

Social and Economic Forces Affecting Intergenerational Relations in Extended Families in a Third World Country: A Cautionary Tale from South Asia¹

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This paper questions the implicit assumption derived from modernization theory that elderly persons in the Third World lead secure and satisfying lives because they still live in extended families. Data from elderly Hindus living in Kathmandu, Nepal, are presented and demonstrate that, although these elderly people do continue to live in extended families, social and economic changes have transformed the nature of intergenerational social relations within these families to the detriment of the elderly family members.

Key Words: Modernization, Aging, Dependence, Nepal, Hindu

"These days money is love" is a comment made by an elderly high caste Hindu woman living with her son and his family in Kathmandu, Nepal in response to a query about whether elderly people these days need their own money and income. She is one of the Third World elderly about whom little is heard or thought. This bitter and sad comment does not fit the stereotype of aging in the Third World.

The dominant theoretical discussion of the impact of modernization on elderly adults asserts an inverse relationship between modernization and the status of elderly people with the decline of the extended family playing a major role in this process of change (Cowgill, 1972; 1974; Cowgill & Holmes, 1972; Holmes, 1983). A number of subsequent studies have questioned and critiqued aspects of this theory (e.g., Achenbaum & Stearns, 1978; Bengtson et al., 1975; Fischer, 1977; Foner, in press; Goldstein & Beall, 1982; Palmore, 1975; Palmore & Manton, 1974), but its contention that the status of elderly adults "tends to be high in societies in which the extended form of family is prevalent and functions as a household unit" (Cowgill, 1972, p. 11) has not received adequate critical attention with respect to the Third World. Two

salient issues arise: (1) In Third World countries does the extended family necessarily break down with modernization, giving way to the dominance of the nuclear family? (2) To the extent that it does not, does the continued presence of extended families imply that the status, satisfaction, and security of elderly persons is high or even adequate?

Despite fundamental changes in the social, economic, and political structure of Third World countries over the past three or four decades, the extended family has not vanished as modernization theory predicts and persists even in many urban areas of the Third World. For example, data from eight rural and urban studies in India shows that between 54% and 78% of elderly persons in these areas lived with a married son. From 92% to 100% actually lived with some relative; less than 4% lived alone (Vatuk, 1980). Similarly, Palmore (1975) reported that over 75% of Japanese persons over age 65 lived with their children, and only 5% lived alone.

Because of this persistence of extended families and households, the situation of Third World elderly adults is commonly believed to be secure and satisfactory. This sanguine view is reflected in the message of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India to the 1982 World Assembly on Aging, the first United Nations conference on the state of elderly persons worldwide. "In developing countries, the problem is not so serious [as in developed countries]. Old people are revered as elders and sheltered within the joint family (United Nations, 1982,

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p. 92). Not surprisingly, the World Assembly on Aging strongly emphasized the importance of *preserving* the extended family as the vehicle for ensuring the elderly a decent and rewarding old age (Oriol, 1982). Such a conclusion, however, is based on the assumption that life in an extended family provides elderly individuals a secure and satisfying life.

Research conducted by the authors in urban Nepal indicates that equation of membership in an extended family with security and satisfaction for the elderly person is a serious oversimplification. Important social and economic changes in South Asia have impacted on the family and elderly people, but they have done so in the realm of relations within the family rather than on family/household composition itself. This paper demonstrates this with data from urban Nepal.

METHOD

The data were collected as part of a larger study on the determinants of urban fertility in the Kathmandu Valley. Two main sites were investigated over a 15-month period from September 1981 to December 1982. This paper focuses on Bistatol (pseudonym), a typical urban neighborhood that is situated in the heart of Kathmandu, a city of over 200,000 persons. Bistatol contains 275 high caste (Brahmin and Chettri) households of low and low-middle income. After lengthy discussions with Nepalese scholars on the representativeness of the different urban neighborhoods, and after more than a month of investigating a number of potential sites, Bistatol was selected because it incorporated a range of occupational, economic, and educational levels. In order to ensure representativeness, parallel demographic data were collected independently by a separate interview team in a second "typical" urban neighborhood in Kathmandu and compared with Bistatol. No significant differences between them were found.

Interviews were held with 46 (87%) of the high caste elderly adults aged 60 and over in Bistatol. An open-ended in-depth interview was conducted in conversational Nepali by a trained Nepali interviewer who attempted to follow up and clarify all contradictory and unclear items. The interviews occurred toward the end of the fieldwork when local residents were well acquainted with the study and rapport established. Information was obtained on self-reported health and functional status, senility, economics, values, and attitudes. Each interview took between 1.5 and 3 hours to complete. Twenty (43%) of the elderly respondents were men and 26

(57%) women. Their ages ranged from 59 to 95 ($M = 68$). Half were without a spouse either as a consequence of mortality, nonmarriage, or separation.

RESULTS

Household composition in Hindu society. — At the heart of Hindu ideals regarding aging is the expectation that the elderly person will live in an extended family with at least one son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren who will respect and care for them. In marked contrast to our own Western value of fierce independence, the Hindu ideal is dependence (Vatuk, 1980). Judging from data on household composition in Bistatol, this ideal is apparently achieved. The majority of elderly persons there (61%, $n = 28$) lived with at least one married son, and virtually all (96%, $n = 44$) of the elderly adults lived with relatives (including spouses). Only one lived alone. These figures parallel those from the other contemporary Hindu communities and, on the surface, suggest that elderly adults are satisfactorily ensconced in culturally appropriate family units. But this structural description is misleading, for it does not reveal the fundamental changes that have occurred in Nepalese society with respect to intergenerational relations within the extended family.

Of the 18 elderly individuals who were *not* living with a married son, more than half (56%, $n = 10$) actually had married sons living separately. This included the one elderly person living alone. The mere existence of a married son did not result in co-residence of sons and elderly parents. Another line of evidence pertinent to intergenerational relations concerns the economic support of households. Twenty-eight (61%) of the elderly adults bore either all or most of their household expenses themselves, whereas only 18 (39%) had all or most of their expenses borne by married sons. More significantly, in 10 (52%) of the households where the elderly person or couple resided with a married son, all or most of the expenses were paid by the elderly. This cannot be explained by unemployment, for in 6 (60%) of these households the sons were earning wages and either did not contribute anything for the upkeep of the household or they contributed just a small amount from their earnings. Critically, in only one case did a separated married son contribute anything to the upkeep of his elderly parents' household.

Those elderly people who paid all or most of their household expenses obtained their income from a

variety of sources. Because the official retirement age is 60, only 5 of the 38 elderly respondents (elderly couples were counted as one respondent) were still working. Seventeen (61%) received income from the rental of rooms in a house they owned, and 16 (57%) received income from farms leased to tenants. Eleven (39%) respondents had small government pensions, and a few others mentioned income from savings. The most common pattern was for the elderly people to receive some income from a combination of these sources.

These data indicate that the economic situation of elderly adults differs from what one might infer from Hindu ideals (norms/values) and actual household composition. A large number of married sons did not support their elderly parents economically and the majority of these Kathmandu elderly people were economically independent and surviving on their own resources. The disjunction between the ideal expectations and reality was reflected in responses to our question regarding whether it was necessary or important for elderly people to have their own private income (rather than depending on their children as the ideal dictates). It is striking that 100% of the respondents asserted emphatically that in today's world it is *essential* for elderly people to have their *own* sources of income. Many said an old person is a fool if he hopes to depend on his sons when he is old. For example, one 79-year-old man living with one of his three married sons said: "Old people must have their own money; otherwise they will not have a one rupee note (8 cents) even to purchase poison [to kill oneself] if it is needed." Another old woman living with her son hesitantly and tearfully whispered that she made lamp wicks not just to pass the time but actually sold them so that she could have the equivalent of a few dollars a month to buy things (e.g., special foods she liked such as yoghurt). That she was unable to obtain this from her son and daughter-in-law and had to labor for wages was a humiliating public exhibition of rejection; the cultural ideal holds that one's son should take good care of his parents in old age. Other elderly respondents without income who lived with sons but could not work did not have a penny of their own to buy even a single candy for a grandchild.

The attitudes and feelings of these elderly people regarding sons and old age also demonstrated their clear understanding that co-residence with a married son in the "ideal" family setting did not imply either a secure or a satisfying existence. Verbatim comments of two respondents provide the best illustration.

There was an old man having four sons, four daughters-in-law and many grandchildren. He was not cared for, loved, and respected by them. He was not even given food properly by them. So he went to his friend and told him everything. His friend bought him a big box and locked it with seven locks and told him to keep all the keys always fastened to his waist . . . That old man told all of his sons that he had a lot of property in gold and jewelry that he had been keeping at his friend's house but that now, since he was old, he decided to bring it back to his own house where he had four sons and daughters-in-law to look after such valuable things. Hearing this all the sons and daughters-in-law loved, cared for, and respected him. He was given good foods and good medicines when he was sick . . . I have been inspired by this story. I am not afraid because I have that red box over there in the corner.

Though we live in the same house, I have not seen my son for many days . . . At my son's house I am nothing. His pet dog is cared for better than me.

The elderly respondents making these comments were not discarded individuals; both lived together with a married son. Nor were these isolated comments. They reflected an almost universal belief among the urban elderly people in this sample that today's sons can no longer be depended on to take good care of their elderly parents (either in emotional or custodial terms). Many respondents cried as they discussed these topics.

Responses to another question on how much longer they wanted to live are consistent with this finding. Thirty respondents (68%) answered either that they wanted to live long or that they wanted to die now/soon, whereas 14 (32%) answered that it was God's will when they would die. Of the 30 who expressed a clear preference, a surprising 16 (53%) specified that they wanted to die now or soon rather than live long. Not only is this a substantial proportion, but it was not a function of differing residential situations: of those responding specifically, 5 (57%) not living with a married son wanted to die as did 11 (52%) of those living with a married son. Of the 11, only three had serious health problems. Clearly, then, something is awry. Although household composition conforms to the ideal culture, relations within the household appear not to. The following discussion analyzes the manner in which the structure of intergenerational relations within the household has been transformed.

Dependence and the elderly in Hindu culture. — According to Hindu ideals, elderly people are expected to depend on their sons in old age. But the meaning of dependence to Hindu elderly adults is

very different from that in Western culture. A pioneering essay on dependency and old age defined socioeconomic dependency as "the extent to which the means necessary for survival are not directly available to the individual through his own efforts, but must to some extent, be obtained from others" (Clark, 1972, p. 264). Although this definition is helpful in studying dependence cross-culturally, it is too broad to be used without clarification (Beall & Goldstein, 1982). For example, it would include both someone who gets his food as a gift from another as well as someone who barter his wheat for another crop produced elsewhere. It would also confuse the individual who, being ill and unable to cook for himself, receives food from a son or neighbor with a wealthy individual who hires a servant to cook. Though all of these entail dependence on others to provide the means of survival, they reflect fundamental differences that should be distinguished.

More important, it is necessary to differentiate between an objective (operational) definition of dependency that can be applied equally in all societies and a subjective, or culturally specific, delimitation that reflects the meanings of dependence in a specific cultural setting. For example, from the perspective of high caste Nepali Hindus a fundamental distinction with regard to assistance (dependence) is made between completely unacceptable assistance coming from a married daughter and completely acceptable and desired assistance coming from a son. Thus, one kilogram of food given by a married daughter to her father objectively can be measured and treated the same as one kilogram given by a son, but in Nepali culture they are perceived as diametrically opposite. The daughter's aid reflects a totally different social etiology with profoundly different social and cultural meanings. This issue has been raised because there is evidence that changing relations of dependency in the family unit are at the core of the contradictory situation we have described.

Changing relationships within the urban Nepalese family. — Traditionally, all members of the Hindu household jointly worked the family land holdings and jointly consumed its production of foodstuffs. Sons brought their wives into the family unit and usually lived in the extended family until the death of the father when the family's land was divided and each son established his own independent family unit. In both the ideal and, as far as can be determined, the real traditional Hindu family, the father is a patriarchal authoritative figure who

controls household affairs and economic management (Caldwell, 1982; Mandelbaum, 1970; Rowe, 1979). Even if he delegates increasing responsibilities to his son(s), it is *his* prerogative to do so. Sons are expected to be obedient and respectful. Mandelbaum (1970, p. 39) comments: "Children owe permanent deference to both parents. Parental authority is unceasing as an ideal and *is sustained in fact* [*italics added*], though the actual duration and degree of this authority are affected by economic circumstance and jati tradition. Within a household a son or daughter must not flout a parent's will, especially not the father's."

Similarly, one of our own respondents said, "In my youth the order of one's father was final. No one could question it. No one could dare to go against it. But these days parents are nothing. Before doing anything we used to discuss the matter with our father and it was only after he gave his approval that we could do it." Statements of this type were common.

The authority of the father was based not only on the set of traditional values and norms requiring respect and deference to parents but also on the father's monopoly over economic resources. As Caldwell (1982) observed for other traditional peasant agrarian societies, in Nepal, too, the father was the legal holder of the family's land and sons did not have rights to either ancestral land or acquired land before the father's death. This is clearly understood on the folk level as well as in the Muluki Ain, Nepal's legal code (Nepal Press Digest, 1976). If a son was unwilling to abide by his father's autocratic decisions he could leave home, but he could not leave home with his share of the family land unless the father agreed.

Hindu parents, therefore, expect to be *served*, respected, and deferred to by their sons and daughters-in-law. Elderly persons were willing to depend on their sons for services and assistance, but structurally this dependency was more akin to the superior's dependence on the toil of the subordinate than the frail and helpless depending on the strong and healthy. By virtue of the strong value on obedience, respect, and deference, and by exercising penultimate and monopolistic control over the means of production in the traditional agrarian setting, the father not only commanded the labor of his sons but also their overt attitudinal demeanor.

Sons acquiesced, in part, because of values socialized from childhood but also because in a traditional rural society such as Nepal there was little but land as a vehicle for economic subsistence. This interpretation does not deny that sons held

genuine feelings of respect, love, and admiration for their fathers. It suggests rather that the aid, support, and respect traditionally given to parents by their sons were based on more than enculturated values; they had a clear basis in the control of the means of agrarian production by the father and his ability to prevent his sons from obtaining their share of ancestral property before his death and of acquired property (i.e., that acquired by the father during his lifetime) forever. It is this complex of asymmetrical power and authority relationships favoring the father that has been transformed over the past three or four decades.

Probably the most profound change in family organization in Bistatol is the demise of the family as a unit of both production and consumption. The importance of farmland as the foundation of the family economy and a prime element in social status has declined and been replaced by salaried employment. The consequence of this for intrafamily organization is enormous. Sons who sell their labor to governmental or business organizations are paid directly for their work. They therefore control economic resources independent of the family. A son may, of course, turn over all of his salary to his father, but the choice is his. The monopoly of the father over economic resources, and thus over the life options of his sons, has been terminated. To the extent that sons are able to obtain employment, they can be totally independent of their father and family at a very young age. The emergence of employment as a key to economic success had led to a tremendous emphasis on education and a concomitant shift in the cost/value of sons.

Traditionally sons were necessary not only for their labor as children and youths but also for support of parents in old age and performance of religious rites at the time of death. In this setting sons were interchangeable (i.e., if one son died another could easily perform the same tasks). The optimal parental strategy was to produce enough sons to ensure the survival of one or two through one's old age. Heavy parental investment was not necessary to accomplish this. Increasingly, however, this strategy has become inefficacious because high caste urban families do *not* require (or use) the labor of children in economic production, and infant and child mortality has dropped precipitously. Moreover, if sons are to be of value to elderly parents they must be employed and receive good income from wages. Sons who cannot earn enough to feed and educate their own nuclear families are unlikely to be able and willing to provide good care for their elderly parents. It is no longer enough just to have one or

more sons who survive to one's old age; they must be relatively successful in earning a living through employment. To accomplish this, parents must make a substantial investment in their sons' education and upbringing and, given the high cost of education, such an investment may be possible for only a limited number of sons. The adoption of a strategy where fewer offspring are produced with a greater investment in each brings the best gains to parents.

Questions on ideal family size and family planning revealed that elderly parents are well aware of this. Rather than articulating the traditional values that advocate large families, 37 (81%) of our elderly respondents said that, given the economic situation in today's world, the ideal family size is only two or three children and that family planning is the appropriate way to achieve this. *But therein lies the paradox.* To the extent that parents succeed in preparing their sons to be successful (i.e., in providing them the education needed to obtain employment), the sons become independent of them economically; if they are unsuccessful in preparing their sons for employment, the sons have no income to support them. The dilemma facing the elderly person is exacerbated. Education not only liberates sons from their parents' economic control, it also fosters new sets of values and attitudes that are detrimental to the status of elderly parents because they contravene the traditional values of obedience, respect, and deference. Individualism, independence, secularism, and democracy, for example, and the shift from patrilinealism to conjugalism (i.e., the primacy of the husband-wife dyad over the parent-offspring dyad) all derive, by in large, from Western-like values and norms inherent in the modern educational, political, and economic systems emerging in countries like Nepal.

The following comment of an old Bistatol woman illustrates the degree to which these elderly parents have come to accept that their sons' primary loyalty is now oriented toward their own nuclear family rather than that of the extended family and their parents.

He [the eldest son living separately] gets about 700 rupees per month [\$53]. He has five children to support . . . so I think it is a very low income to support such a big family. Therefore he is not in a condition to help me. He does not send me money . . . My second son [living with her] also earns about 600 to 700 rupees a month. I cannot say exactly how much he draws in salary, but it is a guess he earns that much. He also has to bear the expenses of his three children. His wife also needs some cash each month to spend according to her wishes. He has to go to the

office, so he needs some money for his tiffin [food] and bus fares. Therefore, though he is living in the same household and earning salary, he very seldom gives me cash. If I ask, sometimes he does not refuse to give, but *I know the situation* and the amount he earns, so I ask only sometimes.

In and of themselves, these changes are not inherently detrimental to elderly parents. If sons are educated and become economically successful, there is no reason why they could not assist their parents in old age. Although basic values with respect to the obligation of sons to obey and respect their parents are changing, our interviews with young adults generally suggested that they still consider it their duty to assist their elderly parents. They also hope (but do not necessarily expect) that the care and income they are expending on their own children will result in assistance from them in their old age.

The poverty of many Third World countries makes such a goal difficult for many to realize. Unemployment, underemployment, and inflation are widespread in Nepal. It has become increasingly hard for sons to support even their own nuclear families. Because sons' salaries are insufficient, they are forced to make difficult decisions regarding the costs of different uses of this income. Should the money be spent (invested) on one's own children and/or style of life, or should it be used to provide one's parents good food and expensive medical care? In this weighing of alternatives the Kathmandu elderly parents are the losers, and they understand this.

Adapting to the changing situation: The "money is love" syndrome. — Because parents can no longer command the respect and obedience of their sons by virtue of their monopoly over the means of agrarian production, and because they can not depend on the love, respect, and good care of sons as a function of a moral imperative, elderly parents realize that they are vulnerable unless they have their own independently controlled sources of wealth and income. Consequently, elderly fathers not only consciously maintain valuable property such as a house in their own name but also manage it themselves, because in today's situation a key factor is obtaining and controlling the income from property. Concomitantly, elderly husbands are concerned about what will happen to their wives after they die (i.e., will sons adequately care for their mother) and actively prepare for this eventuality by transferring property to their wives' names. This gives widows

economic independence and leverage after their husbands die. Undoubtedly, it is this concern (and foresight) that accounts for the fact that 73% (8 of 11) of the elderly widows in our study owned and controlled property of their own (either land or house or both). As one widow of 79 put it, "My husband transferred these properties to my name before his death . . . Sometimes I get scared thinking what my condition would have been if I did not have these properties." Retaining control of property also provides a powerful economic incentive (via inheritance) for co-resident sons to behave toward the elderly parent in the ideal fashion. If one's children believe their elderly parents have property and wealth that they may inherit, the elderly parents feel that the children will show respect and concern. Another elderly man of 70 expressed this as follows, "In our society . . . sons are with you if you have property. If not, parents are left as fleas leave a dead dog."

Parents also try to maintain a hold on the respect and attention of their sons by assisting them economically on a day-to-day basis. This occurs in the form of elderly parent paying for all (or as much as possible) of the household's expenses out of their own income, thereby permitting the co-resident son to use all or most of his income for his own nuclear family. Given low salaries, this assistance allows sons (and their wives) to have surplus income that they can use to acquire more of the ever-escalating list of material status items such as refrigerators, new clothing, tape recorders, and heaters (depending on what level in the lower to middle-class continuum they fall) as well as send their children to better schools.

The elderly parents of Kathmandu want and need the love, attention, and respect of their children but can no longer take this for granted. Although they decry the callousness of modern sons and the declining sense of values and responsibility in today's world, they still try to exert whatever economic leverage they can to obtain attention and respect. In a sense they are making their sons dependent on them by transforming their son's newly acquired economic independence into de facto dependence. Interestingly, they also appear to be conscious of a need to minimize conflict by moderating the autocratic behavior that characterized their parent's generation so as to conform more closely with the new independence of young people. For example, in general fathers no longer insist on being consulted by their sons about decisions regarding the son's nuclear family and mothers no longer expect daughter-in-laws to massage their feet at night.

This attempt to recreate their traditional superordinate position in the family by substituting economic enticement for economic monopoly and power works best for the more well-to-do elderly parents who still control valuable resources (such as a house) in Kathmandu and who still have good sources of income. Because of this, one would expect elderly parents without substantial property or current income to be in the most precarious situation. And so they are. The real victims of the changes that have occurred in Nepalese society appear to be elderly people without any substantial income or resources. They truly have nothing to offer their sons, and they appear to be the most pathetic. In every case but one, the elderly parent who had no property or income and who lived with a married son expressed the wish to die now or soon.

As indicated, there is tremendous pressure on young parents to invest heavily in the education of their sons and to maintain a modern style of life (i.e., to possess material goods). But given low salaries and the difficulty in making ends meet, when sons have an elderly parent with no resources they must choose between using scarce resources for an unproductive end (their parents who will die soon anyway) or for themselves or their children (who will someday get better jobs). In these circumstances a number of incomeless respondents explicitly commented that, although their son appeared to be taking care of them, they received the bare minimum (room and the simplest food) and nothing more. When they commented on this or asked for something special (e.g., yoghurt) the daughter-in-law or son might lecture them about how difficult life is economically and how hard they work to buy clothes and send their own children to school. This type of rebuke to the elderly parent's culturally appropriate request for support destroys their self-esteem and apparently discourages them from asking for anything. The shame a son may feel about not having adequate income to care for his parent(s) properly is far less than the shame of the parent at becoming a beggar in his/her own family. As a result, elderly parents stop making demands, and the son/daughter-in-law do not offer anything. The emotional distress, whether mutual or one-sided, is accommodated by a reduction of interpersonal interaction — the elderly parents become socially and psychologically isolated. Several elderly respondents actually commented that they were like strangers in their own family; no one talked to them or paid them any attention. They were taken care of, but only in a manner they

perceived as both demeaning and alienating. These were the elderly parents who desired a quick death. Given what was initially thought to be the ideal Hindu value of depending on sons in old age, it is ironic that the most truly miserable elderly parents were the very ones who objectively were completely dependent upon a son (i.e., those with no property or income).

DISCUSSION

This analysis demonstrates that, although the changes that have occurred in urban Nepal have not altered the nature of household composition, they have altered the nature of social and economic relations within the family. Today's elderly adults are trying to adapt to a new and changing set of constraints and conditions facing them and have had mixed success. To the extent that they have been able to retain property and income, their situation has been relatively favorable. For those without it, however, the situation is less than satisfactory, despite their living with a son or relative. The key issue, therefore, is the degree to which elderly people in the decades ahead will be able to control property and income.

Economic conditions in Kathmandu (and Nepal) with respect to unemployment, low wages, and inflation make it increasingly difficult for both elderly parents and their sons to make ends meet, a situation unlikely to improve over the next two or three decades. With high population growth rates and a deteriorating physical environment in the hills, massive urban growth is expected (Goldstein et al., 1983) which can only exacerbate unemployment and low wages. At the same time, the sons of today's elderly parents will have less property than their fathers due to division through inheritance and the need to use what they do inherit for special large expenses such as sickness or a daughter's marriage. It seems highly probable that, as today's adult sons reach their 60s and 70s, proportionally fewer will own land and houses. Thus, the vulnerability of elderly parents will likely worsen. Although pensions or savings programs will certainly take on increasing importance in the years ahead, these depend directly on stable employment, decent wages, and either low inflation or cost-of-living increases, all of which will be difficult to achieve. It seems likely that there will be ever increasing numbers of elderly parents who have neither property nor pensions nor savings in their old age. Given the already difficult choice facing sons regarding the allocation of their meagre income between their nuclear family and their parents, and given the

inability of poor Third World governments such as Nepal to mount substantial social service programs, it is likely that more and more elderly people will be unable to live their latter years in a secure and dignified setting. We suggest that this phenomenon is not limited to Nepal but will be found in other non-Western developing countries once research begins to focus on intrafamilial relations, particularly among the less well-to-do.

The findings presented in this paper also raise questions about a number of tacit assumptions inherent in the theory of modernization and aging as it is usually expressed with respect to the Third World. First, it has shown that the elderly Nepali in our study are not passive figures simply being acted on by exogenous changes, but rather are themselves part of a dynamic process. For example, the attitudes of elderly parents have undergone major changes in terms of the value of sons in old age (and thus receptivity to family planning), the need for independent income in old age, and the need to plan for the future of their wives after they die. Second, it has illustrated how the impact of change varied among different subcategories of elderly adults, implying that to treat elderly people as a homogeneous group can only distort reality. In our study those with good jobs and property faced very different circumstances than those unemployed or without property. Third, it suggests that the idea that modernization *creates* problems may be oversimplistic. In every society there are inherent structural conflicts and tensions, and these are magnified when rapid change alters fundamental segments of the initial system. Thus, although the elderly parents in this study were unanimous in their belief that today's sons do not support and respect their parents the way sons did a generation ago, and although it is easy to lay the blame for this on modernization or Westernization, in actuality many of the same tensions and conflicts elderly people now describe were present in the traditional setting. The recent social, economic, and political changes in Nepal have not only created new problems between parents and sons/daughters-in-law, they have exacerbated old ones by altering the balance of powerful social and economic forces that traditionally acted as a restraint on their open expression. Fourth, although many of the changes commonly associated with modernization have led to a decline in the condition of elderly people in Kathmandu, we suggest that the main source of the problems now facing them is not change or modernization per se, but rather the increasing poverty of Nepal. In fact, one might argue that it is the

failure of these supposedly modernizing changes to increase the economic vitality (development) of Nepal, rather than the social and political transformations they have wrought, that is causing the situation of elderly people to deteriorate. It is tempting, therefore, to speculate whether the widely reported successful adaptation of elderly people in Japan (e.g., Palmore, 1975) might not be an artifact of Japan's economic success as much as of distinctive aspects of Japanese culture.

Finally, our findings question whether the focus of modernization and aging theory on total societal transformation is unnecessary and misleading. It is unlikely that Third World countries like Nepal and India will ever modernize totally in the sense the theory of modernization and aging suggests; yet this does not in any way imply that fundamental changes have not taken place. Obviously they have. To infer from the high percentage living in rural areas or the presence of many extended families a lack of impact of modernization is not only incorrect, it is dangerous. It deflects attention from what appears to be a deteriorating situation for at least some of the Third World elderly people who, it should be noted, already comprise the majority of the world's elderly population and whose numbers are increasing more rapidly than those in the industrial countries (Goldstein & Beall, 1982).

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