

## **A Sociological Perspective of Ageing in Kashmir: A Case study of Srinagar**

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The India's aged population is currently the second largest in the world. The proportion of elderly in India's population is 8.6 percent and likely to increase significantly in coming decades. However, Jammu & Kashmir estimates around 7.4 percent elderly population. The share of India's elderly population is projected to climb to 19 percent by 2050, leading to 323 million old people as per census 2011. Recent theoretical discussions in social gerontology have revealed around two main themes, namely the social integration of the aged and their segregation in the society in which they live. The old people used to be integrated into the family and society, and they are now being increasingly segregated. Issues related to old age are multi-dimensional, being physical, mental, social and economic. In this backdrop, the present paper focuses on social aspects of ageing. Issues like respect/care, loneliness needs to be looked through the experiences of old people. The survey method has been used to collect the data from Srinagar city. The inclusion criteria for sample were based on different demographic variables like gender, residence, income, age stratification, marital status and living arrangements. Structured interview schedule and observation were the tools for data collection.

**Key words:** Ageing, Care, Support, Loneliness, Family, Modernization.

The study of ageing involves different explicit theoretical frameworks. Psychological and physiological perspectives focus upon the changes that happen to individuals. However, to understand the social context of ageing, both for groups and individuals, theories derived from sociological perspectives are most pertinent. By understanding the social context of ageing we look at questions concerned with the adaptation of individuals (a micro scale approach) and also questions posed at the macro scale (i.e., concerns with the impact of ageing upon social structures and vice versa). Gerontology is the science concerned with the study of ageing. Within this broad

area of study, there are three main perspectives towards the study of ageing: the biological, the psychological and the social. The present paper focuses on social aspects of ageing. Issues like respect/care, loneliness needs to be looked through the experiences of old people.

The earliest formulations in social gerontology focused on micro level theories of ageing, such as activity theory, disengagement theory and continuity theory in which main focus was on the individual as the subject of interest and explore psychosocial and sociological factors that improve the understanding of variations in outcome for elderly individuals. From more sociological vantage point, sociologists use macro level theories to understand ageing at societal level. Early macro level studies of ageing included modernization theory and age stratification theory. Given the complexity of social gerontology, it seems unlikely that a single perspective will adequately explain the experience of ageing. Bytheway argues, “We need, as gerontologists, to recognize the ageist assumptions which underpin many of our theoretical perspectives upon ageing. He argues that we need to develop a theoretical base, which breaks free from the ageism implicit within popular culture, if we are ever to be able to understand how people manage and experience age and to be able to evaluate the social context within which this takes place.”<sup>1</sup>

There is a common view, generally, that the aged in India enjoy power, authority, respect and security. The social status of an elderly person is determined by several factors such as physical health, economic status, marital status, level of education, position in the society, etc. However, with the advent of industrialization there has been a significant change in the family system in particular and social structure in general. Joint families disintegrated and small nuclear families emerged where the young couple finds no time to look after their old parents. The elderly happen to be the main sufferers of the changing social values and family system. In today’s context of modernization and its associated developments, it is necessary to know the perceptions of the elderly about the care and support provided by their children and also to understand perception of younger generation towards them. The old therefore find it difficult to adjust with the modern ways of living of their young children. In this backdrop the present paper is an endeavor to understand social context of ageing mainly concerning respect/ care and loneliness in Srinagar city.

Family is the fundamental institution of the society. Families or households are those molecular units of society through which life continues from one generation to the next. The analysis of the family from the functionalist perspective reveals that family performs its function in the society. Among the Kashmiris, the family had a special significance. It is a primary group that is considered to be nearest, dearest and intimate of all groups. This group is always accessible and ready to offer help in times of crisis. Be it a financial or emotional or any other type of help, and there is always a feeling that it is a duty and in fact a privilege to volunteer such a help. The family as a group is more important than the individual members who constitute the group. The main functions of the

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family mainly were procreation of new members and maintenance of old members but now it has lost this role. The impact of modern society has declined this holism to a certain degree. It is seen in the present paper that a section of Kashmiri society has undergone changes owing to the modern waves. This change of traditional family system to modern system is the direct reflection of commercialization, monetization and urbanization of the Indian economy and society.

Modernization identifies large scale social change and historical processes, such as technological advances and changes in modes of production, as the creators of new roles and statuses for people (including older people) and their families. Modernization theory explains how specific social and technological changes create particular social and cultural effects for older people (and others) as societies modernize over time. The jumping-off point for modernization theory is the assumption that there was a golden age of the aged: preindustrial societies where elderly people were revered for their wisdom. Cowgill and Holmes writes, "The basic thesis of modernization theory is that as society moves from rural to industrial, the position of older people deteriorates as urbanization and industrialization combine to undermine the extended family and replace it with the nuclear family as the primary unit of society and isolate older people from both society and the family. The process of modernization was defined by four parameters: improvements in medical technology, the application to the economy of science and technology, urbanization and mass education". Cowgill and Holmes argued that improvements in health care led to an ageing of the population. "Urbanization attracts young people from the rural areas, resulting in a breakup of the extended family.

### **Contextualizing the Issue**

#### **(A) Ageing**

Human life, in all its stages, is blessed with growth and development which in later stages results in ageing. Ageing is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and is associated with physical, psychological and socio-economic factors.

Different sociologists and psychologists have defined the concept of ageing or elderly in their own way. Some emphasize on chronology and others on physical capabilities. However, it is also subject to the constructions by which each society makes sense of old age. In the developed world, chronological time plays a paramount role. The age of 60 or 65, roughly equivalent to retirement ages in most developed countries is said to be the beginning of old age. In many parts of the developing world, chronological time has little or no importance in the meaning of old age. Other socially constructed meanings of age are more significant such as the roles assigned to older people, in some cases, it is the loss of roles accompanying physical decline which is significant in defining old age. Thus, in contrast to the chronological milestones which mark life stages in the developed

world, old age in many developing countries is seen to begin at the point when active contribution is no longer possible. Therefore, in view of the above discussion, the definition of old age could be understood under the three main categories:

Chronology

Change in social role and

Change in capabilities

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## **B) Research Orientations**

The problems of ageing have drawn the attention of national and international organizations only in the last three or four decades. Though from the 16th century, several European authors have made systematic thinking about the patterns, process and meaning of ageing (gerontology) and also made efforts to ameliorate, control and prevent the various problems of the aged. The problems of ageing differ from individual to individual based on the socio cultural, economic and health factors. Views of the aged and ageing among different religious, ethnic and cultural subgroups influence the ageing process. In this regard Emile Durkheim writes, "so long people of any class, age, gender and creed are closely knitted with social bond, they are hale and hearty and feel lesser the pinch of ageing in case of senior citizens. The moment the senior citizens feel socially isolated and disintegrated from social bond, they begin to experience fast ageing which becomes a problem".

Recent theoretical discussions in social gerontology have revealed around two main themes, namely the social integration of the aged and their segregation in the society in which they live. The old people used to be integrated into the family and society, and they are now being increasingly segregated. Issues related to old age are multi-dimensional, being physical, mental, social and economic. Failing physical and mental health, economic insecurity, isolation, neglect, abuse, fear, boredom, lowered self-esteem, loss of control and lack of preparedness for old age are some of the common issues related to older persons which need attention.

According to Lawrence Cohen "Since 1970s, gerontological writing in India has been dominated by a powerful and seldom challenged narrative of the decline of the Indian joint family and the consequent emergence of old age as a time of difficulty". Furthermore Mishra, states that the impact of industrialization, westernization and urbanization has weakened the integrity of joint family that leads to the negligence of the role and status of elderly persons. As a result, old people take step

forward to join old age homes. Thus, due to the technological development tremendous changes in lifestyle of younger generation has taken place. There are various factors responsible for this change

1. Housing shortage
2. Increase in work participation of women
3. Dependence and poor health which leads to loss of self-esteem.
4. The elderly lose his/her friends.

In this regard, D'souza also observes that change in living arrangements, family structure and mode of sudden retirement adversely affects the old and that the old people are in increasing proportions losing the status and security which they enjoyed in the traditional Indian family structure. There are various ways to explain the changing living arrangements. There exists a conversion theory of family structure which states that in largely rural traditional societies, families are essentially extended, either horizontally or vertically, where as in modern industrialized societies, the independent nuclear family predominates. This theory believes that there is a natural progression of events as economic development expands. To quote Goode "Whenever the economic system expands through industrialization, family pattern changes, extended kinship ties weaken, lineage patterns dissolve, and a trend towards some form of the conjugal system generally begins to appear that is the nuclear family becomes a mere independent kinship unit".

In the contemporary, changing Indian family context, elder care and abuse of any form are intertwined. It is invisible, unattended, unnoticed, unacknowledged and under-reported. Lowenstein and Daatland (2006) found that "norms about elder care functioned more as guidelines, and actual care provision was determined by situational factors such as competing demands on the family's time. Parental needs such as declining health, functional limitations, increased age and widowhood influenced help. The nature of the inter-personal relationship among parents and adult children" affected help to fathers, whereas reciprocity governed care provision to mothers."

Among the various problems of elderly, the economic dependence is the major one. National Sample Survey conducted in 2018 in India in general reflects a greater degree of financial insecurity among the aged. Inadequate financial resources were indicated as one of the major problems of Indian elderly. It is truer in case of female elderly. While examining economic sufficiency, Singh et al established the fact that financial problems are more seen among widows and among elderly in nuclear families.

The state of mental health of the ageing population is of considerable concern. Loneliness is one of the major concerns for the elderly people. It creates tension and anxiety among them. The problems of loneliness among ageing population differ from individual to individual. Help Age India, 2014 surveys reveals that Economic dependence (45%) and emotional dependence (46%) were one of the main reasons for abuse of the elderly in India. Based on this study, among the persons who seek institutional care, the lonely elderly comes in first category.

Such investigations have been more or less conducted on breaking down of kinship and family organizations which has the elderly in the state of helplessness, isolation, and economic dependence. While examining the perception of the aged themselves on their status in family and community in the wake of changing societal structure, it is found that aged feel to have lost their status due to old age and a few others lost status due to their retirement from work. In nutshell, the status of aged in the changing social structure has been investigated by social scientists from different perspectives. Such investigations have been more or less conducted on breaking down of kinship and family organizations which has the elderly in the state of helplessness, isolation, and economic dependence.

**Methods, Data and Field Work:**

Qualitative data has been used in this study. The survey data collected from selected areas in Srinagar district during 2018 has been analyzed. For the study purpose, Srinagar city in Kashmir was purposively selected because of its urban nature. Three areas within Srinagar district were selected for the study, because of the heterogeneous nature of population. It was targeted to personally interview 150 elderly people from selected areas, 50 from each area. Preliminary visits to the study area before initiating the household survey helped in establishing good rapport with respondents. With the help of key informants, the households with eligible respondents were identified and personally interviewed using a structured schedule. Care was taken to ensure privacy as far as possible during interviews/data collection. The sample distribution is given in table 1.

Characteristics	Category	Number
Area	Rajbagh	50
	Hawal	50
	Razgerteng (Dalgate)	50
Age	60-70 years	62
	71-80 years	59
	81 and above	29
Occupation before superannuation	Working in government/private sector	40
	Business/ personal or associated	55
	Non-working	55
Gender	Male	79
	Female	71

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Marital Status	Married with spouse	60
	Widow	40
	Widower	41
	Unmarried	9
Living arrangement	With children	100
	With only spouse	40
	Without children and spouse	10
Total		150

Table 1: Distribution of sample

### Findings

#### Respect and Care in Old Age

One of key themes which emerged out of the field was respect and care. The care provided by family members or care givers. The questions related to this theme were asked. The responses depict that 56% of the elderly were not getting as much respect and care from their children, whereas 41% of the elderly reported that they do get the same kind of respect and care from their children; however, 3% of the elderly are found to be silent about the care provided by their children. A possible explanation to this kind of silence is that they were not getting proper care and support or that they could not say anything because if they complain, they may be denied even the present minimum care and support being given. Further, an attempt was made to look at the background effect on the respondent's opinion regarding their children. By looking at categories of age groups, it becomes clear that more respondents from the 'oldest of the old', namely those aged 80 and above years (94%), group reported that their children provide as much respect and care as they used to provide to their own parents. However, more elderly respondents from the 'young-old', namely those aged 60–69 years (42%), felt that they were not getting as much respect and care from their children as was provided to their parents. This kind of perception could be taken as an example of the generation gap, societal and value differences between parents and children, which has been on the increase over the last 10–20 years due to modernization and urbanization. The elderly from the oldest of the old group have reported that they get more care and respect from their children because of the fact that their children are relatively older than the children of the elderly from the young-old group. The generation gap between the oldest of the old and young-old is large. A decade or two ago, children were more likely to show respect and care to their parents in old age, but this situation has changed over time and is reflected in the way the elderly from the young-old

age group are not getting proper care and respect from their children, as they had provided for their parents. Sometimes it is found that after the son's marriage, it becomes very difficult for parents to adjust with their son's new family. Often elderly men adjust more easily because they do not have as much direct contact with the daughter-in-law as the female household members who are at home most of the day. In the new family setting, the power goes to the daughter-in-law and the son often neglects his parents because he is busy with his new family. The elderly people living alone reported that they do not receive respect and care from their children as compared to the elderly living with children in joint families. A large proportion of elderly respondents with a low standard of living and who were economically independent felt they did not get care and respect they deserved from their children as compared to those with a high standard of living and dependent status. Often if the elderly live with their children, it means their children take care of them as well as show respect. On the other hand, children of elderly parents with a low standard of living may not be able to afford their parents' care and thus are unable to keep their parents at home, forcing the parents to fend for themselves and become financially independent. About 60% of elderly respondents felt that their children are providing them with as much respect and care as they used to give their own parents, while the remaining feel they were not respected and taken care of as much as they should be.

### **Perception of elderly towards Loneliness**

The change in the family structure along with the transformation of finance management in the family results in elderly people losing their relevance and significance in their own house, and increased feelings of loneliness sweeping over them. This has a detrimental influence on their psychological health and can lead to depression. Mental health is also affected by psychological abuse: threat of physical harm, humiliation and generally making the elderly person feel unwanted.

Results depicts that out of 40 respondents who have worked in government or private sector, 80% feel loneliness in old age and 20% do not feel. In case of females from the same group, out of 15 respondents 66.66% feel loneliness and 33.34% do not. Among the non-working males, out of 5 respondents, 40% feel lonely and 60% do not. So far as the females from the same group are concerned, out of 50 respondents, 50% agree that loneliness is main problem in old age and 50% do not agree. Among the business class males, out of 55 respondents, 59.18% feel loneliness in old age and 40.82% do not and out of 6 females from the same group, 50% feel lonely in old age and 50% do not.

Out of 30 respondents from Rajbagh area, 86.66% feel loneliness in old age and 13.34% do not feel. In case of females from the same group, out of 20 respondents 75% feel loneliness and 25% do not. Among the males from Hawal area, out of 27 respondents, 48.1% feel lonely and 51.9% do not. So

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far as the females from the same area are concerned, out of 23 respondents, 56.52% agree that loneliness is main problem in old age and 43.47% do not agree. Among the males of Razgerteng area, out of 22 respondents, 54.54% feel loneliness in old age and 45.46% do not and out of 28 females from the same area, 35.7% feel lonely in old age and 64.3% do not.

Data throws light on responses of respondents towards loneliness of elderly. It shows out of 30 male respondents from group I, 43.33% feel loneliness as the main problem of old age and 56.67% do not feel. In case of females from the same group, out of 32 respondents 46.87% agreed that loneliness is sole reason for problems in old age and 53.12% do not agree. Among the males from group II, out of 34 respondents, 73.5% feel loneliness and 26.4% do not. So far as the females from group II are concerned, out of 25 respondents, 52% agreed and 48% do not. Among males from group III, out of 15 respondents, 86.6% agreed and 13.34% do not and out of 14 females from the same group, 71.42% feel loneliness and 28.58% do not.

Study shows that out of 35 married male respondents, 54.28% feel loneliness in old age and 45.72% do not. In case of females from the same group, out of 25 respondents 40% feel loneliness and 60% do not. Among the widower males, out of 40 respondents, 75% agreed that loneliness is the main problem in old age and 25% do not agree. So far as the widow females are concerned, out of 41 respondents, 63.41% agree and 36.59% do not. Also, data shows among unmarried males, out of 4 respondents, 50% agree and 50% do not and out of 5 females from the same group, 40% feel lonely and 60% do not.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

History reveals that different societies have undergone changes at different stages like, in the cases of, ancient society into feudal society, feudal society into capitalist society, military into industrial society, traditional society into modern society. Modernization is one of the important factors of social change. Modernization is not a philosophy or a movement with a clearly articulated value system rather it is a process of change. As a consequence of change in economy, the society simultaneously underwent changes in values, beliefs and norms. Today, the term modernization is given a broader meaning. It is described as social change involving the elements of science and technology. However, sociologists examine it in terms of 'differentiation in quality of life' that characterizes the modern societies. They explore new structures created to perform new functions and/or new functions assigned to old structures. Indian society at the time of independence had a deep-rooted tradition but it also wanted to become modern. There were people who wanted a traditional way of life; there were others who wanted to see India emerge as a modern state having no links with the past. There were yet others who were for some kind of compromise or synthesis between tradition and modernity.

Family which is the basis and universal social structure of human society has undergone certain change. Despite many positive contributions of modernization for the development of nation like education, introduction of organized sector, commercialization, monetization, urbanization, industrialization, it has at the same time diminished traditions and customs. The social rules in traditional Indian society were based on unity and dependence on family. Every member of the family was dependent on the other, especially the economic dependence. Family in traditional society was more than simply a social unit in which the group was placed above the individual. Commercialization is an economic process that includes the development of markets in land, labor, capital and commodities. Increased technological inputs in production and monetization in commodity and labor markets accelerated social change. Thus, commercialization and education put little emphasis on the traditional values and importance is given to consumption level as markers of social status. In this regard, it is clear from the data that elderly from higher income groups have least decision-making power as compared to middle- and low-income groups in their families as children of upper-income families (from Rajbagh area in present study) either prefer live in nuclear families or stay out of their home (India/abroad). In such a situation they take their decisions on own and according to their convenience. Parents of such children usually live alone with few servants. Thus, upper strata of Srinagar city are more exposed to global world as compared to middle and lower strata in which still decision lies in the hands of elderly.

Older people had a sense of honour and authority in earlier period. The decision making in the family and the community were mostly assigned to them. They were revered for their experience and wisdom. The transition to a modern society and disintegration of the joint family led to the loss of the traditional authority of older people in decision making. The study of D'souza (1989) also observes that change in living arrangements, family structure and mode of sudden retirement adversely affects the old and that the old people are in increasing proportions losing the status and security which they enjoyed in the traditional society. This description again highlights the point that the respect of elders by the younger generation has lost anywhere especially among upper income groups. But the impact of contemporary society on younger generation in general i.e., from all income groups is not an exception.

Loneliness which is the major problem in old age is another observation of the present study. The responses of upper income group towards loneliness are more than other groups. This is owing to the fact that they have no one with whom they can talk or share their feelings, ideas, thoughts etc. They spend most of the time in reading newspapers and watching television. Such a finding can be justified by the fact that the elderly from higher income group mainly from Rajbagh area in this study interact least with the people from outside. They are cut off from neighbors or from society mainly due to their sub-culture. However, the sub-culture of middle- and low-income groups from

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Hawal and Razgerteng area shows 'we feeling' among its members. People often visit their relatives, neighbors, friends etc. Thus, elderly feel less alienated and distracted from family and society. In this regard Emile Durkheim writes, "so long people of any class, age, gender and creed are closely knitted with social bond, they are hale and hearty and feel lesser the pinch of ageing in case of senior citizens. The moment the senior citizens feel socially isolated and disintegrated from social bond, they begin to experience fast ageing which becomes a problem".

The findings of the present study again show the feelings of loneliness was different between genders as a majority of the females are non-working and usually remain busy in household activities and never had the feeling of having retired from work as against the males whose status feeling was associated with their work status. As a result, the problem of loneliness is found more in males. The problem of loneliness is found more among elderly who had lost their spouses. Be it male or female. Results show the increasing tendency of loneliness in widow/widower than married and unmarried elderly people. Losing of spouse is often one of the difficult challenges in life, whether the spouse dies in middle age, old age or somewhere in between. The surviving spouse (widow/widower) is compelled to face many challenges in life without their partner and thus are prone to diseases like depression, anxiety etc. The death of a spouse in old age is known to have profound effects on the well-being of the widow/widower and is an event which provokes important life changes.<sup>0</sup>

It is important to acknowledge that the effects we found were very small, although consistent across all three loneliness dimensions. We take this to mean that those effects are real and that loneliness is a fairly universal experience across demographic categories. Data are also provided by a large sample of individuals of different ages and from a large number of different countries, provided statistical power to fully explore effects. Thus, findings provide new insights about how culture moderates the effects of age and gender to predict experiences of loneliness. They, thus, are of importance for those who wish to develop public policy surrounding loneliness and/or design interventions for loneliness.

Finally, it is pertinent to mention that the problems of aged need to be looked from all perspectives i.e., at Governmental level, societal level or individual level. While as Government and Non-Government organizations have undertaken various welfare means for upliftment of old age people, a special attention is essentially needed to make available old age homes or day care centers etc. This measure will take care of the old age people residing in posh areas who otherwise have to live in complete isolation as they have no opportunity of either any interaction with neighbors, relatives and friends. At societal and individual level, the adjustment mechanism is need of an hour as A.M Shah puts it in right words, "The household organization is undergoing stresses and strains in modern times and it is undergoing a process of adjustment so as to survive. This process of

adjustment is encouraged by education and well-informed public debate and discussion. Both the elderly and youth need to arrive at a new understanding, for which both need a new socialization.

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