

INTERGENERATIONAL **RELATIONSHIPS**

AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE

Prof. Dr. N.K.Chadha

Delhi University, India

“With age human beings gain lots of experiences to share and wisdom to pass on. They are the building blocks who stand in the middle of past and future. Hence it is really important to utilize and respect such an immense source of knowledge.”

- India has been a country, where the status of family has been of utmost importance since ages. India is known for its diversity and collectivist culture. Families in India are tied up with unseen bond, cooperation, harmony and interdependence. Togetherness is what rules over here. There has been a long standing tradition in the Indian culture to live in extended families. The joint family has always been the preferred family type in the Indian culture, and most Indians at some point in their lives have participated in joint family living (Nandan and Eames 1980).

JOINT FAMILY IS MORE THAN STAYING TOGETHER: The Indian Family

One for all and
all for One



INDIAN FAMILIES

- India, like most other traditional, eastern societies is a collectivist society that emphasizes family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity.
- More specifically, collectivism is reflected in the readiness to cooperate with family members and extended kin on decisions affecting most aspects of life, including career choice, mate selection, and marriage.

Joint families are like microcosms of an entire world.

- They are the first training grounds, where people learn interpersonal skills.
- People in joint families learn lessons of patience, tolerance, cooperation and adjustment. They also learn what it means to take collective responsibility.
- When young people live with senior members of the family from the time they are born, they grow up appreciating, admiring and loving them.
- They also learn to adjust because they realize that as younger people, they have the flexibility of adjusting and changing whereas older people often get caught up in patterns of functioning.

MODIFIED EXTENDED FAMILY

- The traditional, ideal and desired family in India is the joint family. A joint family includes kinsmen, and generally includes three to four living generations, including uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, and grandparents living together in the same household. It is a group composed of a number of family units living in separate rooms of the same house. The family supports the old; takes care of widows, never-married adults, and the disabled; assists during periods of unemployment; and provides security and a sense of support and togetherness (Chekki 1996; Sethi 1989).
- With the advent of urbanization and modernization, the ***modified extended family*** has replaced the traditional joint family but in it also, many functional extensions of the traditional joint family have been retained.

- With the onset of modernization and globalization, a chain of transformation has taken place in all social institutions of almost all the societies. But, one factor that has to be accepted is the tendency of Indian families to maintain '**togetherness**' even in nuclear structure and the emotional bond between the kith and kin.

Insights into some Household Practices- Bonds for the Family

- Some of the core characteristics which forms an Indian family is its joint living of three or four generations under a common roof and cooking food in a common hearth. (Chowdhary, D. Paul, 1992)
- Members of the family shower enormous respect on the elders, their age and wisdom acquired during their life period.
- In a joint family a child learns and is reared by a number of people, thus dividing work, saving time and creating a spectrum of exposure and awareness. The funeral rites and the worshipping of ancestors are still a part of the functions of joint family. This reinforces in the minds of younger generation the respect and love the elders are entitled to get within the larger structure.

GRANDPARENTS: Buffer between Child and Parents

- In the narrations of a young person, **“To my subjective experience, the trips to appu ghar are not only trips that involve joyrides and birthdays. Rather, they got me closer and made me feel more secure with my grandfather.”**
- On the other hand, Grandmothers observe the company that the child keeps, his/her food habits, entertainment preferences etc. All these are possible conflict areas and need a buffer between the child and the parents; this buffer is the “Grandparent”.
- The elderly men and women act as the watchdogs for the adolescents of the family.
- Grandmothers have been good **story tellers** and loving **baby sitters**. From childhood with the help of these stories they try to imbibe in them the morality aspect, which later on becomes a core part of their personality. Also the grandchildren have been the outlets of worriers for the grandmothers. This image has not changed much even at present in India.

NOT AN OBLIGATION, IT IS A NECESSITY

- In the Indian culture living with grandparents is not an obligation it is a necessity as it opens the doors of overall growth of the children in the family. The experience, care and nurture of the elder lies make the kids much more aware of the positives around them. It helps them to understand that as the time is changing the value systems have diminished- these diminished value systems has done so much of harm to our society. But if the kids take the responsibility of bringing back the values of honestly, hard work and helping nature the scenario could easily be changed.

GROUNDS OF MUTUALITY

- Developing connections with a younger generation helps older adults to feel a greater sense of fulfillment. In fact, it is advantageous for both the groups as **on one hand it helps the elderly transfer whatever they have achieved emotionally and socially in their entire life and on the other hand the kids get multiple perspectives on reality which makes them more socially adjusted.**
- With the changing time, the employment of women has created a functional gap at home and that place has been readily filled in by the grandparents.
- The grandparents, by their presence provide peace of mind and trust in their children so that they perform their occupational role well.**

This kind of adjustment in the families is serving two purposes simultaneously:

a) The problem of the care of the ageing population that threatens many societies is mellowed in India.

b) At the same time childcare, another essential familial responsibility is taken up by the elders.

Benefits of the Mutual Relationship

In the Indian culture many children see their best friends in their grandparents and can express themselves without any fear of judgment and scolding from them. Such relationship between grandparents and grandchildren in our culture helps in number of ways. Some of which are:

- Provide an opportunity for both to learn new skills
- Give the child and the older adult a sense of purpose
- Help children to understand and later accept their own aging
- Invigorate and energize older adults
- Help reduce the likelihood of depression in the elderly
- Reduce the isolation of older adults
- Fill a void for children whose parents are working
- Help keep family stories and history alive
- Helping in inculcating family values
- Giving them company, advice, being supportive in parent-child relationships, helping when they need it, and mediating any conflicts with the parents.

- Serve the function of friendship, companionship and solidarity.
- Explain them the importance of values like honesty, solidarity, togetherness, helping behavior with the help of moral stories and by playing role models.
- Making them aware of all the rituals and cultural heritage of India and its past.
- Imbibing in them a sense of proud of being a part of such a diverse cultural heritage.
- Bringing them close to there land by reciting folk songs and telling its meaning and importance in their lives.
- Try to bring in there interest in very small but very peaceful activities like planting seeds, bird watching, walking on grass etc.
- Grandchildren on the other hand try to make there grandparents more aware of the recent technology and its usefulness.

CULTURE MAKES THE DIFFERENCE: The Glue which holds People Together

- Our Indian culture is rich and varied. Grandparents make children appreciate the values of tradition and provide a platform for moral and religious values. Of course, some of the Indian customs may seem redundant today, but there are some things that have eternal value.

DIFFERENT IMPORTANT COMPONENTS OF THE CULTURE ARE:

- An individual takes “blessings” from his elders by touching their feet.
- **Offering Help** is another striking feature in the Indian culture.
- **Ceremonial rites and festive** occasions in India are never complete without the grandfathers and grandmothers, whose guidance is needed at every step.
- **It is said in the Vedas that devotion to elders is like devotion to God.**

FAMILY SUPPORT FOR THE AGED

- At any age, the family provides the individual the emotional, social, and economic support. The ability of the aged persons to cope with the changes in health, income, social activities, etc. at the older ages, depends to a great extent on the support the person gets from his/her family members. This support, it may be said, is more culturally based rather than development dependent. For instance, in India, the cultural values emphasize that the elderly members of the family be treated with “honor and respect”.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR THE AGED

- **Article 41 of the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution**, specifies that the State shall, within the limits of economic capacity, provide for assistance to the elderly.
- **The National Policy on Older Persons, announced by the Government of India (Government of India, 1999)** mandates State support for the elderly with regard to health care, shelter and welfare. Social security has been made the concurrent responsibility of the Central and State Governments.
- **Section 125 of the Criminal procedure Code, 1973**, specifies the rights of parents without any means for maintenance to be supported by their children having sufficient means.
- Government Pension scheme has become the most sought after income security scheme. The policy seeks to ensure that the **settlement of pension, provident fund, gratuity**, and other **retirement benefits** is made promptly.
- **Mobile health services, special camps, and ambulance services are being thought of, for making the health care facilities to reach the elderly.**

- For solving the problem of providing housing for the elderly, group housing is proposed, which will have common service facilities for meals, laundry, common room and rest rooms.
- The policy also proposes to develop educational and informational material relevant to the lives of older people such as the creative use of leisure; appreciation of art; culture and social heritage; skills in community work and welfare activities.
- The Government of India has started giving fare concessions to old age people in all modes of travel, concessions in entrance fees, preference in reservation of seats, priority in telephone and gas connections.
- The Government has declared the year 2000 as the **National Year for Older Persons** to highlight the issues relating to the care and support for the old age people.
- It is also proposed to have a National Older Person's Day every year.

Indian National Policy on Older Person (NPOP)

National policy, seeks to assure older persons that their concerns are national concerns and they will not live unprotected, ignored or marginalized. The goal of the National Policy is the well - being of older persons. It aims at:

- The Policy recognizes the need for affirmative action in favor of the elders.** Special attention is given for older females so that they do not become victims of triple neglect and discrimination on account of gender, widowhood and age.
- The Policy views the life cycle as a continuous one of which past-60 phase of life is an integral part.** It does not view age 60 as the cut off point for beginning a life of dependency.
- The Policy values an age-integrated society.** It endeavors to strengthen integration between generations, facilitates two-way flows and interactions and strengthen the bonds between the young and the old.

- **The Policy recognizes that older persons too are a resource. They render useful service in the family and outside.**
- **The policy firmly believes in the empowerment of older persons so that they can acquire better control over their lives and participate in decision-making** on matters which affect them as well as the other issues as equal partners in the development process.
- The Policy recognizes that larger budgetary allocations from the state is needed and the rural and urban poor will be given special attention.
- **The Policy emphasizes the need for expansion of social and community services for older persons, particularly women,** and enhances their accessibility and use by removing socio-cultural, economic and physical barriers and making the services client-oriented and user-friendly.

- In order to implement **the National Policy on Older Persons**, the **National Council for Older Persons (NCOP)** has been **constituted in May 1999**, in the Ministry of Social Justice and Environment, Government of India with the Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment as the Chairperson, and the Secretary of that Ministry as the Vice-Chairperson. The NOCP includes persons from different Departments of the Central and State Governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), representatives of the National Human Rights Commission, the National Commission for Women, and elected members: oldest member of the Rajya Sabha and the oldest member of the Lok Sabha.

The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007

Was enacted in December 2007 to ensure need based maintenance for parents and senior citizens and their welfare. The Act provides for :-

- Maintenance of Parents/ senior citizens by children/ relatives made obligatory and justiciable through Tribunals
- Revocation of transfer of property by senior citizens in case of negligence by relatives
- Penal provision for abandonment of senior citizens
- Establishment of Old Age Homes for Indigent Senior Citizens
- Adequate medical facilities and security for Senior Citizens

The Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) are also undertaking the work of taking care of the aged mostly in urban areas, although in a limited way.

THINGS TO LEARN FROM INDIA

- **Assimilation of the aged in the cultural roles** of the society is something that can be learned from India.
- **Secondly, the collectivist values of sharing, adjustment, mutual interdependence and harmony are being passed on by the elderly to the young children through story telling, giving real life examples etc.** This is helping them socialize effectively. It is aiding them in their moral, social and emotional development.

- Due to the fast pace of life and modernization both the parents are working. **The presence of grandparents in the family to look after the young children provides them emotional security and practically helps them to focus on their career and achievement needs.** In the west some pattern of arrangement can be conceptualized which will be beneficial for all the three generations.
- **The introduction of National Policy for Older Persons (1999) and The Maintenance and Welfare of Senior Citizens Act, 2007 has provided economic and emotional security to the elderly.** These acts reflect an affirmative action from the part of Indian Government for the elderly. A joint effort by the UN and member countries to bring in more effective laws for the welfare of the elderly is the need of the hour.

END NOTE

The beauty about the Indian culture lies in its age-long prevailing tradition of the joint family system. **A major factor that keeps all members, big and small, united in love and peace in a joint family system in India is the importance attached to protocol.** This feature is very unique to Indian families and very special. Manners like respecting elders, touching their feet as a sign of respect, speaking in a dignified manner, taking elders' advice prior taking important decisions, etc. is something that Indian parents take care to inculcate in their kids from very beginning. **The reason why Indians are proving to emerge as a prosperous lot globally, many researches claim, is because of the significance they attach to the joint family system.** All working cohesively to solve a problem faced by any one or more members of the joint family, is what works magic in keeping one tension-free, happy and contented even in today's highly competitive environment. An Indian may be a great sportsperson or a movie actor and so on in a particular professional field, but all these accomplishments relegate to the backseat when at home.