

Growing Old in Helambu: Aging, Migration and Family Structure Among Sherpas

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Tibetan culture views becoming old in a positive way, as a time when the cares and worries of managing a household are lessened and shifted to one's child or children. Aging is seen ideally as a process of disengagement from everyday worldly concerns. It is a time when persons devote more time and attention to acquiring merit by religious activities in preparation for the future, i.e. for the rebirth that follows death. Although all of one's productive and household work does not usually cease, the worries associated with the struggle for subsistence should decrease substantially. Ideally the elderly should live their later years as respected members of extended families in which their children look after the day to day activities. Tibetan values and norms, moreover, hold that one's parents in particular, and the elderly in general, should be treated with kindness, consideration and respect. Tibetans, for example, frequently say things like:

pha ma'i bka' drin gsab dgos red
One must repay the kindness of one's parents.

Sherpa society, despite its unquestioned inclusion in the broad category of Tibetan culture, appears to deviate markedly from this. Two ethnologists who studied Sherpa society in Solu-Khumbu have suggested that the status of the elderly there is low. Ortner (1978), for example, wrote that a basic conflict in Sherpa society pits parents against their children, and that parents when they become old are left propertyless and abandoned. She sees this as one of the "great tragic themes of Sherpa culture" (47), and observes:

In real life, as one gets old and one's children marry away; as one's property disperses bit by bit with each of their marriages; as one's physical powers, including one's sexuality, wanes, and as the social structural realities of lay life are such that in fact one is not taken care of by one's children but is left to fend for one's self... (1978:52).

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Haimendorf (1978:87) writes that "An occasional casualness towards aged parents though by no means frequent, mars to some extent the otherwise pleasant picture of Sherpa family life."

Several possible explanations exist for this apparent contradiction. First it is possible that Sherpas are not "typical" examples of Tibetan culture and the current "status" of the elderly there is merely a reflection of their different traditional value and normative system. While no cultural "ideal" such as that regarding the status of the elderly in Tibetan culture is ever completely realized with respect to all individuals, the Sherpas seem to deviate markedly. Other Tibetan societies for which data exist do not exhibit this pattern. In Limi, a remote Tibetan speaking area in N.W. Nepal studied by Goldstein (1975, 1976, ms.), only 3 (of 26) males over the age of 50 lived alone in the village of Tsang. One of these was a monk who was a Tibetan refugee, another a man recently separated from a polyandrous marriage, and the third an unmarried man who had recently returned from years in India. The elderly there were treated with dignity and held positions of authority and had relatively high social status. In DHINGA, another Tibetan area 3 days south of Limi, none lived alone. Ross (personal communication) reports that the 21 persons over 60 years of age reside in 13 households of which 10 include married children with their spouses and children, 2 contain unmarried children, and 1 female has no separate household, residing instead with her employers.

Limi and DHINGA, however, are areas more traditional than Solu-Khumbu. This leads to a second possible explanation for the contrast, namely, that important changes which have occurred in the recent past have influenced Sherpa society and culture and altered traditional patterns. The purpose of this paper is to present evidence collected among the Sherpas of Helambu supporting this second alternative. It argues that the current problematic status of the elderly in Helambu and Solu-Khumbu is the result of the indirect impact of modernization.

Over a six week period during July-August 1979, a pilot investigation on aging, activity and dependence was conducted in Helambu in the contiguous Sherpa villages of Norbugyang and Pemagyang (both pseudonyms) situated at an altitude of about 8600' about two days walk from Kathmandu.

These two villages together consisted of 75 households containing 373 persons of whom 257 were in residence at the time of our stay. A striking observation was the large number of elderly people living alone. Eleven households (15%) consisted of one elderly person, and in seven of these, the lone elderly person was over 70 years of age. Another 6 (8%) households consisted of an old couple living alone.

The study focussed on 37 persons over the age of fifty. Twelve of these were in their 50's; 11 in their 60's; 11 in their 70's; 3 in their 80's. Of these, 60% of the individuals over 60 and 73% of those over 70 resided alone or with a spouse, and 31% of those over 60 and 33% of those over 70 lived alone. This sample includes 86% of the persons 60 years or older living in the villages.

We endeavored to investigate and measure what the elderly do and what factors underlie their peculiar household structure. An activity-work survey of 30 different elderly persons aged 50 and over was conducted using 24 hour recall interviews on 15 different days during the peak agricultural season. This yielded a total of 69 person-days of activity recalls. The subjects in this survey were asked to enumerate all their activities and meals for the previous day. This was supplemented with spot-check direct observation. Since western time concepts are not well developed in this society and since very few persons had (and/or used) watches, the time dimension was organized according to the Sherpas' own division of daily time. They discussed their activities with reference to their four daily meals. For example, they would normally state they had worked in the fields from the 2nd meal (about 10 a.m.) to the third meal (about 3 p.m.). The time spent performing activities such as field-work was estimated based on the average length of time (as we measured it) between these culturally delimited meal times.

Sherpa work and activity were categorized into two general types:¹

1. PRODUCTIVE ACTIVITIES

- A. Heavy Work

- i. Agricultural field labor

Agricultural field labour during the period of observation consisted almost entirely of digging up potatoes. Sherpas use an iron hoe with an inwardly curved blade to do this. The handle is about 2 feet long and the blade about 2" x 12". To use this implement, the worker must bend over almost horizontally from the waist and dig in that position.

- ii. Carrying Loads

This involved either a basket of potatoes, or fertilizer or grass. The lightest load we spot-measured was 32 lbs. and the heaviest was 77 lbs.

iii. Wage Labour

This involved construction and carpentry work.

B. Moderate Work

This consisted of herding, milking animals, feeding animals, cutting loads of grass (but not carrying it back), carrying meals to the field for workers, collecting mushrooms in the forest, office work, weaving, etc.

2. HOUSEHOLD AND SELF-MAINTENANCE WORK

A. Heavy Work: Carrying water, leaves, firewood.

B. Moderate Work: Cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, sweeping house, etc.

Table I illustrates the heavy work performed by the elderly subjects in the study. Ninety-one percent of the person-days worked by men and 87% of those worked by women including heavy labour defined as at least one instance of either carrying a heavy load or fieldwork (see Table I). The data show also that there is no significant difference between the heavy labour patterns of elderly persons 50 years of age and those over 70 years of age. Elderly Sherpas of 70 years and over were as likely to do fieldwork and carry loads as those 50 years of age. The amount of hours spent at fieldwork is also instructive. When agricultural work was performed, the average number of hours worked was 4.1 hours/day for males and 3.6 hours/day for females.

Although stress tests and formal health surveys have not yet been conducted, a number of factors indicate good health status and physical fitness. Systolic and diastolic blood pressure did not increase significantly with age and the average blood pressure for males over 60 was 114/77 and for females over 60 was 125/86. Few of the elderly had arthritic enlargement of their fingers (Heberden's and Bouchard's nodes), most males had no finger joint contracture while half of the females did have finger joint contracture to the extent that they were unable to completely flatten one or more fingers. There was only one case of partial blindness (the 87 year-old man mentioned below) and one of deafness, and no overt senility at all. The elderly communicated cogently and had no apparent though or memory disorders. Only one male was too ill to perform heavy labour during the period we observed and he was hypertensive and, based on the symptoms he reported, appeared to have recently suffered a heart attack.

TABLE I
AGE AND SEX DISTRIBUTION OF THE NUMBER AND PERCENT OF PERSON-DAYS IN WHICH
HEAVY WORK (FIELDWORK AND CARRYING) WAS DONE

Age	Fieldwork										Carrying										Heavy Work (both field work & carrying)									
	50		60		70		80		TOTAL		50		60		70		80		TOTAL		50		60		70		80		TOTAL	
	(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)		(%)	
Males	5(31)	2(29)	4(44)	1(33)	12(34)	2(12)	1(14)	2(22)	0(0)	5(14)	1(6)	1(14)	1(11)	0(0)	3(9)	11(69)	5(71)	5(56)	2(67)	23(66)	14(88)	6(86)	7(78)	3(100)	30(86)	15(94)	6(86)	8(89)	3(100)	32(91)
Females	1(17)	4(44)	1(20)	0(0)	6(29)	3(50)	3(33)	1(4)	0(0)	7(33)	1(17)	2(22)	1(20)	0(0)	4(19)	5(83)	5(55)	4(80)	1(100)	15(71)	3(50)	6(67)	4(80)	1(100)	14(66)	5(83)	7(78)	4(80)	17(81)	

A typical day in the life of the eldest male in the village is illustrative of the vitality and self-reliance the elderly generally exhibit. Dorje Jakri is 87 years old. He had three sons and two daughters but all three sons have died. His wife died three years ago at the age of 80 and he now lives alone although his adult grandsons (son's sons and their families) live in houses adjacent to his in the village. He does all his housework and cooking, gets his own water and firewood and works in his fields although most of the land he owns is let out on a lease-basis. On the day, we interviewed him he indicated that on the previous day he had performed the following activities:

He got up late when others in the village were already up and about. He walked to the water tap near his house and got a full jug of water (about 35 lbs.) which he carried back to his household. Then he made a fire, boiled water and churned a pot of Tibetan style tea (tea with salt and butter). He reheated the previous night's leftovers (rice and potatoes) and ate that with the tea as his first meal. After this he went to one of his fields to dig potatoes. He carried back a load of about 32 lbs. and commented that he thinks he misses a lot of the potatoes since he is virtually blind in his left eye. He then walked back to his field carrying a load of manure which he spread on the field in preparation for planting radish. Then he returned home and spread out the potatoes he had carried back earlier to dry on the porch. After this he walked to the water tap, washed his hands and feet, returned home, and again made a fire. He cooked a pot of potatoes and ate them with salt and hot chili for his second meal. He also had one cup of locally distilled liquor (rakshi) with the meal. After washing the pots he again went to the field this time to plant radishes. He worked at this for three or four hours and then returned to his home where he repacked the potatoes he had left out earlier and carried them into the house. It was about 4 p.m. by then. He drank another cup of liquor and ate the leftovers from his second meal. He didn't go back to the fields to work any more and stayed home for the remainder of the day and cooked dinner in the evening.

Despite their high level of economically productive activity, their relative physical fitness, and their ownership of agricultural land, many elderly Helambu Sherpa overtly expressed unhappiness with

their lot. Several spontaneously volunteered that they wished they were dead and others commented that their children had abandoned them and that the young in general did not care about the elderly. We suggest that this unhappiness is in large part a result of a major transformation in the traditional Sherpa family system due primarily to long-term out migration.

Despite the emphasis both Haimendorf and Ortner place on the nuclear family as the heart of the Sherpa family system, it seems clear from a careful reading of these authors that extended family types traditionally were the cultural ideal. The two principal types of extended families known in the Sherpa literature are fraternal polyandrous families and stem families. Fraternal polyandry (two or more brothers jointly sharing a wife) is a family type found throughout most areas of Tibetan culture. According to Haimendorf (1979:68) it still comprised 8% of the marriages in Khumbu in 1957 and according to Oppitz (1968, as cited in Ortner 1978:173) it comprised 5% of those in Solu. Haimendorf, moreover, writes that Sherpas considered polyandry a "time-honoured and highly respectable device enacted to prevent fragmentation of property and foster the solidarity of brothers..." (Ibid). Fraternal polyandry accomplishes this because males in Sherpa and Tibetan society have demand rights to a share of the family's arable land. By marrying polyandrously, they leave this right in abeyance and avoid splitting the family estate. Goldstein (1971, 1975 and 1976) has discussed in detail the motivations underlying brothers' decisions to remain together (marry polyandrously) or marry monogamously, and it suffices to indicate that a key factor underlying a decision to split the family is whether brothers perceive that they can supplement their inherited land by other economic activities so that within a reasonable time they can attain a comfortable style of life.

In Tibet, and among Sherpas, another traditional pattern was for at least one son to remain with his parents in their natal home. This remaining son is expected to marry patrilocally and to care for the parents as they age. When his parents die, he inherits their share of land together with the house and other movable possessions. In most Tibetan groups it is the eldest son who remains in the natal homestead but among Sherpas, it appears to be the youngest son (Haimendorf, 1979; Ortner, 1978; and Lang and Lang 1971).

It is the youngest son remaining in the parents' house on whom a father depends for continued support, and such a youngest son is therefore usually most closely attached to his father (Haimendorf 1979:86).

Thus, a significant percentage of households in a Sherpa village are composed of three generations--

old parents, youngest son and his wife, and their children (Ortner 1978:20).

Traditionally, therefore, it was the expectation of parents in Solu-Khumbu that they would be living with at least one of their children in their later years and that they would control a share of arable land until they die. But if this is the case, the large number of elderly folks living alone or with a spouse in Helambu is anomalous as is the pathetic situation of the elderly reported by Ortner for Solu Sherpas:

Thus elderly Sherpa parents are ultimately more or less abandoned, or at least neglected and treated with some callousness (Ortner 1978:47).

Dr. Ortner (47) argues that the betrayal of aging parents is "a virtually inevitable reflex of the structure and developmental cycle of the Sherpa family as a tightly bounded corporation." This, in turn, she linked to the centrality of the nuclear family unit and the main emphasis placed on generational independence and autonomy. She writes:

The private-property owning, highly independent nuclear family is the "atom" of Sherpa social structure ... a whole range of cultural and structural factors emphasize the ideal autonomy and self-sufficiency of the nuclear family unit. Enconced in its own house and operating as a self-sufficient enterprise, the nuclear family is both the normatively valued institution and the statistically prevalent form (39).

The problem, as she sees it, develops when sons reach marriageable age and part of the family property must be transferred to them. She observes:

And while the whole process climaxes late in life, with the marriage of the last child, it begins to unfold much earlier, as each child's marriage cuts a slice out of the family and its estate. The parents, as we saw, try to forestall the disintegration of the unit as long as possible (47).

Ortner (1978:52) describes this process as one of bit by bit dispersement of property leading to parent-child conflict and ultimately abandonment of the now propertyless parents.

But, this is difficult to reconcile since we have already seen how both she and Haimendorf agree that extended families were the

norm traditionally. If fraternal polyandry was selected then there would be no division of the family property, and if a stem family was selected (with the youngest son remaining), the parents would not only retain their house but also both their share and their son's share. The elderly would be neither propertyless nor alone.

Dr. Ortner attempts to deal with this in passing by implying that children are inconsiderate and cruel to their parents even when they live in the same household, and that parents are victims. In other words, despite the inheritance and family norms, children simply abuse their parents who are portrayed as helpless beings driven out of their home. Since Dr. Ortner presents no data on the frequency of the elderly living alone, one can only take the statement of abandonment at face value:

For the inheritance rule is such that the youngest son will receive the parental house. He is theoretically obliged to feed and care for the parents out of this last share of their estate. In fact, however, this arrangement often works out badly for the old people - They are reduced to the status of dependents, and sometimes almost servants, in the son's household, and there tends to be friction between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The Sherpas are quite conscious of these problems, and seem to expect little from their children in their old age. They may instead retain a small piece of land and buy or build a small house, even an animal shed, for themselves, so as to remain independent for as long as possible ... Thus elderly Sherpa parents are ultimately more or less abandoned, or at least neglected and treated with callousness (46-47, emphasis added).

This argument that Sherpa parents are helpless and without rights to land and property vis-a-vis their children is surprising from another vantage point. Drs. Ortner and Haimendorf indicate that all males are copartners in the family land. Each has rights to a share of the family land. Thus, even if each of the sons marries and sets up an independent nuclear family, the parents should retain the parental home and a share of the land. If a stem family is established but then conflict develops and results in family fission, the son and father each would retain a share of the land and the father would legally be able to retain the house. This is the case throughout Tibetan society and was found in Helambu. Consequently, it is difficult to understand why there should be parents who are left "propertyless" in old age due to the callousness of their children since these children cannot legally abrogate the rights of the parents. Even, should conflict

occur in a stem family when a father is in his seventies and has already relinquished management control of the family to his son, theoretically the father still retains rights to his share of land -- either to work himself or lease or sell.

We contend that the current situation with regard to the elderly is not the result of structural contradictions inherent in traditional Sherpa (and by extension, Tibetan) culture, but rather is an artifact of indirect modernization that has transformed basic aspects of Sherpa culture and society. New economic opportunities have led to massive long-term and permanent emigration and have eroded the social position of parents by removing children who would normally live with them and by fostering individual independence vis-a-vis family unity and autonomy. As we shall argue below, new opportunities made children potentially independent of their parents and the natal village, while at the same time reducing the need or value to subordinate their wishes to the family unit. Let us briefly discuss these changes first in Solu-Khumbu and then in Helambu.

Nepal was closed to foreign travellers until 1951 and to mountaineers until 1953. Nevertheless, important changes had already begun to have an impact on the social and economic life of the Sherpa area of Solu-Khumbu fifty years earlier. The first Sherpas used in mountaineering as high altitude porters were recruited in Darjeeling, India in 1909 (Miller 1965:245) and it is clear that a number of Sherpas had already emigrated to Darjeeling by that year. Miller (Ibid) cites a figure of 3,450 Sherpas resident in Darjeeling District in 1901, 5,295 in 1941 and 8,998 in 1951. Haimendorf (1979: 4) has estimated that by 1947 there were about 7,000 Sherpas in Darjeeling District.

The main impetus for this migration appears to have been the wage-labour opportunities offered by portering on mountain climbing expeditions and trekking parties, recruitment for which centered in Darjeeling until Nepal opened in 1953:

How Sherpas came to settle at Darjeeling is not known in detail, but it would seem that at first it was the prospect of trade which drew Sherpas to Darjeeling and Kalimpong and that the association with mountaineering enterprises occurred at a time when they had already established themselves in the Darjeeling District. The first of these settlers belonged perhaps to the wave of emigrants from Solu who were responsible for the establishment of Sherpa communities in the Nepalese districts of Bhojpur and Dhankuta as well as in the region immediately east of the

Nepal-Darjeeling border. But once the news of the earnings of expedition porters spread to Khumbu, many enterprising young men, some alone and some accompanied by their wives, went to seek their fortunes in Darjeeling. There are few families in Khumbu which cannot name one kinsman or another settled in Darjeeling and when I started to compile genealogies and family histories, I was told of the men and women living there (Haimendorf 1975:85).

To poor but energetic and adventurous young men, expedition work offered unique possibilities. Previously, a Sherpa without land or capital could not hope to attain more than modest prosperity even in a lifetime's hard work ... But a successful high-altitude porter could, in a single season earn sufficient cash to engage in some modest trade deals or buy his first plot of land ... A further complaint by villagers against expedition porters was that many of the younger men used their earnings largely for themselves though they continued to live in a household maintained by the efforts of their brothers who worked on the family's land without having any personal cash income (Haimendorf 1975:86-87).

The impact of these new economic opportunities and the associated out-migration have been devastating for traditional Sherpa family structure:

The growing importance of cash earnings and the corresponding diminishment of the Sherpa's interest in preserving a family's landholdings and herds undivided seems to have affected their attitude toward polyandry (Haimendorf 1979:00).

This new income, first in Darjeeling and later in Nepal, has played a major role in eliminating fraternal polyandry in Solu and Khumbu as a form of marriage and family. While the history of change in Helambu is not nearly as well known as that of Solu-Khumbu, it is particularly instructive. Fraternal polyandry appears not to have been traditionally present but extended families with the youngest son were and are still the ideal. It appears that substantial emigration from Helambu began much later than in Solu-Khumbu, probably only after the Second World War. The last 20 years, however, have seen large-scale, long-term out-migration primarily to

India. The creation of a vast network of mountain highways in India and a booming construction trade have produced the new opportunities. As was the case in the early period of migration in Solu-Khumbu (Miller 1964), parents in Helambu tried (and still try) to keep their sons and daughters from migrating to Kathmandu and India. But the draw of income, new skills, excitement and the avoidance of what young people say is the tedium and harshness of farming, have drawn away substantial numbers from Helambu. Thirty one percent of the villagers of Pemagyang and Norbugyang were living outside the village on a long-term basis. In the younger age categories this was even higher with 36% of those 30-40 and 35% of those 20-30 living in India or Kathmandu.

This migration has produced a tremendous disruption in the Sherpa family system. In Helambu, youngest sons who would otherwise have remained with their parents in extended stem families leave, and even though they often plan someday to return permanently, the likelihood that the traditional extended family ideal of the elderly can be attained has been seriously diminished. The independence experienced while living abroad makes return to a subordinate position in an extended family difficult for children. Even when such sons return, we suggest that their tolerance of and respect for their parents is diminished and conflict culminating in separation is more likely than in traditional times. High mortality among emigrant Sherpas has probably exacerbated this situation. Speaking of the Darjeeling Sherpas in 1957, Haimendorf (1975:85) writes:

Living in quarters little better than the old-fashioned coolie lines of tea gardens, and exposed to contact with the crowds of an Indian bazaar, many Sherpas feel victim to tuberculosis, venereal diseases and other infectious ailments. In the healthy climate and comparative isolation of their mountain homes they had developed no immunity against diseases common in Indian towns...

It is reasonable to suggest that more younger sons die in India than would have died had they remained in Helambu and this further reduces the number of families who can achieve the ideal situation.

The situation with regard to the elderly living alone in Helambu, therefore, does not reflect the traditional cultural pattern. Elderly Sherpas were living alone not because of traditional values and norms but rather because they had to. Massive emigration has precluded the realization of the extended stem family since the sons who should be living with the parents are either residing in India, have died untimely deaths there, or have experienced independence and do not wish to live under the direct authority and financial management of their parents.

Examination of the elderly living alone and as couples in Helambu reveals that many of them, in fact, have living children. Of 17 such households, 2 had no children (one was a nun) and for two there is no information. Of the remaining 13 households, 9 have living sons and the other 4 have living daughters. In many cases there were also married grandchildren and/or siblings in the village. This raises an important question. Since family life is valued, in cases where the youngest son is living in India or had died, why then don't the elderly live with their other sons, or with an adult daughter or a married grandchild? The extensive out-migration reported for Helambu cannot, in and of itself, explain the presence of so many elderly folks living alone bitter and unhappy about their "abandonment."

The answer to this question lies in the Sherpa's own definition of dependency. Since dependency and aging is discussed in a separate paper (Beall and Goldstein 1981), it will suffice here to indicate that dependency can be conceptualized etically (from the observer's point of view) as well as emically (from the subject's point of view). Etically, dependency is a neutral continuum concept indicating the degree to which the elderly receive goods and services from others. From the point of view of the actors, however, very different types of goods, services, situations, etc., may be categorized as pejorative dependency in different societies. The Sherpa example illustrates this.

As elder sons in Helambu marry and separate from their parental household, it was indicated that they receive a share of the land and set up independent nuclear households that are considered socially and legally distinct from their natal ones. Haimendorf (1979: 86) comments on this for Khumbu Sherpas:

Elder sons and married daughters may visit the parents off and on and bring gifts of food and beer on feast days, but only in exceptional circumstances will they work for their parents without receiving the usual wage.

If, after all the elder sons separate, the youngest son migrates to India or dies, the elderly couple is left alone. At this juncture, however, it is considered culturally inappropriate for the elderly to move in with other children even if invited. To do so would be to abdicate their independence and demean their self-esteem. It would mean leaving their own house and turning over their fields to their son (and daughter-in-law). It would mean becoming a powerless and authorityless appendage to the son's household. As in our own society, long-term dependency has a strong pejorative connotation. When the indirect impact of modernization produced substantial numbers of old folks in just such a situation, they opted to reside alone despite the fact that they did not want to live that way and

were lonely and unhappy with their fate. They are bitter about the recent changes that have caused this transformation but have themselves been unable to ignore or redefine their cultural definition of dependency to accommodate the new situation.² The cultural expectations and aspirations of the elderly in Helambu are incongruent with the new reality in which they are immersed. The consequence of this is the anomalous situation of elderly who are hale, healthy, productive, and economically not wanting, but psychologically and emotionally maladapted. Although it is not possible to comment with certainty about this issue in Solu-Khumbu because of the lack of empirical data, it appears likely that the current unfortunate state of the elderly there parallels that of Helambu.

Conclusion

The unhappy state of the elderly in Sherpa society has been reported by both Professor Haimendorf and Professor Ortner as a "flaw" in Sherpa culture. This paper argues that this is an oversimplification. The current status of the elderly in Helambu (and presumably Solu-Khumbu) reflects not "traditional" culture, but the indirect impact of modernization and the world economic system. Despite the fact that the hills and mountains of Nepal are not "modernized" by any definition of that concept, economic and political changes in the adjacent areas have seriously affected the social life of these residents. The new economic and life-style opportunities in India and Kathmandu have acted as magnets drawing away substantial numbers of young people. The elderly left behind are placed in a new and precarious situation where the old forms of social support and maintenance are disappearing.

This situation has wider implications for the elderly in Nepal and other Third and Fourth World countries as it illustrates the manner in which the social, economic and cultural life of rural, agricultural areas in Third and Fourth World countries are not immune to changes in areas contiguous to them. It points up the need for concern regarding the fate of the elderly in Nepal and other Third World countries in the years ahead. In 1970, 45% of the persons 65 and older lived in the Less Developed Countries but by the year 2000 A.D., this will reverse and 58% will reside in the Third and Fourth World (Hauser 1975). At that time East and South Asia will house about 100 million elderly, as many as now exist in the entire world. It is unrealistic to assume that just because countries like Nepal are primarily rural and agricultural, the elderly will be taken care of by traditional social formations. In Nepal, the example of the Sherpas may represent a rather frightening portrait of the future. Moreover, it could be argued that the wealth and physical fitness of the elderly in Helambu have softened the negative effect of indirect modernization and focussed attention on psychological well-being and happiness rather than on survival. In rural areas with less wealth, present and future modernization may pose a serious threat to the level of subsistence of the elderly.

Footnotes

1. The types of activities coded represent only those performed during the period of our study. Obviously, other activities must be included to represent the entire annual cycle.
2. It is interesting to note, however, that certain aspects of the cultural system do appear to be changing. Many of the elderly indicated in response to our queries that they thought small families were better than large families. Their rationale for this was that since one cannot count on children to "look after parents" when they are old, i.e. live with them, the less sons a person has the more land he retains when he is old, and the more security he has. It is not surprising that there was general feeling among the old and young that family planning and sterilization were a good thing.

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