

Jagriti Gangopadhyay

Culture, Context and Aging of Older Indians

Narratives from India and Beyond

 Springer

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Jagriti Gangopadhyay

Message

The main aim of this book is to expand the social gerontological discourse within India and Canada. By providing a comparative narrative of subjective experiences of growing old, intergenerational relationships and gender roles among older Indians in both these countries, this book intends to highlight the cultural commonalities, differences and exchanges between India and Canada. Additionally, by highlighting the policy challenges being faced by older Indians in both these countries, this book also hopes to contribute to policymaking as well.

The author is indebted to the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute in mentoring comparative work between India and Canada and for extending their support to this book as well. It is very encouraging for an early academic to receive such support from the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute for doing research, and I am immensely grateful for this opportunity.



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About the Author

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Intersections Between Culture, Context and Ageing



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Life expectancy is increasing around the globe. Development of medical care, new drugs, and improved sanitization and hygiene facilities are attributed as the major factors for the rapid rise of life expectancy (Brown, 2015). India too is witnessing an increase in its life expectancy. As per the National Health Profile (2019), life expectancy in India has increased from 49.7 years in 1970–75 to 68.7 years in 2012–2016. Additionally, the survey also notes that life expectancy for males is 67.4 years and females it is 70.2 years. An increase in life expectancy, however, does not guarantee a better quality of life. Studies on the elderly in India are mostly quantitative in nature and focus on issues such as later life sustenance and mental and physical health problems. A more nuanced understanding of the experience of growing old, caregiving arrangements, filial obligations, network ties and gender norms requires more discourse in the Indian demographic, sociological and gerontological literature.

The main aim of this book is to highlight the intersections between culture, context and ageing. To achieve this goal, the studies in this book are located in multiple sites to indicate how different cultural practices and contextual factors play an integral role in shaping the ageing process. Through studies located in different groups of sample population such as older adults living in multigenerational households, old age homes, with spouse, living alone and in transnational settings, this book demonstrates the complexities and subjectivities involved in the experience of ageing.

The other aim of this book is to provide an insight into various intricacies and dynamics associated with intergenerational relationships. Apart from focusing on older adults, this book also through interviews conducted among co-resident and non-resident adult children discusses how filial obligations and caregiving arrangements are formed in a globalized and neoliberal India. Highlighting different forms of intergenerational relationships such as multigenerational living, virtual care and co-residing with an unmarried adult child, this book examines how filial expectations are constructed among the financially stable older Indians as well as the older Indian diaspora.

This book lies at the intellectual interface of social gerontology and family sociology. Hence, in addition to unpacking the everyday experiences of growing old and filial ties, this book also links major theoretical models from family sociology and social gerontology to the empirical data collected in the different sites. Since the discipline of gerontology has often been critiqued for lack of theory building (Achenbaum & Bengtson, 1994; Birren, 1999), this book with the intention of addressing this research omission has applied different theoretical models in each of the studies to explain the significance of theory as well as expand the scope of the discipline, social gerontology in India.

Finally, sociological and anthropological studies on older Indians have mostly described them as detached, disengaged and dependant (Brijnath, 2014; Lamb, 2002, 2009; Vatuk, 1990). By offering a detailed understanding of how ageing is constructed and absorbed by older Indians across the globe, this book is an attempt to alter the general perception of ageing in India.

The next sections of the chapter explain in detail the main objectives and methodologies of the book. In the process, the chapter also provides an elaborate reflection of the author's subjective experiences during fieldwork. Finally, this chapter ends with a brief framework for each of the other chapters of this book.

Population Ageing and Living Arrangements in India

Population ageing is gradually becoming a worldwide concern. Demographic forces such as increasing life expectancy and rapidly falling fertility rates are contributing to a growing bulge in the age group of 60 and above. While this ageing could be seen as a symbol of medical advancement, it simultaneously makes it necessary to provide economic support to the aged. In particular, population ageing remains

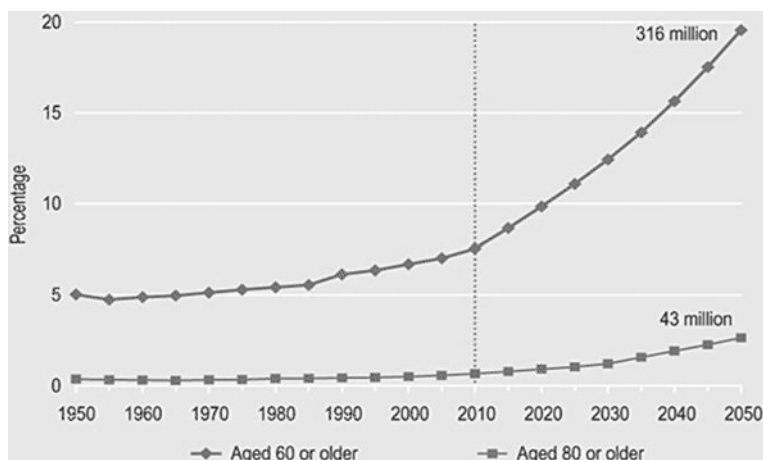


Fig. 1.1 ESA, 2009. World Population Prospects: The 2008 revision. New York, NY, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division

a major challenge for the developing world as these countries continue to adjust to the growing demographic bulge of the older population against the backdrop of shifting cultural norms around family and caregiving. In this, India is no exception. According to the Census (1991–2011), while India's older population (ages 60 and above) comprised 57 million older adults in 1991 (6.6%), the same increased to 104 million in 2011 (8.6%). In addition to the Census of India, a study by the United Nations of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2009) also highlights the growth of India's older population. Figure 1.1 summarizes the findings of this study. It traces the change in the older adult population from 1950 to projected scenarios until 2050. As mentioned, India's demographic scene is witnessing an increasing share of an ageing population (60 years or more). The following figure demonstrates this demographic phenomenon.

Recent projections also suggest that India's older adult population (60 and above) will rise from 8% in 2015 (~ 60 million) to 19% in 2050 (approximately 300 million) and by the end of the century, the elderly would comprise 34% of India's population (UNFPA, 2017). With the steady rise of the older adult population in the country, there have been growing concerns about economic security and support for older adults. Unlike the older adults in the developed world, older Indians continue to remain economically active (e.g. small businesses, farm, cultivation and animal care) since alternative sources of income such as pensions are lacking (Barik et al., 2015). Lack of economic security and a stronghold of male-progeny preference (wherein sons inherit ancestral property and family homes) make it more likely for the older adults to co-reside with adult offspring (more often male). Though there have been debates around the continuity of extended families in India due to a declining dependence on agriculture and the rise of urbanization and individualism, recent data reveals that a majority of older Indians continue to co-reside. For example, the India Human