

CULTURAL ASPECTS OF THE SOCIALIZATION OF ELDERS IN INDIA

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The article explores the unique Indian model of socialization of the elderly, where aging is understood as spiritual elevation, not decline. The article analyzes religious, family, and social mechanisms that support this approach, as well as modern challenges such as urbanization and family breakdown. Adaptive cultural strategies are identified, and it is concluded that the Indian experience is valuable for developing models of decent aging in a global context.

Keywords: socialization of the elderly, cultural gerontology, joint family, Ashram system, respect for elders, urbanization, cultural adaptation.

КУЛЬТУРНЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ СОЦИАЛИЗАЦИИ ПОЖИЛЫХ ЛЮДЕЙ В ИНДИИ

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В статье исследуется уникальная индийская модель социализации пожилых, где старение осмысляется как духовное возвышение, а не упадок. Анализируются религиозные, семейные и общественные механизмы, поддерживающие этот подход, а также современные вызовы — урбанизация и распад семей. Выявляются адаптивные стратегии культуры, и делается вывод о ценности индийского опыта для разработки моделей достойного старения в глобальном контексте.

Ключевые слова: социализация пожилых, культурная геронтология, совместная семья, система Ашрам, уважение к старшим, урбанизация, адаптация культуры.

Introduction

In the context of global population aging, the study of cultural models determining the position of older adults in society becomes increasingly relevant [1]. India presents a unique example of a civilization where, over millennia, a comprehensive system for the socialization of the older generation has developed, based on principles of veneration, integration, and spiritual authority. In contrast to the widespread narrative of decline prevalent in the West, the Indian cultural paradigm views old age as a stage of increasing wisdom and social significance. The purpose of this work is to analyze the religious-philosophical foundations, family-domestic practices, and modern transformations of this system, as well as to assess its resilience in the face of socio-economic changes.

Religious and Philosophical Foundations

The cultural perception of aging in India is rooted in religious teachings which, despite their differences, demonstrate a consensus regarding reverence for elders [2]. In Hinduism, the Ashrama system plays a key role, dividing life into four stages: Brahmacharya (student life), Grihastha (householder), Vanaprastha ("forest dweller"), and Sannyasa (renunciation). The Vanaprastha stage (beginning around ages 50-60) conceptualizes aging as a transition from material duties to spiritual and mentoring ones, thereby ensuring continuity of purpose and status. The principle of "Pitru Devo Bhava" ("Parents are like Gods") elevates the care of parents to the level of dharma (righteous duty) and a source of spiritual merit. In Sikhism, the practice of "Seva" (selfless service) includes caring for the elderly in gurdwaras as an act of piety, emphasizing the interconnection between social respect and spiritual growth [5]. Similar attitudes, present also in Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, and Christianity in India, form a strong consensus, turning respect for elders into a civilizational value.

The Family System and Everyday Rituals

The traditional joint family serves as the primary social unit ensuring the integration of the elderly [4]. Within it, grandparents perform active roles as knowledge keepers, mentors, arbitrators in disputes, and primary caregivers for grandchildren. Their authority is reinforced by a system of daily rituals: Pranama – a blessing ritual where the younger members symbolically touch the feet of their elders; meal hierarchy – the elderly are served food first; communication protocols – the use of respectful forms of address, prohibition on raising one's voice, transformation of disagreements into requests for advice. These practices, repeated daily, internalize respect and confirm the status of elders as key figures in making important family decisions (marriage, education, financial matters).

Social Spaces and Public Interaction

Respect for the elderly is also institutionalized in the public sphere. In public transport, seats are reserved for them, which is the norm rather than the exception. In queues, their place is yielded. Strangers address them using kinship terms ("uncle," "aunt," "grandmother"). Sacred spaces, such as temples and specialized Vanaprastha ashrams, provide the elderly with roles as spiritual leaders and mentors, turning later life into a period of deepened religious practice and transmission of wisdom [4, 6].

Modern Challenges and the Crisis of the Traditional Model

Rapid urbanization, labor migration, the spread of nuclear families, and the influence of individualistic values have led to a systemic crisis of the traditional model [1]. The prevalence of elder abandonment has reached alarming proportions: according to various

estimates, up to 70% of elderly Indians face neglect or abandonment, with 82% of abuse cases occurring within the family. Key factors are: geographical separation of families due to migration; economic pressure on the "sandwich generation"; housing constraints in urban apartments; and property disputes, underlying 40% of parental abandonment cases. This has led to an increase in psychosomatic illnesses among lonely elderly, whose condition is comparable in health harm to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Adaptation and Institutional Responses

The culture demonstrates resilience by adapting traditional values to new conditions. Digital socialization: video calls become a form of virtual "pranama," family councils are held online, the elderly master the role of digital content creators (YouTube, WhatsApp), sharing knowledge. Legal reinforcement: The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act (2007) obliges children to support their parents, provides for special tribunals, and protects property rights. Government and public initiatives: pension schemes (IGNOAPS, PMVVY) are being developed, a network of old-age homes (both charitable and paid) is expanding, as well as the National Program for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE), covering 713 districts [3].

Conclusion

The Indian model of elderly socialization, based on the concept of aging as spiritual elevation and reinforced by a complex of religious, family, and public practices, has faced serious challenges in the era of modernization [2, 4]. However, as the analysis shows, the culture does not abandon its fundamental values but transforms them, finding new forms of expression through digital technologies, legal mechanisms, and social welfare institutions. This experience of adapting ancient principles of dignity, respect, and integration to a modern context is of significant interest to the global community seeking ways to ensure quality of life in the context of universal population aging.

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