, expanded the existing business and also diversified into coal transport. He was a strong upholder of traditional values, and was widely respected by his family and fellow villagers. He had eight sons, who idolized him. It was primarily because of Bansilal's strong wish that after his demise his sons continued living together.

Like many Indian families, they have followed an age based hierarchical system in the family and the business. Presently Bansilal's eldest son, who has retired from the business, is the head of the family. The eight Lahoti brothers together have 17 sons, and 34 grandchildren.

The success of a joint family is heavily determined by the family leadership and the level of understanding among the members. In case of the Lahotis, family elders have played a crucial role in inducing family traditions in the next generations, maintaining transparency and understanding, and fair sharing of resources and responsibilities. Their traditional values do not support separation as a solution to discontent. Younger generations are encouraged to respect and value each other and think of ways that will

amicably resolve dissatisfaction prevailing about the conduct or decisions within the family. New entrants into the family, such as new brides or babies, are groomed and mentored by the elders.

The family gathers together every evening for casual chat and dinner. This tradition is being observed since the time of Bansilal Lahoti. This generates affection and facilitates less stressful discussion regarding business. It prevents creation of silos within the business, and fosters transparency and mutual trust.

They have also successfully transferred the benefits of a joint family to the succeeding generations. For example, the working members can freely pursue their professions; someone or other would always be there to take care of their children, aged parents or sick family members.

The Family Business

The family is involved in various business activities such as coal mining transport, transport services, cloth/textiles, agricultural products, and dealership of several companies. It is customary that only the male members would join the family business. However they are not forced into it. They are as free to leave the family business as to join any of the existing businesses. For each business, the eldest person or the person to start that business is considered to be the head. He enjoys complete authority, and is free to approach the elders and others for advice. They have not, so far, felt the need for a formal board.

Wealth Sharing

Profits from all the businesses are deposited in a common pool, which is supervised by the family elders. All daily household expenditures are met from this fund. Family members, working in the family businesses, do not receive any stipulated compensation. Anyone can take out as much money from the fund as they require. However, elders keep a watch to ensure that the nature of expense is not against the family values. Individuals, who opt to work outside, are expected to take care of their regular financial requirements. However, they can approach the family for financial support in time of need.

The Future

The number of family members is growing with each generation. Some of the younger members now stay away from their ancestral house either to expand the family businesses or to pursue their chosen professions. But, all reunite routinely, on numerous festive occasions. Sometimes, outstation members also entrust their children to the family. The Lahotis believe that as long as their traditional values are intact, and benefits of a joint family are enjoyed by the members, their joint family would continue to survive.



Picture Source: The Hindu, Oct 19, 2009

Family Tree of the Lahotis

