

## **INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE**

**Prof. Dr. N.K.Chadha**  
**Department of Psychology,**  
**University of Delhi, Delhi-110007,India**  
**nkc\_du@yahoo.co.uk**

*“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)

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.

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.

In India, families in the past adhered to a patriarchal ideology, followed the patrilineal rule of descent, were patrilocal, had familialistic value orientations, and endorsed traditional gender role preferences. The Indian family is considered strong, stable, close, resilient, and enduring (Mullatti 1995). 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. The idea of global market with the exchange of goods, ideas, manpower and technology demands a geographic mobility of people in search of jobs and desire for new exposures. Large-scale migration, easier transportation and faster communication at the macro level have influenced the social system. Migration of the younger members away from home affected the structure of the family. Women entering into the labour market require corresponding functional changes in the family. The kinship relationships are undergoing a change with certain degree of reduction in the expression of love and affection because of physical distance. All these changes in the Indian family structure and the corresponding functional modification's are conspicuous by the mushrooming of modern institutions to substitute the familial functions. (Nalini,1997). 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.

From past many years it has been seen in various researches that the Life expectancy for both Indian men and women is increasing (Ilango Ponnuswami). According to the 2001 Census of India, life expectancy was 61.9 years for men and 63.1 years for women (Census of India 2001). This has led to a significant increase in the population of elderly individuals. The elderly in India are generally obeyed, revered, considered to be **fountains of knowledge** and wisdom, and treated with respect and dignity by family and community members. In most instances, the elderly care for their grandchildren and assist with household chores. Even the children continually consult them on most of the important aspects of life.

**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, 1992) The eldest male member called the '**kartha**' has the full decision making authority in all family matters. The property of the family is owned by all the male members of the house but managed by the eldest male member. The worship of a common family deity is another significant feature of Indian joint family (Nalini,1997). 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 worshiping 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.

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”. This observation is in sync with the fact that grandparents are a resource to the family. They owe this respect because they are the sincere guardians of the younger generations of the joint family. The elder women of the family are the care-givers of the infants, children and adolescents in terms of giving medicines or food or good discipline. The elderly men and women act as the watchdogs for the adolescents of the family. The unique quality of this authority which is been held by the elderly lies in combination with emotionality from both sides – those who exercise it and those who fall under it. Because of this kind of close bond that spontaneously sprang within the generations, social security for the older persons is automatic in such family structure.

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 there 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**

When people are raised in different time periods, their values and perceptions of the world can be quite different, and this can lead to difficulties in understanding one another. Because of this gap in understanding between generations, it's important to find links between younger and older generations. (Spence & Radunovich,1992). But in eastern countries, where the concept of joint families is still so prevalent and going strong it is much more easier for the grandchildren to understand the perspective of an older member and to be able to relate with it. This understanding does not only provide a better perception of the environment but it also forms the basis of the socialization process for these kids. Hence 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 honesty, hard work and helping nature the scenario could easily be changed. The **mutual advantage** of living in the joint families and having grandparents around is the understanding of world as a positive place to live and inculcating positive values to make it further a better place. For the elderly people, it is a positive opportunity to find meaning in their lives.

Talking from the vantage of the elderly, it is the time to give other the richness of life and share their worldly wisdom with their children, grandchildren and great grand children.

(Orlando,2010).This is the time in their lives when they can live their lives the way they actually want to. The concessions they are entitled to makes it actually worth being a senior citizen. Airlines and Indian Railways offer discounted fares to the elderly. There are separate queues for senior citizens at the post office; railway counters and some buses even have seats reserved for them. It all boils down to one thing---It can actually be quite appealing to be senior citizen once they look at themselves with esteem and confidence.

**“GROUNDS OF MUTUALITY”:** It has been seen that in old age, individuals cease to play certain roles. This role loss may be due to death of a kinship member, retirement or resignation from associations. As a result of this, their role play is very much reduced and they start feeling lonely and isolated. But in Indian context, one good factor is that the retired men and women have a whole new bunch of roles to play. They still have their roots in the family. 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 emotional care and safe atmosphere is been created by the grandparents at home itself. The grandparents extend a warm care to the grandchildren because they consider it their duty and privilege. The grandparents, by their presence provide peace of mind and trust in their children so that they perform their occupational role well. In spite of their own health problems, the elders manage to take care of the younger ones at a good level. In many industrialized societies the family system is disorganizing leading to several other social problems. But the situation in India is different. Migration, women’s employment, new social institutions or the modern culture have not crashed down the social system as such. It is because of the bindings that exist within the family. The role of a mother or father for a short while is substituted by the presence of grandparents.

**This kind of adjustment 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.(Nalini,1997)**

The underlying sense of responsibility that goes with this is tremendous. The role of grandparents in children’s lives is varied. It is imperial at times, muted at others and goes underground whenever required but the entire time solid and absolutely dependable. **Grandparents often bridge the gap between parents and their children.** Rebellious independent children who are trying to find their feet are almost always at loggerheads with their parents. The role of the grandparents can be very important here as they act as impartial judges and are able to convey their feelings to both parties. Grandchildren

prefer to listen to the grandparents rather than the parents with whom they are unfortunately involved in everyday tussles. The sense of objectivity and the absence of bias lend a sense of credibility to their roles as mediators. Honestly done, this goes a long way in lulling both the parties into a sense of arbitration.

The *socialization function* of the family has been sustained by the inclusion of grandparents in the household. During the process of socialization, Indian grandparents teach their grandchildren practical abilities and provide them with information about their family and their past (Nalini,1997). They also provide them with care and support, and act as role models and sources of ideas and reflection about human life. As agents of their grandchildren's socialization, grandparents are significant and contribute to their cognitive, moral and socio-affective development. This creates a close relationship between children's development and the roles played by their grandparents within the web of family relationships. It is been seen in the Indian culture that advice, education and reflection are more frequently attributed to grandfathers while affectionate relationships and care are attributed to grandmothers.

Grandmothers also tend to be more involved and intimate and act as substitute mothers when needed. Regarding developmental stage, while the grandchild is young, the grandparents' main roles are helping with his or her care, developing play behaviors, and stimulating them cognitively and emotionally, thus contributing to their affective, cognitive and social development. (Viguer, Carlos, Sandra, José, and Esperanza, 2010). But as the child grows, grandparents lend new focus to this interaction such as giving them company, advice, being supportive in parent-child relationships, helping when they need it, and mediating any conflicts with the parents. **The grandparent role, then, may serve the function of friendship, companionship and solidarity.**

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 a 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 thier 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.

*Teaching about own values, culture and being in cooperation with others; all the more staying with grandparents has given the Indian children a broader perspective of world around, the changes which has happened in the culture and how to cope up with those changes by being away from selfishness and close to harmony and love.*

The importance of values during adolescent has been justified by many researchers. Values are of particular interest during the adolescent years because, development- ally, it is a key time in the process of discovering and formulating one's identity. It is during this stage of self-discovery, and with these new cognitive capacities, that adolescents sort out for themselves what they value. Thus, adolescents' values are tied to identity development and this development is dependent upon the kind of family environment and the type of interaction with the elder lies in the family.

**It not only helps in bringing a better human being within themselves but also makes them more inclined towards giving back to society what ever they could in the form of positive values and positive actions.**

Inculcating beliefs and values is not as easy as it was years ago. With changing times and changing outlooks, children have started to question the authenticity of everything. They do not believe until they are convinced. Globalization has eroded the sense of belonging and identity with their roots, and science and technology has them questioning everything. Parents who are already fighting constantly with time are perhaps not in a position to inculcate these values. Children are very demanding and grandparents without appearing to be pushy have all the time and experience to deal with their tantrums. They appease, soothe, and impart values with tremendous ease.

### **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. Respect for elders is a major component in Indian culture in most states and cities. An individual takes “blessings” from his elders by touching their feet.

**Offering Help** is another striking feature in the Indian culture. Right from the early days of childhood we are taught to help one another in need of help and distress. Indian culture

tells us to multiply and distribute joy and happiness and share sadness and pain. This way we can develop co-operation and better living amongst ourselves and subsequently make this world a better place to live in. The presence of elderly in family has helped people living in metros get a touch of ethnicity.

Metros are seeing a lot of family value in celebrating birthdays and anniversaries by observing the rituals. The Indian culture has imbibed the right mix of western influence and yet maintaining the ethnic family tradition. There is more love in every family while blowing candles on the birthday cake, lighting the diya to observe an **aarti** for the birthday person or donating on the birthdays. The grandparents can perform this role to perfection. The ability to love, shower affection, and willingness to help and comfort their grand children has made grandparents indispensable. There is no doubt in the fact that their role is as important as the role of parents. Their timeless experience, their patience and their ability to create a non-compulsive learning environment is something that even parents have learnt to rely on.

**Ceremonial rites and festive** occasions in India are never complete without the grandfathers and grandmothers, whose guidance is needed. In India, we all still believe that the heart-felt blessings of elders go a long way in helping the grandchildren achieve what they want in life.

There is no doubt that the joint-family system has many advantages such as the experience of the elders, their time & effort in taking care of the children or looking after the household and their advice when the youngsters are at fault. The elders themselves are no doubt benefited as they are not left alone. This contributes to their mental and physical well-being. Also, in times of sickness and need, the younger generation will be there to care for them. Grandparents and grandchildren have a special bonding that enriches the lives of each other.

First of all, being with grandparents in the Indian culture gives the younger generation time and chance to respect the elders and their experience. It helps them understand their feelings and sentiments and care for the elders. The wisdom and experience of the elders is invaluable in solving their own problems.

Domestic problems are been discussed with the elders. Giving time to them makes them feel wanted and respected.

One should always remember that the wheel of life is constantly turning and the youngsters themselves will have to one day depend on the next generation. **It is said in the Vedas that devotion to elders is like devotion to God.**

## **LIVING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE AGED**

*“We’re born alone, we live alone, we die alone. Only through our love and friendship can we create the illusion for the moment that we’re not alone.”*

- Orson Welles

The living arrangements for the elderly are often considered as the basic indicator of the care and support provided by the family (Martin, 1988). However, it must be noted that this practice is more culturally based rather than development dependent. For example, in USA only about 15% of the aged persons lived with their children, whereas in India about 75% lived with their children (Martin, 1988 ; Bose, 1982). Similarly, the WHO surveys have indicated that among the aged persons, 72% in Malaysia and 79% in the Philippines were living with their children (Martin, 1988). Presently in Indian villages, 80% of the aged persons are living with their children.

These indicate the **strength of cultural traditions** over other factors in providing care and **support** to the aged by the families. Indian culture emphasizes the reverential treatment of the aged persons. The social system puts pressure on the children, especially the male children to take care of the aged parents, apart from the legal requirements. The cultural practices also assign certain duties for the aged in the household chores. Taking care of the young children, looking after the societal responsibilities, settling inter-personal or inter-household or even inter-group conflicts, helping in the matrimonial match-making, are among the duties that the society expects the aged persons to take interest in and attend to. Thus, the aged are made to play useful roles in the household and in the society so as to make them feel reassured that they are an important part of the society.

## **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, recently 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. The policy recognizes that older persons could render useful services in the family and in the society. However, it emphasizes that employment in income generating activities after super-annuation should be the choice of the individual. **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. If any person



refuses or neglects to maintain their parents a magistrate may order such a person to make a monthly allowance for the maintenance of his/ her mother or father at a monthly rate not exceeding Rs.500 (Natarajan, 2000). 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. It is also proposed to set up a Welfare fund for the old age persons.

Regarding health care for the elderly, the goal of the policy is to provide affordable health services. In this process it envisages to have the cooperative efforts of the public health services, private health services and private medical care. Development of health insurance is also being given high priority. **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. These should have easy access to community services, medicare, parks, recreation and cultural centers. Government proposes to encourage construction and maintenance of old age homes. However, family is recognized as the main provider of old age support not only in the area of housing but also in other areas which are crucial to old age people. 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. Further, it will provide information about the process of aging and the changing roles, responsibilities and relationships at different stages of the life cycle.

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 to strengthen their legitimate place in society and help older persons to live their last phase of their life with purpose, dignity and peace.

- The Policy visualizes that the state will extend support for financial security, healthcare, shelter, welfare and other needs of older persons, provide protection against abuse and exploitation, make available opportunities for the development of the potential and provide services so that they can improve the quality of their lives. The policy is based on some broad principles.

- **The Policy recognizes the need for affirmative action in favour of the elders.** It has to be ensured that the rights of older persons are not violated and they get opportunities and equitable share in development program and administrative actions will reflect sensitivity towards older persons living in rural areas. Special attention will be necessary 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. It considers 60+ as a phase when the individual should have the chances and opportunities to lead an active, creative, productive and satisfying life. An important thrust is, therefore, an active and productive involvement of older persons and not just their care.
- **The Policy values an age-integrated society.** It will endeavor to strengthen integration between generations, facilities two-way flows and interactions and strengthen the bonds between the young and the old. It believes in the development of social support system, informal as well as formal, so that the capacity of families to take care of older persons is strengthened and they can continue to live in their family.
- **The Policy recognizes that older persons too are a resource. They render useful service in the family and outside.** They are not just consumers of goods and services, but also their producers. Opportunities and facilities need to be provided so that they can continue to contribute more effectively to the family, community and the society.
- **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 decision-making process will seek to involve them to a much larger extent, especially since they constitute 12 percent of the electorate, a proportion which will rise in the coming years.
- The Policy recognizes that larger budgetary allocations from the state will be needed and the rural and urban poor will be given special attention. However, it is neither feasible nor desirable for the state alone to attain the objectives of the National Policy. Individuals, families, communities and institutions of civil society have to join hands as partners.
- **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. Special efforts will be made to

ensure that the rural areas, where more than three-fourths of the older population lives, are adequately covered.

The National Policy recognizes the need for making use of the huge untapped resource of the old age population by providing training appropriate to the person's experience and capabilities. However, the individuals are to be given free choice to either continue to work or to take peaceful retirement. The policy aims at involving mass media to give better understanding of the aging process, the issues and the areas for action.

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 Government of India has expressed its concern in this regard by preparing the National Policy on the Older Persons and by constituting a National Council for the Older Persons (NCOP) to over-see the implementation of the policy. The Central and the State Governments have already introduced a number of schemes to provide care and support to the elderly (Sivamurthy, M ).

**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 justifiable 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.**

But, it is the family that is found to be playing the most vital role in India in this respect, especially in rural areas. This is in fact what the elderly persons seem to want also. The Indian culture emphasizes the reverential treatment to be given to the aged persons in the family. It is therefore necessary that efforts must be made to strengthen the family support for taking care of the elderly population.

## **POLICIES RECEIVED BY THE ELDERLY: SCOPE, IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE**

Policies and programs introduced by the Government of India have received mixed feedback in terms of their advantages and limitations. Through planned systematically based on demographic information and index of development, the policies remain isolated from the psycho-social determinants of mental health and adjustment, affecting the Indian population. This observation is remarkably true for the elderly population, living in both rural and urban areas and affecting both male and female elderly residing in India.

However, designed to ensure the protection and maintenance of the senior citizens of the country, the acts and legal provisions fail to take into account several factors:

1. The Indian family system has remained largely joint and collective in nature. The implementation of the Maintenance and Welfare Act challenges the parenting styles of the Indian parents. The provisions of the act require children to forcefully take care of their parents and make the pattern of mutual care giving, materialistic and one sided.
2. The acts have a potential to act as silent killers to the Indian fabric system and can destroy the inter-dependence of grandchildren towards their children and vice versa. In place of realistically making children responsible for providing basic care and maintenance to their parents, the locus is more external, creating every possibility of the total breakdown of the act and the family systems.
3. Most of the acts consider objective parameters of quality of life index including infrastructure, income levels and health indicators. However, they fail to acknowledge social support networks and aspects of subjective wellbeing, which still remain profound in action.

In spite of such shortcomings, the acts and schemes have their own advantages. They have successfully highlighted the actual status of the elderly in India, which requires immediate attention by demographers, psycho-gerontologists, gero-counsellors and social activist. The cases of elderly abuse and neglect are high in India, which contrasts the intergenerational solidarity and intergenerational learning. The picture is diverse and needs to be handled realistically to ensure a balance between intergenerational relationships and maintenance of the elderly.

### **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.

### **FIVE THINGS TO LEARN FROM INDIA:**

- 1) Assimilation of the aged in the cultural roles of the society is something that can be learned from India. In the west wherein Disengagement theory (Cummings and Henry, 1960) is popular that suggests declining roles of the aged is an essential prerequisite for the continuity of society, Indian culture is posing a challenge to this view as the elderly are involved in parenting of grand children, they are the roots which holds the family tree in place. Hence being actively involved in the society is not only boosting their self esteem and well being; they are also a valuable resource for the family.
- 2) Secondly, the collectivist values of sharing, adjustment, mutual interdependence and harmony are being passed on by the elderly to the young children through storey telling, giving real life examples etc. This is helping them socialize effectively. It is aiding them in their moral, social and emotional development. The joint family setup is therefore ensuring continuity of the cultural values. The evidence suggests that despite being exposed to globalization and changing gender roles of society, in India there is still comparatively more harmony in Indian families. Elderly are indispensable contributors to this scenario.
- 3) 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.
- 4) In India the success of marriages is comparatively higher as compared to the west. Many psychologists, medical practitioners and counselors have pointed out that the couples living in nuclear families report having more conflicts as compared to couples living in the joint family setup. The reason being that the support they seek from the elderly in the resolution of conflicts is not available and hence the counselors and medical practitioners provide a substitute for the same.
- 5) 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.

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