Chapter Two
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

This chapter presents the conceptual framework and theoretical underpinnings of the study. The conceptual framework was developed on the basis of the objectives of the study that have been spelt out in Chapter One. At the very outset of the chapter I would like to point out that although the conceptual framework informed the data collection process, it was constantly reviewed as the research work unfolded. It was, thus, not seen as a set of suppositions that guided the research process in a pre-determined direction. Instead, it evolved along with the data collection process and was enriched by the insights drawn from the field.

As has already been highlighted in Chapter One, the three dominant areas of the study are religious commitments, identity development, and family life experiences of young adults in inter-religious marriages. They have been studied from a psychosocial lens. To build up a more comprehensive conceptual understanding about them, theories and researches in the broader areas of religion, identity, and family life were probed. It was felt that a wider focus as a starting point would be more meaningful than a narrow search.

Accordingly, each of the three areas has been discussed in separate sections aimed at presenting important theoretical ideas and a review of significant research studies. While mapping the research and locating specific research studies, it was found that Indian studies in all the three areas were fewer in number than those situated in foreign contexts. The latter have been consciously woven into the text of the chapter since they were seen to contribute very meaningfully towards building the conceptual framework of the present research. Moreover, it was assumed that because the dimensions of religion, identity and family life, which the study focuses on, cut across cultures and contexts, any research on them, which contributes to enhancing
understanding about them, merits inclusion. At the same time, what has also been kept in mind is that every study has a contextual relevance and so how each of the three processes unfold will undoubtedly be determined by the dynamics of the inter-religious context in which it is located.

It is relevant to mention here that some of the studies that have been cited in the text of this chapter date back to the decades of the 1960s and 70s. Their inclusion is justified by the significant contribution that they have made towards building up conceptual understanding of each of the three areas. The chapter concludes by presenting the research questions that the study specifically seeks to find answers to. Needless to say, the research questions draw upon the objectives of the study, but have emerged from the discussion that forms the text of the present chapter.

**Conceptualisations of Religion and Insights from Research Studies**

As was discussed in the first chapter, the present study focuses on understanding religion as part of the subjective world of the individual. At the same time, however, it also recognizes that all subjective experiences are socially embedded. Thus, the discussion that follows focuses on understanding religion from a psychosocial lens.

Many researches in the domain of religious studies, including those situated in India, focus on understanding the impact of religion on personal and social life. The themes that they probe explore the relationship between religious affiliation and family size, family planning, family stability, educational attainment, women’s status, mental illness and sexual attitudes (Adsera, 2006; Archer, 2003; Bainbridge and Hatch, 1982; Bhat and Zavier, 2005; Bhat, 2005; Dharamlingam and Morgan, 2005; Jeffrey and Jeffrey, 2000;, Jejeebhoy and Sathar, 2001; Kulkarni and Alagarajan, 2005; Odimegwu, 2005; Stack and Kanavy, 1983; and Takyi and Addai, 2002). Some studies look at the historicity and politicization of religious identity (Butalia, 1998; Engineer, 2010; and Sorensen, 2008). All these studies although very
important in themselves, were not found to be related to the process of arriving at religious commitments, which is the focus of the present research. Hence, they have not been discussed in detail. Specific to religious commitments, very interestingly, the studies that were identified carry conflicting views about the roles of the individual and the society in arriving at religious commitments. They, thus, helped to build the view that religion is best understood within the socio-cultural context in which it functions.

To consolidate the theoretical underpinnings on religion, the definitions of religion by Geertz and Dittes, the framework presented by Stark and Glock and the work of Kakar, which situates religion in the psycho-social context of Indian society, have been relied upon.

Geertz (1973) defined religion as “(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (p 91). The definition provides a somewhat illusory quality to religion. At the same time, it highlights the importance that Geertz ascribes to culture in defining religion. In his conceptualization, symbols associated with particular religions, and stories that are built around them, provide an esoteric, yet pervasive quality to religions. Thus, the individual perceives his/her religion within the cultural context in which it is practiced. In other words, religion needs to be understood in the personal as well as the collective realm.

In contrast, Luckmann (1995) argues that religion in modern societies has to be increasingly seen within the personal domain. According to him, in comparison to traditional cultures, the individual in a modern society is free to make choices of life, friends, marriage partners, etc. In the same light, religious belief has to be seen as a matter of individual decision that reflects one’s search for self fulfillment.
Dittes (1983), in The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Psychology, wrote that the psychological study of religion would include the following:

i. providing “descriptive accounts of devotional, mystical, conversion or other experiences reported as ‘religious’”; 

ii. discovering the “degree of correlation, if any, between various elements of religiosity such as religious beliefs, moral preferences and intense experiences”; 

iii. identifying “personality factors that may shape these religious elements”; 

iv. studying the “consequences and functions, for an individual or a group, of any of the religious elements”; 

v. contributing to or borrowing from “philosophical or theosophical reflections on human nature” (p. 530).

His conceptualisation highlights the need to study individuals’ religious experiences and their relationship to moral preferences, beliefs, and personality factors. At the same time, the definition emphasises studying these experiences within the context of the individual and the ‘group’.

The works of Geertz, Luckmann and Dittes, taken together show quite clearly that in the present study, religion needs to be understood in both the personal and social worlds of the individual. Stark and Glock (1968) elaborated on the various aspects of both the personal as well as social realm, in which individuals define their religion. They elaborated on religious commitments as a multi-dimensional term which includes religious beliefs, religious practices, religious feeling, religious knowledge and religious effects. Religious belief refers to that aspect of religious commitments which deals with religious dogma and principles. It comprises of the content of the individual’s belief. Religious Practice is the behaviour expected of an individual committed to a particular religion. Further, religious practices are not merely the effects of religion, but also important aspects of “what defines religion”. Religious
Feeling is the experiential dimension of religious commitment which consists of emotions, states of consciousness, sense of well being, dread, freedom, or guilt, that are part of a person’s religiousness. Religious Effects refer to the influence of religious commitments on a person’s everyday behaviour. Religious Knowledge refers to what a person knows about his/her belief. Religious beliefs and knowledge are dimensions that stretch along a continuum. Different people will be at different positions along the two continuums at different times. “Crossing religious belief categories with religious knowledge categories generate some intriguing portrayals. For example, consider the knowledgeable believer and the ignorant believer… And think about someone who is highly knowledgeable about a religion, yet rejects it” (Paloutzian and Santrock, 2005, p 5). How one arrives at religious commitments and what effects commitments have on individuals’ lives tend to vary from one individual to another (see Stark and Glock, 1968; Byrnes, 1975; and Paloutzian and Santrock, 2005).

Stark and Glock’s dimensions of religious commitments provide an important framework for understanding the nature of an individual’s religiosity. Simultaneously, however, the forces that influence the development of the various dimensions of religious commitments for each individual also need to be identified and studied. The discussion in the subsequent paragraphs highlights the various dimensions of religion that have been addressed by research studies.

Brewer (1973) reviewed several research studies on the basis of which he presented the various dimensions of religion that have been studied. These include- attitudes towards religion and religious phenomena, institutions, groups, and persons; religious identification through affiliations to particular religious groups, religious preferences, and religion of parents; religious participation, beliefs, experiences, and knowledge; and social correlates of religion, including demography and attitudes.
Hunt (1972) suggested that religion may be understood across two continuums: “ritualistic-institutional” and “existential-behavioural” (see Brewer, 1973). Prayer, family devotion, involvement with religious places and groups, are part of the ritualistic-institutional dimension. The existential-behavioural dimension covers the aspects of attaching meaning and emotions to religion through the family’s continuous interaction within itself and with society. Hunt argues that the former dimension is secondary in importance to the core dimension of religion in the context of family life. These dimensions also relate to Stark and Glock’s classification of religious practice and religious feeling.

Kelley (1972) looked at religious groups ranging across an “exclusivist-ecumenical” continuum (see Lehrer and Chiswick, 1993). “Exclusivist” religious groups have clear and strictly enforced membership criteria. “Ecumenical” religious groups in contrast have few membership criteria and place little importance on religious group boundaries. In the context of the present study, it is significant to understand whether ecumenical groups are more open to inter-religious marriages than comparatively exclusivist groups. The implications that openness may have for family life and interpersonal relationships are also seen to be significant.

Further, in relation to membership of specific religious groups, studies by Waite and Lehrer (2003) and Cohen-Zada and Sander (2007) suggest that associating with a religion needs to be understood as separate from religiosity. Waite and Lehrer proposed that religiosity may be manifested through various forms of religious participation. These include attending religious services, observing family practices and individual devotion.

Cohen-Zada and Sander studied religious affiliation and participation in relation to the choice of private schooling. Religious participation was understood in terms of attending religious services. They suggested that other forms of participation may also be included while studying religiosity, such as contributions made to places of worship, and religious beliefs. The study also
reported a link between the choice of school and the religious participation of parents.

Exploring the different dimensions of religiosity, Krause (2003) raised the issue of religious doubt. In his view, many religious faiths require people to believe in things that they cannot see (such as God, heaven) or that defy conventional logic (such as people rising from the dead). Thus, Krause holds that it is quite normal for people to undergo doubts over their own religious faiths.

Hunsberger, McKenzie, Pratt and Pancer (1993) define doubt as “a feeling of uncertainty toward, or questioning of, religious teachings or belief” (see Krause, 2003). Doubt may arise in the light of seemingly dichotomous arguments or viewpoints. “...it may be difficult for some people to believe in a loving and protecting God while at the same time recognising there is a great deal of pain, suffering and injustice in the world” (Smith, 2006, see Krause, 2006).

Although religious doubt seems to be natural, it may also lead to feelings of guilt in one’s shaken faith in God or the religious teachings that are otherwise considered sacrosanct. In addition, many religions are based on faith and condemn doubt. Thus, expressing or even having doubt may lead to fear of meeting disapproval by other members of the religious community. A counter argument, presented by Krause (2006), is through the work of Tillich (1957), who presented the view that doubt is not the opposite, but a strong aspect, of faith itself. He asserted that doubt is a part of serious contemplation, involving questioning and searching one’s religious beliefs and teachings, thus resulting in strengthening of faith. Fowler (1996) suggested that the quest for deeper faith often involves a period of “disenchantment and disorientation” that comes along with grief, loss and confusion. Krause (2003) further cites the work of Hunsberger et al. (1993), saying that even though people have doubts about their religious faith, they continue to practice it and feel that religion is important for them. The views of Krause and Wulff (2004) also find support
from the work of developmental psychologists “who maintain that growth and cognitive development are driven by doubt and uncertainty (Acredolo and O’Connor, 1991). This perspective is captured in the work of Piaget (1975), who discussed doubt in terms of what he called “disequilibria”. He argued that disequilibria forces individuals to mature by challenging currently held ideas and encouraging them to strike out in new directions” (p 37, see Krause and Wulff, 2004).

Krause and Wulff believe that the substance of doubt is also an important area to be researched. They highlighted that people may, for example, have doubts about specific doctrines, teachings or practices put forth by their denominations (or sects), but not about the more fundamental issues of their religion, such as belief in God. They point out that both personal and social events are important catalysts of doubt. “The death of a child would be a good example of this. Another example might be found by turning to recent problems in the Catholic church involving child abuse” (p 52).

The studies discussed above emphasise the need to explore religious doubt as an important aspect of religious experience. It would be worthwhile to explore whether all individuals experience religious doubt, under what circumstances they do so, and identify the coping mechanisms that they use. Religious doubt also raises the possibility of questioning religious doctrines and principles as can be seen in the study presented below.

Sarroub (2002) focused on understanding Yemeni-American adolescent girls’ perspective towards literacy and studied their experiences of negotiating between the two cultures they experienced. She found that the girls made distinctions between questioning religion and culture. They accepted that their culture and the traditions associated with it can be questioned. However, they were not open to the same level of questioning about Islam or Quran. They felt that religious texts sanction a particular meaning which is often misinterpreted. Thus, they blamed family decisions on education, marriage etc
on Yemeni culture, but never on Islam. Sarroub also highlighted that Yemeni girls found it okay to question all texts that were not religious.

Most of the studies that have been discussed so far look at religion as located within the social realm. The studies discussed in the subsequent paragraphs refer to religion in the personal domain.

Wilson and Musick (1995) presented the view that religion as an institution is increasingly being marked by individual autonomy. Citing research studies by Hargrove (1983), Roof and McKinney (1987), Hadaway et al (1993) and Hammond (1992), they asserted that the dimensions of autonomy extend to decisions regarding involvement with the church, choice of religious teachings to be followed and decisions about the level of involvement in social and religious events. People have increasingly started to believe that involvement in religious events and places is not a necessary condition for being a religious person.

Regnerus and Smith (2005), in their study on religious influences, highlighted that the effects often attributed to religion may in fact also be influenced by several other personal and social factors. One of their main findings was that some people choose to be religious for both personal and social reasons. Peer influence was identified as one significant reason, since a person who is friendly was likely to join a religious group and attend ceremonies for the purpose of being with friends. Another reason mentioned by them was that of using religion as an active strategy to achieve a desired outcome. They held that some people, who are predisposed to certain outcomes, such as staying married, being vegetarian etc, may choose to be religious in order to achieve this pre-decided, non-religious aim. Both these examples have been used to highlight how positive outcomes may be attributed to religious commitments. They also pointed out how decisions of being religious or committing to a particular religious group, belief, or practice, could have both individual and social roots.
Waite and Lehrer (2003), in their research discussing the benefits of religion and marriage, found that, like marriage, the institution of religion is also an integrative force. In their view, religious gatherings provide opportunities to socialise and develop a sense of community. They further cite Ellison and George (1994) who found that people who attend religious services generally have a much larger social circle. Thus, it was considered worthwhile to explore the relations between religious communities and inter-religious families, which generally face opposition from both their extended family and society. It was also felt that studying the influence, of the reactions of religious communities to the inter-religious family, particularly with reference to the children growing up in them would be a meaningful research pursuit.

The studies discussed above highlight the relevance of individual autonomy as well as social determination in religious commitments. Gribbin’s (1995) study explores these dimensions in the Indian context. In his view, a religious believer in India is religious and secular at the same time. He found that while people enjoy the freedom to practice a religion of their choice, outside of their private lives, they have to don a secular face. For a religious conservative, this would reflect a separation between one’s beliefs and actions. “Thus, secular culture encourages a dichotomy between one’s private and public self because people are expected to subordinate their religious side. That is, they are to behave as if matters of personal faith are an irrelevance in the public sphere of their lives” (p 87). In other words, social adjustment may necessitate subordinating one’s religious self.

Linking the experience of religious doubt with social adjustment, Krause (2003) found that older people who experience religious doubt are more likely to feel disconnected from their social group and were thus, more likely to experience mental health problems. In a separate study, Krause (2006) also found that doubt was more likely to be distressful for younger, than older adults. Another trend that was observed was that more years of schooling and higher levels of educational attainment, lead to greater doubt. At the same time, older people with higher educational attainment were seen to suffer less
on account of doubt, on the scales of life satisfaction, self esteem and optimism, in comparison to their less educated counterparts. Further, most of the older people with more years of schooling were seen to feel that having doubt was wrong. Krause cited Mirowsky and Ross (2003) to assert that education is helpful in developing skills such as inquiring, discussing, researching, finding solutions etc., that help in synthesising, classifying and interpreting information.

The major insight drawn from this study was that although education leads to greater religious doubt, education and religion need not be seen as incompatible. A synergy of the two can contribute to greater psychological well being.

The findings of the study are in consonance with my M.Phil research work. One of the participants reported that while he was a devout Hindu growing up in a strongly religious family, his faith in the religion and many of its beliefs and practices had shaken after several years of studying Science at the school and college level. Not having found answers through questioning older members of the family and in temples, he declared himself an atheist, causing much distress to himself as well as his family. However, in search of psychological well being, he continued to turn to God (Wadhwa, 2008).

Krause and Wulff (2004) found that religious doubt does not serve a beneficial function. Instead people who doubt their faiths were found to be less satisfied with their health and experienced more depressive symptoms. This was particularly true for people who had formal roles in the church. Their study contributes to the present research in two ways. First, it highlights the need to understand the reactions of people, who are in positions of authority in religious organizations, to inter-religious marriages within the family. Second, it emphasizes the need to study the dynamics that mark the process of arriving at religious commitments in children born into families where family member(s) hold significant religious positions.
Smith (2003) suggests that while making decisions and life choices and judgments of good and bad, right and wrong, religion can provide adolescents the standards and norms that guide their practices and choices. Thus, many of the positive outcomes in the lives of adolescents that have been associated with religion may to some extent be explained by “the cultural moral order that religion provides” (p 415). Further, he also pointed out that parents play a significant role in mediating religious and cultural values that develop constructive and prosocial attitudes and behaviours.

In a separate study, Regenrus and Smith (2005) highlighted that religious influences have been documented for both their direct and indirect effects. The direct effects of religion include providing people with a set of moral teachings that tell them how “they ought to live... People with greater religious commitment will be more apt to reflect in their actions, the implications of those moral teachings” (p 24). Thus, religion plays a significant role in the socialisation of adolescents in two distinct ways- by the transmission of values mediated through the parents and by providing a network of social connections (Smith, 2003).

Further, they also pointed out that religious congregations provide a forum to adolescents and youth to interact with others of their age, involved in the same religion. They help build a network of social ties where adults can supervise the activities of all children, adolescents and youth of their community. Smith further cites Fletcher et al (2001) to highlight that such a social network benefits youth by “enabling parents to effectively monitor and supervise their activities, communicate with other parents about their expectations and behaviour and feel supported in their own parenting.

It may be argued that the studies of Smith and Fletcher are based in the American context, and are largely restricted to an understanding of Christian congregations. However, the discussion on the relevance of community based interaction is relevant to the Indian context as well. In my M.Phil study, the interactions with religious teachers and leaders (Maulanas, Jain gurus, and
priests) was found to significantly influence the religious beliefs of the participants following Islam, Jainism and Christianity respectively. Further, the Jain and Christian participants in the study had also reported the significant influence of community practices in their life. It provided them with a sense of belonging as well as helped them to develop strong friendship ties, thus playing an important role in their identity development (Wadhwa, 2008).

The discussion above highlights several significant aspects of the psychosocial realm of religion. The various dimensions of religious commitments, exclusivist-ecumenical nature of religious groups, nature of religious doubt and understanding religion within the personal and social realm, were some of the important aspects that were identified as worthy of exploration in the present study as well.

**Exploring Theories of Identity and Significant Research Trends**

Religion is one of the areas that adolescents and young adults typically seek to explore, as they embark on a quest for developing a sense of identity. Their search for meaning in life, through an exploration of themselves in various spheres of life, is influenced by the social, economic, and cultural milieu in which they live. This section presents a discussion of the theories and research studies that have looked at this process of exploration.

The terms ‘self’ and ‘identity’ have been used interchangeably by most theorists and researchers. Some of the studies in the area of identity look at identity from a personal and developmental context. Other studies look at the process of identity as rooted in the social context. Emphasising relatedness and socio-cultural context in understanding identity has been highlighted by research studies that are situated in the Indian as well as in the global context.

To develop the conceptual framework on identity, various theories have been used. To understand the psychosocial, developmental perspective, the theories of Erikson and Marcia have been included. The existential perspective has been explored through the work of Rollo May. To understand
self in relation to others, the work of Gergen has been referred to. Since there is also a need to understand self and identity from the lens of one's social, cultural and ethnic background, Jenkins’ work has been used. Carl Rogers’ work has been referred to for highlighting the role played by family in the development of self.

Erikson's theory presented the view that the development of an individual is seen to occur across a set of eight stages that mark the human life span. At each stage, the individual completes a developmental task and confronts a crisis. Each of Erikson's stages is, thus, represented through dichotomous alternatives representing the resolution of the crisis that the individual comes across. Through the successful and healthy resolution of the crisis, the individual is able to reach a turning point in life and move ahead towards the next crisis.

Of the eight stages that Erikson has propounded, the fifth and sixth stages of Identity Achievement vs. Role Confusion and Intimacy vs. Isolation respectively, are seen to be relevant for the present study. The fifth stage corresponds with the age of adolescence. At this stage, adolescents try to find who they are and where they belong. For attaining a healthy identity, Erikson was of the view that adolescents should be allowed to explore different paths and roles. The formation of identity in the absence of exploration could result in confusion about one's role in life. "Adolescents who go through inner soul searching eventually arrive at a mature identity" (Berk, 2007, p 382).

The sixth stage of Intimacy vs. Isolation corresponds to young adults in their twenties and thirties. At this stage, the developmental task is to develop close relationships with others. Failing to form an intimate, romantic relationship can result in social isolation. "A sense of intimacy is also evident in other close relationships. For example, in friendships and work ties, young people who have achieved intimacy are cooperative, tolerant and accepting of differences in backgrounds and values. Although they enjoy being with others, they also are comfortable when alone" (Berk, 2007, pp 446-447).
Berk (2007) elucidated Erikson's notion of identity as the "crucial step towards becoming a productive, happy adult. Constructing an identity involves defining who you are, what you value and the directions you choose to pursue in life" (p 382). The self exploration and eventual commitment occurs in many different domains including vocation, interpersonal relationships, membership to different ethnic, social and religious groups, political and cultural ideals etc.

Thus, what emerges is the realisation that identity needs to be understood across personal, social, professional and religious domains. Further, it was also considered important to study how the process of identity development unfolds from the preadolescence age through young adulthood. The overlaps in the stages of identity and intimacy were also seen to be worthy of exploration.

Grotevant (1992) suggested a process oriented approach to understanding identity by using a developmental and life span approach. A developmental approach refers to focusing on the development of a sense of identity over a period. A life span approach refers to understanding the process in its continuity from infancy to adulthood.

Extending Erikson’s work further, James Marcia used psychological tools to organise the progress of adolescents along the path of self exploration, into four categories. These are: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure and diffusion. Identity achievement involves an exploration of alternatives and then committing to a set of clearly formulated goals and values. Moratorium involves a delay in commitment. Adolescents experiencing moratorium are still in the process of exploration and are yet to make a commitment. Foreclosure involves making definite commitments without having undertaken an active exploration of alternatives. Diffused individuals do not make clear commitments. They may not have explored alternatives, neither are they likely to have clear goals and values that they have committed to.

The progress along the path of exploration varies from individual to individual. While some adolescents remain in one status, others experience different
statuses at different points of time. In addition, the experience of these statuses can be different across the different domains of identity such as vocation, social group membership, religious values etc. Thus, studying each individual as a case in point and understanding the process of identity development through his/her lens was the line adopted in the present study.

What also emerges from the above discussion is the fact that the development of identity is not a process taking place in isolation but is markedly influenced by the ‘others’ in one’s life and the social relations that one develops. Erikson stressed upon how the social groups one operates in and identifies with, strongly influence the process of identity development. “For instance, it may be difficult for a young woman to achieve a firm sense of identity in a society where she is accorded a second class status” (Hjelle and Ziegler, 1992, p 198).

To summarise the aforesaid, the sense of identity is embedded within the familial, social, and cultural context in which one functions. Further, an individual can have different identities across different life domains, such as religion, family, society, and culture. At the same time, it is also important to understand the person’s subjective frame of reference. Understanding self through the individual’s subjective perception of the world has been the focus of the existential school of thought. ‘Dasein’, one of the key concepts of the existential school of thought, focuses on the person experiencing the world and interpreting it within the context of a particular time and place. “The world and the person exist simultaneously and cannot be separated” (Hergenhahn and Olson, 2003, p 537). Thus, it is important to understand the individual within the context in which he/she lives and experiences the world, as well as know his/her perception of the world around him.

Challenging the notion of social and environmental determinism, existential thought gives emphasis to the freedom and agency of the individual to transcend biological and environmental determinism. Rollo May also put forth the notion of ‘human dilemma’ and described it as the capability of humans
to look at themselves as both subject and object. The subject-object dichotomy allows one to “escape determinism and personally influence what they do” (Hergenhahn and Olson, 2003, p 541). May, thus, believed that each person is free to choose the meaning of his/her own existence. An authentic life would be one where the individual lives in accordance with the values chosen by him/her and not by values imposed from outside.

The question which arises here is whether the values that one develops are ever free from the influence of the social context. The notion of understanding oneself in the context of the perception of others has been highlighted by Jenkins, in his work on social identity. Jenkins (2008) referred to the development of social identity as the ways in which ‘individuals’ and ‘collectivities’ become evident in the social interactions and relationships of an individual with other ‘individuals’ and ‘collectivities’ (p 18). In other words, what people see us to be is as significant as what we are. Identity does not restrict itself to individuals but also encompasses identification with collectivity and history. People make use of their knowledge of history and collectivities when they form perceptions about others.

He further emphasised that it is meaningless to understand identity in isolation from the rest of society. All human identities, he argues, are by their very nature social identities. In his view while it was important to understand individuals as unique, it was equally important to understand them within the process of socialisation and social interaction in which they constantly define and redefine themselves. Thus, both similarities and differences with social groups were important in the development of identity. The development of one’s sense of self is not just based on how one sees himself/herself but also on how others perceive him/her. In other words, one cannot see himself/herself without simultaneously seeing how other people see him/her.

This view has also been supported by Jayaram (2004). Describing the dynamics of social relations in India, he refers to two significant processes: “(1) the perception of one’s own identity in a given situation, and (2) the
reaction of others in terms of the perceived identity of that individual” (p 129). Further, within the social group, the identity of individuals is influenced by age, gender, and marital status.

Research literature on social identity also highlights that all humans tend to divide the social world into categories of 'us' and 'them' (Turner et al, 1987). People belonging to their own social group are called 'ingroup' and those belonging to another group are referred to as the 'outgroup'. Distinctions in groups may be made on the bases of many dimensions, including race, sex, age, ethnicity, occupation, and religion. The process does not end at social categorisation. Members of outgroups are often associated with undesirable qualities, as against those in the ingroup, who are associated with favourable qualities. These can later form the bases of biases and prejudices (see Baron, 2000).

Hutnik (2004) in a study on inter-group perspective on ethnic minority identity found that a positive social identity is an outcome of social comparisons made between the ingroup and other social groups. Social categorisation and social comparison together contributed towards the formation of social stereotypes. She further found that the stereotypes that one held about one’s own group were more favourable than those held about outgroups.

Hussain (1984) studied 60 Hindus and 70 Muslims in India and found that both ingroups evaluated themselves higher on affiliation and outgroups significantly higher on aggression. The study showed that Hindus had negative and derogatory images of Muslims based on physical appearance and their tendency to divorce their wives. Muslims perceived Hindus to be inferior, dishonest and unreliable. Research has also shown that on religious preference tests, 4-5 years old children belonging to ethnic minority groups expressed a high degree of own group preference or ethnocentrism. Ethnic minority groups were studied on the basis of four major religious groups in India- Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian (Khalique, 1986, Singh, 1986, Jabbi, 1982). Hindus, Sikhs and Christians also held Muslims at the greatest social
distance. Muslims in turn viewed Hindus as the most distant (see Hutnik, 2004).

Thus, we see that the perception of self, in the context of others, plays a crucial role in developing a sense of identity. Grotevant (1992) suggested a contextual approach to understanding identity, which refers to considering “the interdependent influences of society, school or work environments, and interpersonal relationships on identity”. Here, the interdependence of different domains of identity has been highlighted. The present study seeks to address the interaction between two of these domains, viz. religion and relationships. The underlying assumption is that religious commitments and family life experiences have a dialectical relationship. In an inter-religious home, family life and, therefore relationships, would be influenced by the differing religious commitments of parents. Likewise, relationships would also exert an influence on how one consolidates one’s own religious commitments.

Grotevant’s study further highlighted the importance of the context. He raised the important question of whether “assigned and chosen components of identity develop side by side, or are there principles that govern how they affect one another” (Ibid, p 74). He used the case of adopted children to explain the notion of assigned identity as that component of identity that an individual does not have control over. Examples of assigned components of identity include gender, ethnicity, and adoptive status, among others. He further emphasized that assigned aspects may “pose problems for the self in the sense that one must construct meaning around that which cannot be changed” (Ibid, p 77). Assigned aspects of self may exercise constraints over the types of choices one might make in other domains of self. For instance, gender stereotyping may pose constraints over career choices that one might make. Or identity development may be inhibited when assigned components are undervalued by society. Similarly, belonging to a particular social class or racial group may therefore lead to restricted options of exploration.
In the context of the present study, it was considered worthwhile to explore if the same constraints are experienced by persons belonging to particular religious groups. The various assigned and chosen aspects of identity, within the context of an inter-religious family, also lend themselves to exploration.

Carl Rogers in his theorization of the self gave importance to understanding a person within the context of his/her reality. He was of the view that the field of experience, as perceived by the person, holds the key to understanding him/her. He strongly emphasized that the person’s perception of the world may not, correspond to objective reality. Further, he perceived self not as a product, but as a process. “Whereas others use the word self to point to that part of our personal identity which is stable and unchanging, Rogers’s meaning of the word is almost the opposite. Rogers’s self is a process... This leads to his belief that people are not only capable of growth, change and personal development, but that such positive change is also a natural and expected progression” (Frager and Fadiman, 1984, p 336). Rogers also suggested that each individual has an inherent drive to achieve one’s fullest potential and capability. He termed this drive as the self actualising tendency.

The process of development of self was marked by what he called conditions of worth. In his view, individuals begin to behave in manners that gain approval of others from an early age. When conditions are put on acceptance, the individual begins to disregard those aspects of his or her self that meets with disapproval. This may create a discrepancy between the self concept and the real self. The solution that Rogers suggests is to provide unconditional positive regard. This helps in the development of a healthy sense of self, accepting even those aspects of self that may not be approved by others. The ‘self actualising tendency’ and ‘unconditional positive regard’, both facilitate the process of becoming a fully functioning person. What emerged from his theory to be deeply relevant to the present research was the importance of studying family life experiences in the development of self.
The above discussion presented the psychosocial perspective to understanding identity. The subsequent discussion will focus on trying to understand how the process of identity development, of young adults, is influenced by an inter-religious family context. Since literature on identity development in inter-religious families could not be located, studies that make reference to growing up in multicultural contexts have been relied upon.

In a review of a book on the changing identities of Asian girls in Britain (Shain, 2002, *The Schooling and Identity of Asian Girls*), Archer (2003) presents the author’s argument against the populist belief that Asian girls struggle between opposing environments that they face at home and in the British schools they attend. Although the book discusses the identities of Asian girls whose families have migrated to Britain, it highlights the need to look at continuities and discontinuities between home and school. Given the changing patterns of family life and varied parenting styles, urban India is a rich ground for exploring the dynamics of identity development of children in the face of similar and opposing environments between home and school.

In the context of Asian families in Europe, Shain has also described four main strategies that Asian girls employ, namely: ‘resistance through culture’ (forming homogeneous group and staying together in the school), ‘survival’ (conforming to stereotypes and surviving the opposing cultures with minimum trouble in the face of long term benefits), ‘rebellion against culture’ (opposing and transforming cultures at home; integrating both the cultures), ‘religious prioritisation’ (defining themselves primarily through religion and using a mix of survival and resistance strategies).

The book provides a useful framework for analysing struggles of developing, preserving, and reconstructing identities in the face of opposition. The strategies may be employed not just by Asian girls from migrant families but also by any individuals belonging to minority groups. It would also be interesting to analyse the strategies of the participants when they belong to minority religious groups within the school and community set up. The notion
of minority would depend on the participant’s own religious background, as well as the context in which they are studying or living. Thus, although a Hindu in India is in the majority, a Hindu participant’s negotiation in a minority school would provide a rich ground for analysis.

Sarroub (2002) borrowed the term ‘in-betweeness’ to describe the notion of existence in multiples worlds from the works of Alvermannm, Hinchnman, Moore, Phelps and Waff (1998) and Moje (2000). In her study, Yemeni adolescent girls used the term to denote their status of simultaneously belonging to different cultural contexts or groups- Yemeni as well as American. The study begins by referring to an instance where a Yemeni girl stops outside an American mall to complete her evening prayer sitting in a car facing eastwards." The localization of Saba's prayer was unexpected at least to me, as we sat in the mall parking lot, yet her actions symbolized identification with something other than the tangible objects in the immediate space of the car." Sarroub further wrote that Saba would have ordinarily found a quiet place at home or in the mosque, performed ritualistic ablutions and then prayed on a mat on the floor. Here, keeping the surroundings in mind, Saba chose to quickly perform the prayer in a parking lot, thus negotiating between the American and Yemeni identities. The instance is one of many instances which highlight how girls in her study created spaces for themselves that allowed them to practice what they believed in, within the localised context. "...in-betweenness or the locality of culture signifies the immediate adaptation of one's performance or identity to one's textual, social, cultural and physical surroundings... Saba engaged in ritualistic performances that were influenced by the immediate conditions of the interaction. In effect, the result was neither conventionally Yemeni and Muslim nor was it commonly American, but somewhere in between" (p 134).

Sarroub's work draws upon the construct of social identity. Referring to Goffman (1981), she states that "sometimes individuals intentionally express themselves according to the traditions of the group to which they belong in order to create a favourable or necessary impression" (p 133).
In a similar stead, Sedikides, Gaertner and O’Mara (2011) look at self concept as comprising of three fundamental components rather than as a singular monolithic cognitive structure. The three components include: the individual self, which highlights the uniqueness of the individual and consists of traits, goals, aspirations, interests and experiences that differentiate one from others; the relational self, which highlights the interpersonal side and refers to attributes shared with significant others, like family members, friends etc; and the collective self, which highlights the inter group identity and emphasizes attributes that are shared with the ingroup. It is reflected in membership in valued social groups. Further, the three selves co-exist so that people’s perceptions about themselves alternate between the three. They argue that the individual self assumes greater prominence than the relational and collective self.

Gergen (2011), on the other hand, remarks that the psychological self in fact emerges out of a relational process. Critiquing the notion that the world comprises of individual selves, he adds that “when a fundamental distinction between self and other is established, the social world is constituted in terms of differences”. However, he also accepts that the relational self leaves the individual bereft of all subjective life as well as individual agency. Taking cognisance of both the perspectives, it becomes important to understand individual, relational and collective selves.

In a similar vein, Worchel, Cooper and Goethals (1988) also emphasised on the role played by others in the development of one’s self concept. “We learn who we are based on all our experiences of the world, especially our interactions with other people” (p 101). Our self concepts are, thus, influenced by the opinions of others around us. They also elaborated on the concept of ‘reflective appraisal’ highlighting that how we appraise ourselves is a reflection of how others appraise us. “Research on the way people describe themselves illustrates the importance of social comparison. When they are asked to respond to the question “who am I”, people answered by mentioning ways in
which they differ from others, ways in which they are unique” (p 103). Thus, ‘I’ can only be understood in relation to the ‘other’.

Gupta (2008), in a study on religious identities of Hindu and Muslim children in the walled city of Delhi asserted that a child tries to develop his/her identity by developing “trust in one’s origins”. This refers to experiences and affiliations to religion, language, community, school, family etc. She argued that the initial years of life are crucial in internalising family values, patterns of behaviour and opinions, all of which lead to the formation of habits, prejudices, biases and belief systems. She found that family also plays a significant role in the development of a collective identity. Family initiates an individual into membership of different “collectives” including religious groups. These in turn play a significant role in the “transmission of myths, symbols, and ceremonies” including daily rituals, all of which are important in developing a religious identity. Membership of religious groups and religious identity contribute towards maintaining continuity between past and present events. These come into the forefront during religious events such as riots, formation of “stereotypes, and community specific generalisations”. One’s beliefs, about other religious groups develop in accordance with the beliefs of the group of which the individual is a member.

The study highlights that religious identity and the understanding of religion as ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’, begins as early as the age of four years. The Hindu and Muslim children in the study also spoke of religion in the collective. Further, young children expressed ignorance, dislike and intolerance towards people from ‘other’ religious groups. Hindus, for example, expressed that Muslims are dirty, potentially violent and that they felt disturbed by the reading of the namaz. People from ‘other’ religions were not perceived as individuals but as a collective. The study also found that Muslims were more aware of Hindu symbols and practices and had developed a minority consciousness.

While Gupta’s study presents some interesting insights about the development of religious identity from a young age, it also raises some
important questions. What are the specific influences, family events that lead to the development of perceptions of ‘others’? In an understanding of religion as ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’, is there space left for a personal relationship with God? Do communities provide space for personal religion? Is the understanding of self as an individual, separate and different from self as belonging to particular (religious) group?

In most of the studies that were sourced, school also emerged as a dominant influence in the process of identity development. Sarroub's (2002) study of Yemeni girls in America clearly showed that the girls laid as much emphasis on social success as they did on academic success within the school. "... social success in school (behaving and communicating appropriately according to cultural and religious traditions) is as important as academic achievement because the enactment of appropriate social mores in and out of school determines status as well as degrees of shame and honor" (p 134).

What was seen was that the school also provides its students the chance to transcend boundaries that are imposed by the home and the community. In Sarroub's (2002) study, the Yemeni American girls were not allowed to listen to American pop or rock music at home, read teen magazines or anything that implied sexuality. At school, however, they were able to transcend these boundaries. The lunch time at school served as an important social event in which they could decide who they wished to have lunch with, share materials that were otherwise prohibited or looked down upon by their community, and even discuss taboo topics, such as dating. This is also an example of how Yemeni girls found spaces for themselves to express their "in-betweenness". Another example was given by one of the participants in the study who justified her listening to Western music by a particular singer because it was based on Islamic teachings.

Nasir (2004) conducted a study on identities of children in an urban Muslim school. The study highlighted that children often express resistance and reject values and refuse to fully participate in school practices, where they find them
to be in opposition to their cultural identities. In addition, when the school environment is unsupportive and alienating, some children fail by choice. Nasir elaborated that “ideational artifacts” give rise to “ideas and cultural conceptions of self that play out in the cultural activities within which identities develop” (p 155). For instance, schools often propagate the idea that boys are more inclined towards sports. This shapes the identities of both boys and girls. The paper highlights how school activities interact with the cultural backgrounds of the students. The experience of conflict would be more intense for students who belong to minority groups in a school setting propagating the majority culture.

The discussion so far has helped to build a meaningful framework for understanding identity in the context of the present study. One of the key dimensions to be explored would relate to the assigned and chosen components of identity. What will also be pursued is trying to understand identity through the person’s subjective lens, and simultaneously looking at it through the relational, social, and collective perspectives. The discussion also highlighted the significant role played by the family in this regard. The section that follows discusses family life factors and experiences with special focus on the Indian context.

**Locating Significant Family Factors and Influences**

In the present study, the focus is on understanding the nature and dynamics of family life within the context of inter-religious marriages. The research quest is aimed at understanding the influence of family in the development of religious commitments of children and identity formation. Basically family has been looked at in terms of its supportive and socializing roles. This stems from the work of Goode, Baumrind and the ecological perspective of Bronfenbrenner. The ethnocentric approach to understanding parenting highlights the need to look at family within the socio-cultural context in which it operates. Recognising the importance of the cultural context, several research studies that explore the Indian family system have also been included. These
focus on building understanding on emerging family patterns, parenting styles, and interpersonal relationships within the family.

Family is the first point of social contact that influences the social relationships developed throughout life. Baron and Byrne (2006) cited several studies to emphasise that parent-child relationships have implications for interpersonal relationships developed later in life. Foltz et al (1999) reported that men and women show consistent patterns of relationships with parents and with friends and romantic partners later in life. Many studies have found that interaction with mothers, fathers, grandparents, and siblings are influenced to some extent by the personality characteristics of those interacting with the child (Maio, Fincham, and Lycett, 2000; Rohner, 1988; Boon and Brussoni, 1996; and Clark, Kochanska and Ready, 2000). Some studies have highlighted those interactions with family members provide the child with information about how people deal with each other in social situations (O’Leary, 1995; and Lindsey, Mize and Pettit, 1997). Santrock (2011) cited the works of Epstein (2007) and Schader (2008) to point out that parents play the most important role in influencing children’s activities in and out of school. Waite and Lehrer (2003) corroborated that the family plays a significant role in healthy development of children. They further emphasised that a marriage characterised by intimacy, friendship and emotional support puts children in the family at an advantage. Further, marriage connects the individuals in the family to larger social groups, thus adding avenues of emotional and social support.

Smith’s (2003) work specifically focused on the influence of the religion of parents on family life. He studied the relationship between parental participation in religious congregations and their expectations of moral behaviour and levels of supervision. It was found that parents who regularly attended Church service had higher expectations of moral behaviour from their children and exercised greater supervision on their adolescent children. The study highlights that the religious commitments of parents is a worthwhile area of exploration since it is a significant influence in the lives of adolescents.
and young adults. Further, while understanding identity development, the influence of religion needs to be studied not only from the lens of capturing the religious views, experiences and commitments of adolescents and young adults themselves, but also in terms of the influence that the beliefs and practices of parents exert, even in cases where the children may themselves not share similar religious beliefs and practices.

Danso, Hunsberger and Pratt (1997) studied the religious attitudes of parents in relation to their ‘child rearing’ goals and practices. Religious fundamentalism along with authoritarian parenting style was studied to understand the goals set by parents for their children, as well as their approval of corporal punishment. The study found that parental attitudes and parenting styles are more significantly influenced by authoritarian attitudes rather than by religious fundamentalism. Wiehe (1990), Dobson (1976) and Meier (1977) established linkages between fundamental religious beliefs and authoritarian parenting norms. Obedience was considered the most important goal towards which children needed to be socialised. The study also analysed empirical data to establish a chain of influences: parental religious fundamentalism leads to a desire to socialise children into their own religion, which in turn leads to valuing obedience and in some cases, endorse corporal punishment. The study concluded by stating that the effects of religious fundamentalism and authoritarian parenting styles are interlinked. While religious fundamentalism could be linked to establishing the goal of socialising children into their own religion, authoritarianism could influence parenting styles by valuing obedience in children (see Danso, Hunsberger and Pratt, 1997).

Sheikh (2008) in a paper presented on religious and ethnic identities of second-generation Muslim-Americans found that parents play a critical role in deciding whether to expose their children to religious practices. Children in turn, interpret this decision in their own way. Khadeja, a participant in Sheikh’s study expressed regret that her parents did not expose her to Islam. “I always felt like I don’t have a group to belong to, and I was always envious of those
people who were religious because they had a group to belong to” (p 14). This further indicates that religious affiliation provides a sense of belongingness and plays an important role in developing a social identity.

The discussion brings to light the inter-relationship between religion and family life. It also highlights the significant role played by family as a socializing unit. The subsequent paragraphs focus on the different dimensions of family life that lend themselves to analysis.

Goode (1994) in his book titled ‘The Family’ highlighted the importance of family by stating that it is the only social institution that is formally developed in all societies (p 5). In his view, the family serves not just as an "emotional social unit", but also as an "instrumental agency for the larger social structure". It, thus, serves as a source of emotional support and social security to its members. In addition, it also enculturates its children with social and behavioural norms. What is learned in the family becomes a prototype of behaviour outside. The family therefore has a very important role to play in the socialisation process/practices of its members. Further, it also plays a significant role within the larger social context. "The family is partly an instrument or agent of the larger society. If it fails to perform adequately, the goals of the larger society may not be effectively achieved" (p 6).

Berk (2006) highlighted the work done by family system theorists. They argue for bidirectional influences within the family. Family members represent a network of interdependent relationships (Parke and Buriel, 1998 and Lerner et al, 2002). Thus, it is not just parents who play an influential role. All members of the family exert influence over each other.

Further, in terms of identification with the parent, a warm and nurturant relationship with the child is more likely to motivate the child to identify with the parent than someone who has experienced frequent outbursts of anger. Freedom to choose rules and participate in decision making is also likely to provide the child with a greater sense of independence and develop beliefs and attitudes desired by the parents. The role of parents in developing a
Positive identity cannot be undermined. This is also in consonance with Rogers' view which places emphasis on providing a positive home environment (discussed earlier).

Given the important role of family as a socializing agent as well as in developing a sense of identity, changing family patterns appear to be a cause for concern. Based on data from NFHS-1 and 2, Singh (2003) asserted that there is an increase in the number of nuclear families in India. The factors that lead to the process of nuclearisation include increasing independence of men and women, movement to urban areas, family discord, increasing individualism or importance given to personal interests, smaller kinship networks, increased education levels, which allow children to be in jobs outside of the family and therefore, the reduction in the pyramidal control structure of the traditional joint family. Schelgel (2003) reflects that the decline in family size in urban India and increasing mobility of families in search of better professional opportunities results in smaller kinship networks and weaker relations with the neighbours. This further implies a lack of association with the extended family. In the absence of interaction with adults, adolescents maintain closer contact with the peer group that distances them from participation in the community. She describes the necessity of interactions with adults in the lives of adolescents. "They need to hear tales of caution, the informal remarks of approval or disapproval of their own actions and those of others, to learn what the boundaries are and what directions to take" (p 256).

A somewhat different view is presented by Kakar (2007) who said that the concern about the withering away of the traditional joint family system in India is misplaced. He argues that the prevalence of the joint family system is increasing in the face of modernisation. Kakar also describes the process of psychological nuclearization within the joint family system. Ranganathan (2008) describes the different patterns of family systems that exist in urban India. These include nuclear families with parents and two children, parents and a single child, only spouses with no children out of voluntary choice,
husband and wife living in separate cities owing to work compulsions, same
gender couples, live in relationships, and single parent and child units. Several variations are visible in the joint family system as well. These include
a number of sub family units living within a common ancestral space and
common kitchen, sub units in a common space with clearly demarcated
spaces and separate kitchens, and extended families, comprising
grandparents, parents and children, who stay together out of mutual
convenience. Kakar highlights that living in a nuclear family, or greater
psychological nuclearization in the joint family, would lead to greater
individuation of the child and a greater emphasis on the pleasures and
sorrows of the individual.

He further highlights the central role that the Indian family plays in the
individual's life. “Given the centrality of the family in an Indian’s emotional life,
one can understand that the family is also the main source of self-esteem, the
constant supply of that ‘healthy narcissism', which all of us need to survive” (p
215). Further, the individual’s self worth is seen within the context of the family
life. The recognition of identity is not ascribed of individual effort but
“interpreted in the light of his family’s circumstances and reputation in the
wider society”.

Kakar also contrasts the western perception of family, where intergenerational
conflict is expected and even considered necessary, within the Indian family,
where family integrity and varying the family’s traditions forward are accorded
greater importance than individual aspirations. The young Indian derives his
sense of identity by stretching the traditional values further, rather than
rupturing them. Sharma (2011) writes that children in India are socialized to
“listen, watch, and look inwards, rather than to question or critique.
Socialization is for togetherness and relationships rather than for autonomy or
individuality” (p 197).

Family studies also show that the hierarchical nature of relationships, within
the Indian family, is in fact changing. Subrahmanyam and Chadha (2002)
highlight the changing roles of fathers in Indian families. While fathers find satisfaction and derive a sense of identity from achievement in the sphere of work, the family and children play an equally important role in their emotional life. Traditionally, fathers have not been expected to play a dominant role in caring for the child. Mothers have been associated with complex tasks of child rearing and seen as a source of warmth and nurturance. In a joint family system, the father is also one of the many available role models for the young child. Further, the hierarchical nature of the Indian family demands that greater respect be given to the family’s eldest male members than to the father. Fathers have also been seen to maintain a distance with their adolescent children (Kakar, 1981, Ranganathan, 2011).

With change in family structure and greater nuclearization, role relationships within the family have also changed. Greater emphasis is placed on the family bond. Living arrangements also facilitate closer contact with the parents, including the father. Ross (1961) commented that the process of dialogue with sons and daughters starts early and that relationships allow greater space and independence to the children (see Subrahmanyam and Chadha, 2002). Larson, Verma and Dworkin (2003) studied the relationships of adolescents with their parents in urban Indian middle class families. Given the emphasis on collectivist values and family ties in Indian families (Sinha, 1988; 1994), the family experiences of adolescents are expected to vary from those of their counterparts in American families. They reported that adolescents reported enjoying the times spent with their families. Unlike American adolescents, they did not report any significant points of conflicts with their families or the need for rebellion. Many adolescents also reported spending time jointly with family and friends, thus, indicating that adolescents did not feel stifled in the presence of parents or siblings. The study also reported a relaxation in the traditional hierarchical nature of the family. Fathers were not seen as figures of authority to be feared.
A somewhat different perspective on the parent-child relationship in middle class families was presented by the studies of Ranganathan (2011), Thapan (2001), and Subhramanyam and Chadha (2002).

Ranganathan studied the experiences of urban adolescent girls of puberty and sexuality and ways of coping with developmental changes. Middle class girls in urban Delhi reported experiencing greater distance in their relationship with their fathers and brothers as they entered into adolescence. They described their relationships with the male members of the family as less natural and spontaneous and more distant and formal. They also felt that their parents, particularly their mothers, imposed many restrictions and expected them to behave in a more ‘mature and controlled’ manner after they entered adolescence.

Thapan’s research on adolescent girls’ identity also presented a similar view. All the girls in the study belonged to urban, upper middle class families. Their descriptions of the relationships that they shared with their fathers reflected “a lack of close or intimate communication with their father, his inability to understand their long term goals and aspirations, and a general feeling of aloofness and distance from him” (p 363). While their fathers were distant figures commanding awe and respect, it was their mothers who played the role of their friends and confidantes. Young women reported a close bond with their mothers. They shared their ideas, thoughts and aspirations with them and desired to share a similar relationship with their fathers. While being firmly entrenched in family ties, young women in the study also reported attempting to redefine their roles and identities in ways that may be contradictory to social and familial expectations.

Subhramanyam and Chaddha’s study with Indian fathers and sons found that despite the changing patterns of family life, fathers still play a limited role in care-giving activities. Further, participation in household chores and caring for the children are optional roles for the fathers. They are, however, expected to play a significant role in the academic lives of children. Fathers and children in
contemporary, urban homes no longer have the option of “effortlessly stepping into the parent’s occupation”. Thus, there is greater emphasis on school performance and academic achievement. Goode (1994) also highlighted that adolescents in modern societies are likely to have greater autonomy. The underlying reason for this autonomy is that parents are not in a position to secure a livelihood for them and are therefore, not able to prevent access to resources if they do not conform.

Families can, thus, be analysed in terms of the relationships that parents share with their children in relation to the professional aspirations of children and parental expectations from them. Family life in India can be seen as a complex interplay of relationships and mutual expectations, and is characterized by a balance between providing warmth and support in relationships as well as maintaining distance. This underlines the need to study the parenting styles adopted by families.

Baumrind (1971, 1996) propounded four basic parenting styles: authoritarian parenting, authoritative parenting, neglectful (or uninvolved) parenting and indulgent (or permissive) parenting. An authoritarian parent is restrictive and punitive. Children follow the instructions of parents and respect them. Children in such families are found to be anxious about social comparison and have poor communication skills. Authoritative parents place limitations on children but encourage them to be independent at the same time. Parents are nurturant and supportive and there is extensive discussion on issues. Children from authoritative parents are found to be self reliant, delay gratification needs and tend to get along with peers. Baumrind endorses authoritative parenting. Neglectful parenting is a parenting style in which parents are uninvolved. Children tend to believe that other aspects of their parents' lives are more important than themselves. They are often socially incompetent and have poor self control. An indulgent parent is highly involved with the children and puts few restrictions on their behaviour. Although parents believe that nurturance would produce a creative child, children from such families often do not learn to control their own behaviour.
Further, Ranganathan (2008) highlights that with reference to the changing contours of family life in India, the four styles of parenting discussed above are no longer sufficient to capture the variations in parenting styles and parent child interactions in contemporary context. “Many more styles have emerged. These include controlling, critical, remote control managed, benevolent, indulgent, rejecting, indifferent, overprotective and global...”

Researches by Waterman (1982) and Marcia (1980) reflect on parenting styles and identity statuses of children. Studies have indicated that foreclosures have more affectionate relationship with their parents than those with other identity statuses. Identity achieved individuals and those experiencing moratorium are more likely to criticise their parents and are less likely to seek their advice in times of confusion. They are also likely to experience a higher level of conflict. Diffused adolescents do not view their parents as role models like foreclosed adolescents do. They are likely to be most distanced from their families. This corroborates the earlier discussion linking family life with identity development.

The important role played by family in developing a sense of self is also highlighted by the ecological perspective developed by Bronfenbrenner (1986) around the turn of the last century. His theory presents the individual in the center of five environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. The theory propounds that these five systems contribute towards the development of the individual. The aspects covered by the five systems range from close inter-personal relationships to wider influences of culture.

The microsystem is the setting in which the individual spends a considerable time and include the individual's family, peers, school, places of worship and immediate neighbourhood. The individual at the center interacts regularly with the members in his immediate surroundings to build the context in the microsystem together. The mesosystem involves linkages between the various settings within the microsystem. The interaction between the school
and the family would fall under this system. In fact, Bronfenbrenner asserted that the most important link in developing and maintaining the well being of children and adolescents is between the home, the peer group and the school. The exosystem presents settings, in which the individual does not have a direct interaction, but which have an influence on the direct context of the individual. These include the legal system, the friends of family, neighbours and media. The macrosystem includes the broader socio-economic and cultural background of the individual. Belonging to a cultural setting where women are traditionally not allowed to study can have significant influences on the immediate context of the individual. The chronosystem refers to the socio-historic time frame within which the individual lives. The self is, thus, seen to unfold in the context of the five systems that are represented through concentric circles, exerting influence on the individual in the center.

The aspects of religion can be seen to exert influence in both the micro and macro systems. In the microsystem, the places of worship and religious practices followed by the family, school, peers and neighbourhood hold influence. At the level of the macrosystem level, belonging to a particular religious, cultural and ethnic group can influence lifestyle and practices.

Besides parenting styles and authority relations, family also exerts, what Bronfenbrenner called, indirect influences, or third parties, on the child. “...when parents’ marital relationship is warm and considerate, mothers and fathers praise and stimulate their children more and nag and scold them less. In contrast, when a marriage is tense and hostile, parents tend to be less responsive to their children’s needs and to criticize, express anger, and punish (Cox, Paley, and Harter, 2001; McHale et al, 2002)” (see Berk, 2006, p 560). Berk further argued that parental arguments and conflict can undermine good parenting and increase problems for youth. However, other family members may help restore effective communication. Grandparents can play a meaningful role in promoting children’s development. They can provide a warm and caring environment to the children. The absence of extended family
support in case of inter-religious marriages, as has been discussed earlier, can, thus, have a significant influence on the children in the family.

Although some universal patterns of family relations, parenting styles and power structures have been discussed above, it is important to highlight that no two families are alike. Factors such as region, caste, class, gender, religion, and language, contribute towards varying contexts of family life (Ranganathan, 2008). Each family and the family life experiences of each member within the family need to be studied as cases in point.

In this context, researches in the area of family studies highlight the role of ‘parental ethnotheories’ in different facets of family life. Parental ethnotheories emerge on the bases of cultural beliefs systems as well as specific parenting experiences in raising the children in a particular time and space. Further, the social context also influences parental belief systems. In simpler societies, for instance, parents may believe that children are capable of learning on their own and, thus, provide greater autonomy. In contrast, complex societies may require longer durations of care and a relationship of dependence on parents. Super and Harkness (1997) cautioned that parental ethnotheories vary as greatly within a culture, as they do across cultures. Further, individuals belong to more than one cultural group. The influence of belief systems of all or some of the cultural groups may be visible in parental ethnotheories. The influence of the belief systems that parents hold is not only visible on parenting styles but on several aspects of family life, including freedom, autonomy and independence of children, family decision making and even lifestyles such as eating habits and sleeping arrangements.

The family may be seen as influencing the child at three levels: “as a social setting for daily life; as a collection of customary practices that convey messages to the child; and as a reality fashioned by the caretakers’ shared beliefs about children and child care” (p 23).

Dasen (2003) developed a framework for understanding human development by integrating various theories in cross-cultural psychology. He drew upon the

Dasen’s own framework also makes use of the concentric circles model. It uses arrows to represent reciprocal interaction between the different components. The developing child is placed in the center. The influence of parental ethnotheories, parenting styles, and social and physical settings, is shown in the microsystem, representing the most direct influence of the family. A graphic representation of the framework developed by Dasen has been presented in Appendix 1.

The studies in the area of family highlight its role as the primary socialisation unit. They also highlight interpersonal relations and parenting styles as important dynamics of family life. Further, the need to look at religious affiliation of parents as an influence on the socialisation of children has also emerged. The next few paragraphs discuss some significant research studies that discuss family life within an inter-religious family and its possible influences on children.

**Family Life in an Inter-Religious Context**

As early as 1967, Carey highlighted that in religious homogamous marriages between Catholics, religiosity was positively correlated with marital happiness. This association was found to be particularly significant for those with higher
levels of education, in lower income levels and for young adults in their twenties.

Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) found that an inter-religious or a religious heterogamous marriage results in lower marital stability. They highlighted that religious homogamy provides opportunity for enhanced companionship through shared spirituality. In an inter-religious marriage, the partners “must look outside for religious intimacy” (p 386). Similarity in religious beliefs and practices allows marriage partners to participate together in religious practices at home and in religious and social places. Further, they argued, that the influence of religion goes beyond religious practices. Religious influences extend to the spheres of “education and upbringing of children, the allocation of time and money, the cultivation of social relationships, the development of business and professional networks, and even the choice of place of residence. Clearly, households in which the partners differ in their preferences and objectives in this area would be characterised by reduced efficiency and potentially more conflict” (p 386). Further, in religions where the role of the family, as opposed to the role of individuals and religious places, is central in rituals and practices, intra faith, and by extension intra-religious, marriages would be more stable. Inter-religious marriages between religions that are similar in their practices, beliefs and customs, are also more likely to be stable. This finding was also corroborated in a study by Waite and Lehrer (2003), in which they cited Michael (1979) and Lehrer (1996), highlighting that religious heterogamy increases the risk of marital instability and conflict. Shared religious experiences also increase the chances of cohesion among family members.

Studying inter-religious marriages across the “exclusivist-ecumenical” continuum (discussed earlier), Lehrer and Chiswick (1993) highlighted that the placement of spouses' religions along the continuum can reflect an influence on marital stability. The closer the two religions are to the ecumenical end, the less marital stress and instability can be expected. The authors also point out that irrespective of religious heterogamy and homogamy, marital stability is
also significantly influenced by the importance given by couples to shared activities and religious beliefs and compatibility.

Thus, the nature of religious commitments of parents and their belief in specific organized religious groups, emerge as potential areas of exploration for understanding family life experiences in inter-religious families.

**Inferences Drawn**

The discussion in the three sections above highlighted how the processes of committing to a religion, developing a sense of identity and family life exert influence over each other. Further, it also established that the social context, within which they function, has a bearing on each of the three processes. A study of this unique blend of factors, arising from the interplay of religion, identity, family and society, within an inter-religious context, thus requires an idiographic approach. Most of the studies discussed above use quantitative approaches to arrive at general trends, establish relations and identify patterns. The present research focuses on capturing personal, experiential reality which is better studied through a qualitative research approach evident in the studies by Gupta (2008), Sarroub (2002), Sheikh (2008), and Thapan (2001).

The theoretical underpinnings and the related research studies have also contributed towards developing a framework for writing and analyzing the life stories of the participants in the study. The framework for analysis has been discussed in Chapter Three (page 80).

**Research Questions**

Both, the conceptual framework discussed above, as well as insights drawn from the field, contributed significantly towards the development of the research questions. The main question that the study attempts to address is how family life experiences and the processes of arriving at religious commitments and developing a sense of identity interact in an inter-religious
family. In addressing this question, several other significant questions emerge.

**Religious Commitments**

What is the nature of religious commitments of young adults from inter-religious families? What are the processes that they undergo in arriving at their religious commitments? How do they, particularly those in inter-religious families, perceive their religious commitments?

How is the process of arriving at religious commitments influenced by the familial context? Do parents, in an inter-religious set up, make conscious decisions towards developing religious commitments in their children?

**Schooling**

Are decisions of schooling influenced by the religious commitments of parents? In turn, does a choice of school influence religious commitments of children?

How do these two processes of schooling and religious commitments interplay with the process of developing a sense of identity?

**Identity Development**

What aspects of identity do young adults perceive as assigned and chosen? Do they differentiate between assigned and chosen identities? How do they resolve the inconsistencies, if any, between assigned and chosen identities?

Do children from inter-religious marriages face conflict in belonging to particular religious, cultural, and social groups? How are such
conflicts resolved? How do these conflicts influence the choice of a peer group and peer relations in and outside school?

How do these religious communities exert influence over developing a sense of identity and committing to a religion by children from inter-religious families?

**Family Life**

How does a mixed religious background influence children’s perception of relationships with people of different religious groups?

How, if at all, does society influence the family life dynamics in an inter-religious family? What influence do the two religious communities exert over an inter-religious family?

Do the religious commitments of one parent dominate the family dynamics? How do children react to such domination?

How do religious commitments exert influence over family life?

Do situations of conflict in everyday life experiences arise due to difference in religious commitments? How does the family, as a unit, address such situations?

What are the significant areas upon which the family holds a collective decision? In contrast, which are the domains in which individual decisions assume greater significance than family decisions?

The next chapter will present a discussion on the research design and methodology that was followed to find answers to the research questions presented above.