

## **“Contribution and Importance of Aged Women in Society: Special reference to District Pauri Garhwal”**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION:**

The elderly are considered to be the main role players in the family and society which is the form of important human resource of our society. Since ancient times, the monopoly to make decisions in Indian society is held by the oldest member of the family. They had a significant place in family and society. Age was regarded as a symbol of prestige and experience and knowledge was acknowledged over-all in society and the young generation would also take advantage of their experience and knowledge. Elder's advice was accepted in life decision and in the, the family he had high position. For this reason all the members of society were expected to respect the elderly. Children were given good education and good Sanskars' (rites) by parents that he should give full respect to the elderly, obey them and think of and follow the good things he has told. The children learn good behaviour and thinking, practical education etc from the elderly of their home, such as grandparents, parents, siblings and other elderly relatives. It is believed that in the Garhwali society, younger family members will adopt the same kind of behavior as their parents did towards the elderly. Finally, when their parents reach old age, their children will behave in the same manner as they have seen their parents doing with their family's elderly people. The young learn good supportive and respectful behavior from parents and others of their generation has learning by emulation.

Since ancient times, also in the Garhwali society, the oldest member of the house is considered the head of family. They are given important position in social, religious and political activities, and the representation of family caste or community has also been done by elderly. It can be said that since ancient times, man has discovered the scientific rules of the social system, political system and economic system; the elderly have been doing the work of communicating them in the oral and written form to the next generation. These elderly people have been working as a bridge between knowledge acquired by us and our ancestors, but in today's changing environment, various aspects of social change have created a change in human family relationships. Today, urbanization, westernization, industrialization, sanskritization, secularization and migration have rapidly changed the traditional structure of Garhwali society. At the same time, there has been change in the heritage of our culture. In the place of the joint family, the nuclear family has taken place rapidly, due to which social relations have reduced the dignity of elderly people. Today there is a feeling of neglect and disrespect towards elderly in society. Long term experiences of the elderly are not being taken advantage of, rather they are being considered as a burden by members of society and family and by the younger generation.

Community includes the wider society, the local community family members, and friends and is central in to identifying concept of place and space. It surely has an impact on how ageing is experienced by individuals successful ageing is considered to be a key pillar of the foundation of a community.

'Rising importance of environmental gerontology over the past decades also fuels the discussion on an age-friendly community' (Lui et. 2009:119). Successful ageing demands older people's desire to feel included and useful. Chong et al. (2006:243) citing; "active engagement with an activity or with society." In the successful ageing strategy we seek an opportunity to develop and enable people from every age group to flourish. Several researches have shown that older people in addition to the financial contribution have also a greater involvement in community based organizations, democratic institutions and also to vote. We might even feel a renegotiation of public attitudes towards the ageing population. We even see that older people offer a potentially huge resource not just to the community but to the wider society through offering things such as child-care and supporting family by creating an informal economy of care.

Therefore a positive strategy must be approached for a meaningful community and successful ageing. A proper interactive engagement and healthy communication between these age groups must become the priority of the present generation.

**Aims of Study:**

The purpose of the research paper presented is to try to assess the contribution and importance of the elderly women in society. As much as the important sections are men in the society, the same is the case of women also whether it is the elderly women. The basis of the importance of this class is not only the biological existence but also a social cultural structure. Women play a special role in living between society and family. They are never retired from their work just as a man retires from the job and settles in the house and thinks that now are my days of rest, but the whole life of a woman is a struggle. She tries to fulfill her obligations till here old age or till she has physical strength and plays her part in social cultural programs.

**Research Area & Methodology:**

The present research work is a humble attempt to study the Contribution and Importance of Aged Women in Society within a limited area. The universe of the present study is the aged population (60+) in Pauri district of Uttarakhand. The selected population has been stratified into two main categories- rural and urban. In order to make a comparative study among the elderly women living in the village and urban areas, the data has been collected from the two urban centers, Srinagar and Pauri, as well as from 13 villages located nearby. The total sample size is 400- out of which 200 from two urban centres, and the remaining 200 (rural) from selected 13 villages-Sumari,Khola, Sarna, Bacheli, Dharigaon, Dhikalgaon, Srikot, Dhikoli, Bhandai, Dharkola, Dand-Aithana, Dobhaldhara and Chatkot. Schedule, interview and observation techniques have been used to collect reliable data and information.

Garhwali women have also contributed a lot to the social awakening like Gaura Devi movement of Chipko and Amrita Devi movement of Vishnoi. These women have contributed themselves to protecting nature and environment from being destroyed, as well as to other women also motivated by this contribution. 70-years-old Sangrami Devi of khemana village, who considered Gaura Devi as the inspiration for the Chipko movement, has also contributed a lot to the environment. Through several programs of the Dasholi village Swarajya Mandal’s environmental camps and plantation, she has planted numerous trees in her life and furthermore the woman desires to devote her remaining life to this work.

In the study of the life of older women in the study area, it was found that mostly elderly women are reducing their participation with their growing age. The reason for this is that some older women do not consider themselves capable of participating in social programs due to unhealthiness and some do not harmonize with the younger generation. The harmony means that the thinking of the younger generation is like changing times while the elderly are living their old age, with their old ideologies. Activeness of participation in social programs of older women is shown in table 1 below.

**Table 1: The Participation of Female Senior Citizens in Social Activities**

S.No.	Age Group	Rural Area			Urban Area		
		Total Respondent	Yes	No	Total Respondent	Yes	No
1	60-70	96(100%)	66(68.75%)	30(31.25%)	94(100%)	62(65.96%)	32(34%)
2	70-80	67(100%)	32(47.76%)	35(52.24%)	63(100%)	25(39.68%)	38(60.31%)
3	80-90	28(100%)	8(28.57%)	20(71.43%)	32(100%)	10(31.25%)	22(68.75%)
4	90+	9(100%)	-	9(100%)	11(100%)	-	11(100%)
	Total	200(100%)	106(53%)	94(47%)	200(100%)	97(48.5%)	103(51.5%)

The above table (1) show the participation of the elderly females in various social programmes according to ascending order of their age. Their participation in these social activities goes on decreasing as their age increases. The maximum participation in these social programs is shown by the age female in the group between 60-70 years. Similarly the female between the age group of 70-90 years shows a lesser participation in the social events than the earlier group whereas; the participation of the females between the age group of 90 and more shows zero participation.

One of the reasons for the lack of participation by these senior citizen females is also because of their physical weakness and health issues. In comparison to the participation of the female from the rural areas to that of the urban areas shows that there is more participation from the female in rural areas than the urban ones. The major reason behind this difference is that in the rural areas people still seek advice and demand the participation of the senior citizens, whereas there seems to be a lack of importance being given to the senior citizens of the cities. It shows that the people even today in the village areas follows all the norms and traditions, food and living habits in traditional way which enables them to still follow and believe the elder most members of the family as the head of the family, liable of all the advice and decision of the family, whereas most of the people in the city life follow modern tradition. They presume that the youth are more thoughtful than the senior citizens. They tend more towards the use of technology like mobile phones, computers and many more.

Since the youth can more easily operate and access these devices, and are globally connected to the outside world with the help of social media, this takes them away from their elders especially the senior citizens

who do not have a take on this technology. These make the adults especially those more than 60 years of age unacceptable to the city life and thus are given less importance which leads to their minimal participation in social activities.

**Table 2: The Participation of Senior Citizen Females in Household Chores**

Age Group	Rural Area				Urban Area			
	Total Respondent	Household chores	Supervision of grandchildren	Financial help	Total Respondent	Household chores	Supervision of grandchildren	Financial help
60-70	96(100%)	62(64.58%)	34(35.42%)	26(27.08%)	94(100%)	56(59.57%)	38(40.43%)	24(25.53%)
70-80	67(100%)	31(46.27%)	36(53.73%)	16(23.88%)	63(100%)	29(46.03%)	34(53.96%)	19(30.16%)
80-90	28(100%)	10(35.71%)	18(64.28%)	9(32.14%)	32(100%)	14(43.75%)	18(56.25%)	11(34.38%)
90+	9(100%)	-	-	2(22.22%)	11(100%)	-	-	4(36.36%)
Total	200(100%)	103(51.5%)	97(48.5%)	53(26.5%)	200(100%)	99(49.5%)	101(50.5%)	58(29%)

In table (2) the participation of female senior citizens in the household chores of the family has been analyzed according to their age in increasing order. In a survey it has been proved that in comparison to the females from the urban areas. The participation of the adult female in the household chores from the village areas is more than those women in the urban areas. This participation is 56% in rural areas whereas it is 45.33% in urban areas.

As shown in the earlier tables, the participation of female between the ages group of 60-70 years is more than the presiding age groups. Their participation decreases with an increase in their age. The reason behind this decrease in the participation is also because of their decreasing health, physical weakness and over-age because of which these women do not feel them to be liable of performing any household activities. More importantly, people after marrying off their children believes that all the works are now supposedly to be performed by the young generation. Initially their children prefer to take advice from their parents but slowly and gradually with passage of time these people start taking their own decisions and thus slowly neglecting the senior citizens. This results in the actual decrease in the participation of any activity by the adults especially by the people between the age group of 80 and more. Therefore, resulting in minimum involvement of senior citizens and, a maximum preference being given to the young generation.

**Table 3: The Participation of Senior Citizen Females in Solving the Health Problems**

S.No.	Area	Total Respondent	Participation of Senior Citizen Females in Solving the Health Problems	
			Yes	No
1	Rural	200(100%)	93(46.5%)	107(53.5%)
2	Urban	200(100%)	87(43.5%)	113(56.5%)
	Total	400(100%)	180(45%)	220(55%)

The given table (3) shows that the total participation of female senior citizens in solving the health problems in the rural areas is 46.5% whereas it is 43.5% in the urban areas. Elderly women in the rural areas make more contribution to the social and health issues in comparison to the urban areas. By contribution it means that they have a rich experience of health issues in village areas, and have also contributed to the cure of several of such issues.

They also know how to take care and bring up kids since they have also brought up their own children and have experience of such situation. They further teach the same to the women of young generation and also about several health issues regarding the babies, and provide several homemade remedies to their daughters and daughter-in-laws regarding certain diseases of the newly born babies and kids.

Some elderly females work as mid-wife’s. They are given more importance in villages rather than the cities, because people in the villages still follow and believe certain norms and traditions. In case of labor pain, these mid-wives are called as soon as possible in villages. In special circumstances when the labour cannot be completed by the mid wives only then the pregnant woman is referred to nearest hospital. People in the city areas have completely changed their mind regarding the mid-wives, they only prefer hospitals.

The mid-wife believes that they have the honors of working for the society, by doing their job and feel proud of themselves. The mid-wives are not only favored but also given much respect in the society. Infact, the government are giving special training to these experienced mid-wives who enhance their experience and job. But in present scenario even the villages are moving towards the hospitals for delivery, because the government has provided certain incentives schemes and health programs to improve the health and one such example is “Asha Worker”. This organization works for the pregnant women-including their connectivity to the hospital, from the knowledge of thier pregnancy till the date of the delivery, and the birth of the child, including its vaccination. The “Asha Worker” along with the women in labour is given economic help after the baby is born.

Some elderly women also perform occult arts and keep the knowledge of ayurveda and home remedies. For example the cure for jaundice through occubalim and ayurveda to or cure snake bites by chanting mantras etc. people visit such specialists from faraway places. Such women keep the cure a secret, but before dying pass the secret remedy to at least one of their family members.

At times the home remedies are not fruitful and does not completely cure the diseases, because of which the young generation who believes in immediate cure moves towards allopathic treatment and give more importance to hospitals. These young generations do not prefer to take any advice and decision recommendation from the senior citizens because of which the decision making habit of the senior citizens is close to zero level. The young people actually do not care to ask any advice from the adults because of which the senior citizens feel inferior to the young people.

**Table 4: Participation of Elderly Females in Religious Affairs**

S.No.	Area	Total Respondent	Participation of Elderly Females in Religious Affairs	
			Yes	No
1	Rural	200(100%)	125(62.5%)	75(37.5%)
2	Urban	200(100%)	114(57%)	86(43%)
	Total	400(100%)	239(59.75%)	161(40.25%)

In above table (4) shows that most of the senior citizens women participation in the religious affairs. Both the senior citizen male and female have an equal take in the religious issues and their presence is equally important, and is an honor for the religious functions. For example, they are deliberately invited in the wedding ceremonies since their absence in such function is desirable. Holy functions like chants and prayers; holy preaching and marriage function can only be performed in the best way with the presence of elderly women, since they are the ones who collect all the essential ingredients for such functions. They also teach the young generations how to participate in such rituals with full traditional values. It has been proved in survey that the holy ritual can be purely performed only in the presence and with the help of senior citizens, because they themselves have learnt the same from their elders and pass it on to the newer ones. The total participation of senior citizen women in the religious programs in the village areas is 125(62.5%) whereas it is 114(57%) in the urban areas, and those women who do not participate in the religious affairs includes 75(37.5%) in villages and 86(43%) in the city areas. The reason behind, those who do not participate includes their overage, physical weakness and health issues. Moreover, in the present study few elderly women believe that the young generations do not prefer to take any advice from their elder ones because of which they feel marginalized in such programs.

## II. CONCLUSION:

Even today, in the Garhwali society, the more important sections are believed to be of men as the community follow and believe in patriarchy. Woman plays a vital role in social and family life. After retirement, men sit in the house and think of resting, but the life of a woman has been a struggle and she does never retire. Older women play an important role in social program, household chores, solving health problems, panchayat and religious programs. They have more expertise in conventional remedies than the younger women and share and pass on their traditional knowledge and their experience with the younger generations. Women try to play an active part in the social cultural programs and household chores till they are old or till they have physical strength and are able to do so. The senior and elderly women have a significant role to play in the socio-cultural and family life of the society. Especially in traditional and rural societies. They have the authority and control over all issues which need experience and wisdom to advise decide and act upon. Their contribution to community life is therefore invaluable.

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