

Ethnicity and Ageing: The Anglo Asian Experience

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ETHNICITY AND AGEING : THE ANGLO-ASIAN EXPERIENCE

by

Donald Chandraratna

and

Michael Cummins



Social Welfare Research Centre

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FOREWORD

Care of the aged is a major concern of social welfare policy and with increasing numbers of elderly persons this concern is likely to remain high on the social policy agenda. An important aspect of the policy on aged care is the aim to develop a network of services which would enable the aged to remain in the community and lead as normal a life as possible for as long as possible. Residential care in hostels and nursing homes is seen to be the last, though often unavoidable, resort. A particular issue in aged care policy is the provision of services for the aged population in various ethnic minorities. Provision of ethno-specific services in the community, as well as in residential institutions, needs urgent attention. The creation and maintenance of informal support networks of relatives, friends and ethnic community organisations is an important part of service provision, but their importance needs to be recognised and encouraged at the policy level.

The report presented here records the experiences of life in retirement of a specific group of Anglo-Asian immigrants from Burma, India and Sri Lanka currently residing in Perth, Western Australia. The research for the report was commissioned by the Social Welfare Research Centre to Dr Don Chandraratna, Senior Lecturer in the School of Social work at the Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia. Dr Chandraratna, together with Mr Michael Cummins, conducted the research and wrote the report.

As readers will see, the authors give an interesting and informative insight into the lives of people who have succeeded in achieving a remarkably contented though modest life in retirement. This has been due in no small measure to the support those included in the study receive from the network of family members, friends and the church community in which they are actively involved.

The report raises some important issues for aged care policy. The authors provide strong evidence of the significance of informal support networks in the maintenance of elderly people in the community. At the same time they also point out that those networks are unlikely to be sufficient as people grow older and become frail. A 'partnership in care' of formal services and informal support groups will then be necessary to provide an adequate level and standard of care.

I am pleased that the Social Welfare Research Centre has been able to assist with this project and I commend it to our readers as an important contribution to a more informed public debate on this important aspect of social welfare policy.

Peter Saunders
Director
Social Welfare Research Centre
June 1988

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DON CHANDRARATNA

MICHAEL CUMMINS

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ABSTRACT

The ensuing analysis of ethnicity as a factor in old age exploits a body of data drawn from three ethnic population groups from the Asian region who now live in Perth. It provides an insight into how ethnic continuity in old age is evident in the migrants of the early post war years in Australia. Given the current concerns with multiculturalism and with old age, the convergence of these two areas is a high priority in social policy provision. The paucity of research into the ethnic aged from the Asian region prompted this project.

The high degree of westernisation, English language proficiency and urbanisation distinguish the Anglo-Asians from other migrants from the region. Nevertheless, the cultural heritage, ethnicity and religion are factors which they share in common with others. These common elements make the observations more than partially applicable to many ethnic groups outside the Anglo-Asians.

It was evident that background characteristics associated with the process of migration have a life-long influence. The strength of contacts with family, friends and church make the retirement years of Anglo-Asians in our sample contented and happy. Moderate expectations regarding financial and material comforts in retirement are evident in these population groups. The popular expression of old age as a social problem cannot encompass these groups on the strength of data from this study. However, the future for these people in 'very old' age seem unplanned and bleak, and consideration should be given to the provision of ethnospecific accommodation services.

CHAPTER 1

ETHNICITY AND AGEING: A SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

There is virtually a consensus of opinion among academics, social policy analysts and bureaucrats alike that old age¹ is a social problem in the industrialized nations. There is, in a sense, a romantic appreciation of the traditional *gemeinschaft* community and a feeling of despair about its demise in the wake of capitalist industrialization. The problem old age in relation to quickened pace of modernity has become a central focus of gerontological research. It has become so popular today that some consider it as a growth industry². Unlike some societies where the structural arrangements guarantee the social dominance of elders, considerations of technology, material advancement and power have relegated the aged to outer domains of society. It is to be expected that in the existing differential access to both material and non-material resources of our society the latter group suffers negative discrimination. Where the apportionment of resources is arbitrated by younger groups in society, the aged tend to lose out in the transaction. Since the activities of the modern industrial society are determined primarily over the issues of production and reproduction the elderly become a marginalised group due mainly to their meagre productive value in the economy. In retirement they are forced to live in communities where the resources are directed towards serving the existing labour force and the reproduction of a new one, and this marginality is further accentuated. In Australia, as Russell (1981:13) states, 'The aged group ... are neither socially dominant, nor ... hold the reins of domestic power into the adulthood of their children'.

The increased attention focused on old age in Australia has an obvious demographic as well as an economic basis. Demographically, the proportion of aged persons in the population make-up of the nation has increased significantly due to the improved standards in the quality of life affordable by many of its citizens, such that an increasing proportion of people now live longer³, as is shown in Table 1.

In economic terms, as a result, the proportion of the national product that is consumed by the older cohort by way of welfare has grown rapidly over the years. Some interest groups which are alarmed by the increasing dependence on the state claim that efforts to deal with distress create further distress, consuming more of the national product. It is true that social policy generally raises expectations which in turn creates new and further demands. It is also true that this process, if unimpeded, creates confusion, uncertainty and frustration⁴. These claims tend to demand social policy measures to strengthen what is left of the traditional family system to care for the aged in our society.

1. There is no unified theory on ageing. It is generally accepted that ageing occurs through the interaction of biological, psychological, and sociological processes over time. A bureaucratically defined age category may not be identical with a culturally given definition of old age (see Callan 1986:96).

2. Estes (1974) refers to the ageing enterprise as 'a congeries of programmes, organisations, bureaucracies, interest groups, trade associations, providers, industries, and professionals that serve the aged in one capacity or another'.

3. From 1947 to 1982 the population aged 65 years and over has more than doubled from 604 900 to 1 401 500. The median age of this population has increased from 71.1 years to 72.2 years. It is estimated that between 1982 and 2001 the aged population will double again to three million. The overseas-born component of that population group is expected to increase threefold by the end of this century, ie, 1 in every 5 Australians 65 years and over will have been born overseas.

4. For an extended discussion see Mishra (1984).

TABLE 1: Proportion of Australian Population
Aged 65 and over

Year	1966	1971	1976	1977	1978	1979	1981	1982	1983	1984
Percentage	8.5	8.4	8.9	9.0	9.2	9.4	9.7	9.9	10.0	10.1

SOURCE: Year Book Australia 1981 p.88
Year Book Australia 1986 p.100

AGEING IN SOCIAL GERONTOLOGY

In this preamble to our research it is useful to recount briefly the conceptualization of old age from the different perspectives of social gerontology. Given the need for scientific stature in the new discipline, much of the available data is grounded in hard objective facts. The lack of integration of the older generation into the mainstream society is viewed in terms of an aggregate of low income, loss of employment, lack of productivity, poor health and low frequency of familial interactions (Shanas et al 1968:426).

In Australia the debate regarding low income was fuelled by the Henderson Poverty Report of 1975. Low income is related to low levels of pension payments. The concentration on objective data has resulted in a consensus of opinion that the national health bill, institutional facilities, home help services and income maintenance benefits are overly consumed by the older generation. Such evaluations have contributed towards the negative images regarding old persons, conferring in addition an unwarranted passivity to the subjects. The data that has been gathered and documented through much of the objectivist kind of research has given rise to a variety of interventionist programmes. Unfortunately, these programmes designed by the experts on old people very often neglect the actions and reactions of the aged to the harsh structures and ideological supports that underpin them. As Russell (1981:281) says, 'The definition of old age as a period of biological decline which produces certain special needs legitimates the creation of segregating policies and programmes and thereby obscures the structural aetiology of old age deprivation'. The likely outcome of such an attitude regarding disadvantage is to blame the victim for societal problems and in the case of old age is to condemn the individual for lack of foresight in planning for later years.

Negative stereotypes are socially constructed. They usually come in clusters such as poverty, disability, old age, loneliness, welfare-dependence and death. To receive aid for any of these disadvantages, however deserving one may be, often entails a sense of shame and degradation that comes from public admission of such weakness. 'In a society that places high value on self-reliance, hard work and thrift, those who obtain aid from others will be subject to some degree of stigma' (Jones 1977:76). The fact that the old are treated differently by the media accentuates this perception. Institutions and practitioners who attend on negatively valued groups receive low status and low recognition. Doctors who attend to these groups derive little professional satisfaction and attendant staff require only minimal qualifications compared with their counterparts in similar jobs (Kane and Kane 1978:915). Ambulance drivers take emergencies seriously if they involve old people (Sudnow 1971). As a consequence of these factors the aged are relegated to the far corners of the national consciousness (Summers 1975:81). Since much of the gerontological research is grounded in objective data it fails to bring out the subjectivity of the respondents in the way they negotiate the harsh structures of daily living.

The problem of old age cannot be seen in isolation from the general political and economic structures of wider society. Societal ideologies that incorporate the facets of old age legitimate the structural relations. The economic and political reality is an important dimension that cannot be left out because the majority of the aged suffer a

variety of disabilities due to their position in the stratification system. As de Beauvoir (1970:16-17) argues, 'The class struggle governs the manner in which old age takes hold of a man ... Any statement that claims to deal with old age as a whole must be challenged for it tends to hide this chasm'. To see the aged as a classless disabled group is bereft of a proper sociological imagination. For example, this is obvious in retirement from work where the affluent self-employed remain in the workforce for a much longer period⁵. Again, in matters of health, the quality of health care varies in relation to one's position in the class structure of society. Our complaint would be that those who use objective data do not go far enough in terms of the scope of their analysis.

As is the case in many other areas of social living, the phenomenon of old age has no unified theoretical body of knowledge which it can claim as its own. It is only possible to demarcate the major research emphases. There are numerous references to mobility, both physical and social, material well being, social services, and personal and family relationships. The disengagement theory holds that the inevitability of a reduction in social and personal interactions is proportional to altered 'physiological capacities'. The activity theory of ageing, on the other hand, holds that the continuation of activities is important for maintaining satisfaction, self esteem and health in later life. Psychological theories of ageing are often the extension of personality and developmental theories into middle and later life (Busse 1977). The variables that figure in these concepts and theories whilst claiming to explore the subjective aspects of old age fail to do so, given the allegiance to 'objectivity' in social research (Wood and Robertson 1976:303).

Paradigmatic shifts in general sociology have yet to be reflected in the research on the aged. In the developed analyses of social life the central focus is on the meanings and quality of interactions rather than the rates and ratios. Obviously specific interactions need to be studied empirically but it is a difficult exercise, given the fact that empathic understanding is clouded by class, culture, ethnicity and a number of other ideological factors. Nevertheless, such an understanding is crucial because human interactions are experienced within a social practice that is underpinned. By those constitutive meanings we mean the shared assumptions, definitions and conceptions which structure the world in particular ways for the actors concerned (Fay 1975:76). As Berger and Luckmann (1967:149) point out, society exists as both objective and subjective reality, and the individual and social are engaged in one social dialectic. A good analysis of old age and especially one that explores ethnicity as a significant variable cannot overlook this methodological issue.

ETHNICITY AND AGEING

In Australia the ethnic revival of the recent past and the popular use of the term ethnic must be traced to the arrival of non-Anglo-Celtic immigrants since the second world war (Jupp, 1984). The focus of the debate on multicultural Australia has shifted from population numbers to that of the consequences of those numbers for the various institutions of society (Encel et al 1985:2).

Ethnicity is a difficult concept to define but operationally it is used to recognise groups which are not based on class, occupation, organised economic interest, or gender. Encel et al (1985:10) point out, however, that ethnicity provides the basis for a critical analysis for exposing inequality and disadvantage just as much class analysis has provided in traditional sociological discourse. If it is combined with a class analysis it would offer a helpful dimension that demystifies cultural and ideological concepts such as pluralism and assimilation.

Cultural homogeneity, which until recently was both a social and a political policy, is being officially wound up, but its hegemonic character and effects have not been totally obliterated. The vigour with which it was pursued for over a century by the state as well as other sectarian interest groups makes it difficult to be erased from the national consciousness. Both the superordinate and the subordinate groups in society still carry the scars of that thinking to varying degrees. Ethnic particularism of recent times is a challenge to the hegemonic definition of a cultural reality

5. Twelve of the OECD countries do not require substantial retirement from all work to be eligible for pension benefits. Five specify complete disengagement. Only 1.3 per cent of the total labour force are aged persons in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1982).

which was state sponsored⁶. The paternalistic contempt implied in the drive towards cultural homogeneity makes the present ethnic revival similar to the revaluation movements where members of ethnic groups are attempting to place a higher value on their self-identification in exchange relationships with others (Banton 1983:196).

Cultural homogeneity has had a political ally in nationalism. Discounting ethnic loyalties becomes a pre-requisite for a national identity. Either directly or indirectly it is the state that promotes ethnic consciousness and identity in various groups. For example, the subjects of this study, the Anglo-Asians, have become ethnic groups in their own respective countries due to the actions of majority communities which are often state-sponsored. Like other status groups they are involved in the struggle for economic, political and social advantages. Having shunned the majority community values either voluntarily or involuntarily they take on an identity of their own. Once formed and identified as such by outsiders, ethnicity generally involves a past-oriented group identification involving origins and some conception of cultural and social distinctiveness. Such identifications are emblematic, having names with meaning both for members and analysis. Though the features of any ethnic group, such as language, phenotype, economic activity or religion may not be that different from others, it is symbolic ethnicity that constitutes the basis for identity formation. With time there develops a transgenerational commonality with the existence of national heroes. They are not real but they have iconic value with symbolic ties of blood and/or colour. 'And so when we talk about ethnicity we are dealing with something basic and fundamental in the human condition, something that cannot be clearly quantified and expressed in a series of regression equations' (Zubrzycki 1977:133).

IMMIGRANT GROUPS, SOCIAL POLICY AND THE ETHNIC AGED

Assimilation

There are several models of social policy regarding immigrant minority groups in pluralist societies. The 'melting pot' concept assumes that given time, migrants cease being ethnic and are melted into a dominant culture. Early post-war migration policy in Australia was based on this policy of assimilation and tacitly accepted the notions that little value is attached to distinctive cultural patterns and that individuals are eager to embrace the dominant culture. To the degree that assimilationist policies are viable, the assumption is that with ageing the individuals will reduce their attachment to their original ethnic traditions and with it their subjective identification will decline. Simultaneously the life chances of the younger generation will increase because of exposure to the dominant culture. Assimilationist ideology asserts that cultural and racial diversity is unpalatable and potentially dangerous. Public pronouncements in Australia in the post-war years accented the British way of life; at stake for the migrants was a hierarchy of good assimilators. The brunt of assimilation belonged to the immigrants, for the host society needed no preparation with regard to opportunities and avenues for sociability (de Lepervanche 1984:178).

The assimilationist policy supports the views of Anglo conformity as the ideal. It comes as no surprise therefore that those ethnic groups that headed the assimilationist 'success lists' were northern Europeans and English speaking Anglo-Asian groups. Though no one has explored the latter groups in any depth it is doubtful whether their cultural success has been accomplished by material success. The pressures of assimilation and the possibility of a deviant status in the event of abnormality puts an enormous burden on the individual. The fact that some have not coped is evident in their person, the family and the circle of friends. These problems do manifest in old age in some of the immigrants.

We must take note of the fact that a person's ethnic saturation may differ from another person of the in-group and also its expression varies as life progresses through critical situations. Expressions of ethnicity can be inhibited or encouraged in a migrant's life experiences with effects in old age as well. Assimilationist policy assumed a generational shift in ethnic saturation, the most obvious being the lessening of the ethnic saturation with succeeding

6. 'The whole tenor of Australian policy towards migrants in the post-war years has been an "assimilationist", and paternalistic at that, in that it was always intended that migrants should fit into the Anglo-Saxon heritage of Australian society and were told how to do so. A homogenous society was considered supportive of the egalitarian ethos' (Jayasuriya 1977:48).

generations. This has not been an easy experience for the first wave of migrants who now live in retirement. The pride and satisfaction that came with the Australianization of their children is regretted sometimes in old age. The 'breaking away' of children from the 'old country', the accented speech of the parents, the old values and beliefs, have de-stabilised the family structure of immigrants which to many of them is the cornerstone of life satisfaction in old age. It is also conjectured that 'an immigrant will progress over the years to an apparently stable level of assimilation but ... at some later time will be at a noticeably lower level ...', so regression to a lower level of assimilation occurs' (Richardson 1974:88). The questions in our minds are whether there is a nexus between ageing and ethnic distinctiveness, and, if so, does the policy of assimilation create some dilemmas for migrants in their later years?

Assimilationist ideology demands no special provisions for the ethnic aged. They fall within the scope of the general welfare ideology which locates old age problems within the domain of the individual. There are no special provisions that take care of the ethnic aged. The strong association between welfare services and charity in Australian society linked the migrant aged with religious organisations in the absence of a great deal of state provision (Kewley 1965, Jones 1977:83).

Pluralism and Multiculturalism

Theories of pluralism in effect mark the euphoric state attendant on the end of ideology. They highlight the existence of allegedly equal groups engaged in peaceful competition (de Lepervanche 1984:185). Pluralists hold that ethnic groups maintain distinctive cultures, forms of social organisation and identities, while participating in general mainstream society. The problems which were associated with assimilation and explained away by recourse to the personality of the individual immigrant now become cultural differences that need to be tolerated and respected.

At the outset, it is important to note the unfavourable aspects of pluralism. It is possible to invoke biological and genetic reasons to explain ethnic differences and cultural variation. If social relations are built on such casual links related to primordial forces, disharmony rather than harmony is likely to be the outcome.

With regard to ageing, pluralism offers both negative and positive theoretical possibilities. If descent rules are followed to the extreme, the differences of regional, cast, religious and other criteria will make the social space available for intimacy very narrow. Moreover, the negative effects of minority status become accentuated by the addition of such defining criteria. The aged migrant is discriminated against, for the sake of argument at least, not only by the host society but also by certain groups in the ethnic world. Such multifactorial differentiation makes any kind of welfare provision problematic.

What many social analysts favour is cultural pluralism as distinct from structural pluralism. Cultural pluralism, to Jean Martin (1976), must be 'controlled, modest and unthreatening'. This robust pluralism according to her provides a viable and human model for the future because '... it recognises ethnic structures as forming one subsystem of roles and relations, among many others, through which individuals in our kind of society try to match their inner-selves - their identity - with lifestyle and behaviour' (Martin 1976:136). The policy of multiculturalism is in effect cultural pluralism within one structural unity⁷ (Zubrzycki 1977:136). However, by equating ethnic groups with other interest groups and social organisations there is a tendency to portray Australian society as a collectivity of pluralistic units. Seeing the social collectivity in these terms diverts attention away from inequalities and the underprivileged nature of certain parts of the whole. Martin (1981:81) notes this weakness of cultural pluralism and remarks that 'Sector inequality makes a mockery of the notion of cultural pluralism. To the extent

7. Zubrzycki explains this position well in his paper to the First National Conference on Cultural Pluralism and Ethnic Groups in Australia thus: 'If we are to promote multiculturalism then we must be clear in our own minds that our goal should be cultural and not structural pluralism. To avoid the creation of an ethnically stratified society policies have to be devised to assist immigrants and their children in social advancement outside their own communities without, at the same time, eradicating everything that ethnicity stands for in terms of primordial ties and attachments' (1977:136).

that ethnic culture becomes associated with socio-economic inferiority, we will develop a culturally, as well as structurally, stratified society.' It is true that ethnic revival has increased the social and political awareness of ethnic groups leading to a lessening of the negative stereotyping of ethnic populations. The aged ethnic persons are able to retain the pride and honour that is their due in the native countries thereby enhancing the link between adults and younger generations.

Old Age and Disadvantage

The heterogeneity of today's aged population means that there is a marked differentiation among those who are old in our society, mainly in terms of their socio-economic standing. The Henderson study in 1975 came to the conclusion that 'The current Australian population contains a sizeable and increasing number of overseas born elderly people whose welfare is of growing concern' (Henderson 1975:17). While one may not deny that ageing and its associated social problems consequent upon the biological decline of the organism are universal challenges facing all in society, their impact is felt unequally by different socio-economic groups. The spokespersons for the ethnic minority groups are critical of incrementalist social policy measures as inadequate and insensitive to the needs of the aged in their ethnic communities. This is especially true, they claim, regarding smaller groups which are socially invisible or do not figure prominently in the sectarian power struggles for financial and material assistance.

Ethnic leaders maintain that their aged members have special needs mainly because of their additional deficits. Decision makers on the other hand, argue that the special needs are met by generalist social policy measures. Yet there is very little information, if any, regarding the specific needs of the ethnic elderly to make competent judgements. Whatever policy measures are proposed therefore, seem to be done on the basis of political expediency or at best on stereotypical generalisations far removed from the real concerns of the needy.

If it is accepted that ethnicity is an important factor in the analysis of social differentiation in modern pluralist societies, then what constitutes that ethnicity needs analysis. In matters regarding age and ageing, we need to group the different cultural attitudes towards age and ageing. It is evident that biological imperatives are handled differently by ethnic groups. Their unique cultures, family types, friendships and lifestyles make quite a difference in the way the biological fact of old age is negotiated by the members of the respective communities. Obviously, unlike the majority of community members, their problems are complicated by the additional economic, social and psychological burdens of living in a new society. However, we need both theoretical and empirical validation of elements such as health, income, life satisfaction, social interaction, intergenerational negotiations, and family solidarity indices to consider how the ethnic factor may intervene as a mediating variable in understanding the needs of the aged in our society.

Minority Status

The subjective conception of old age has been interpreted under a variety of headings: minority status, deviant status, stigma and marginality. Minority status is conferred because of negative stereotyping, discrimination, high visibility and an undervalued subculture (Palmore and Whittington 1971:89-90). These are characteristics that the old have in common with other devalued groups. Some theorists deny categorisation purely on the basis of age unless they share a common past history or solidarity (Streib 1968). To turn the aged into a homogeneous category, Streib calls for a shared subjective awareness which must be achieved at least on the basis of economic interest. Age, he argues, is no *a priori* principle of minority status.

The deviant status of the aged owes its popularity to the labelling perspective. Old age is seen as deviant in a society committed to youthfulness, beauty and vigour (Berger and Berger 1976). It highlights the interactions between the aged and society at large and the consequent effects on the self conception of the actors. Streib's notion of a pure statistical aggregate takes on a different complexion when viewed in terms of an audience that confers a negative value on old people. The impact of the labelling process must be examined empirically at the personal level and viewed in terms of personal experience and meanings (Ward 1977:228).

Stigma refers to the attribution of negatively charged meanings by outsiders but one's own self-definition does not stray too far away from the outsider's point of view. Not being mentally alert or socially competent, and being childish and dependent are concepts that the old persons incorporate into their self-evaluation.

The Double Jeopardy Hypothesis

The minority aged are said to suffer a double burden. While experiencing the negative stereotyping prevalent in urban industrial societies their condition is made worse by being 'ethnic' as well. This is called the 'double jeopardy' or 'multiple hazard' hypothesis (Jackson 1970). What this implies is that the added burdens facing migrants living in an inegalitarian society make their aged position worse than the rest of the aged. In view of this there is now beginning a realisation that ethnicity should be considered a very important variable in the understanding of the aged. There is a call for more cross-cultural inputs into gerontological research so that social policy provision can be tailored to meet the specific needs of the ethnic aged. This is in spite of the contention that age is a great leveller with regard to both racial and social differences in old age (Kent 1971:11). Whether the ethnic variable loses its potency as people enter old age can only be determined empirically and such conclusions must await further research.

Culture and Ageing

It is important to place the nexus between ethnicity and ageing in the relevant cultural context. There is an abundance of anthropological data to illustrate the differing perceptions of roles, statuses, interactions and fulfilment in ageing in different societies. Many non-urban industrial societies, it is argued, enhance the status of people as they enter old age. Some societies such as Japan, China and Korea have made statutory steps to preserve the sanctity of old age even in the period of rapid industrialisation (Maeda, 1978). However, one must exercise caution in making generalisations that all non-western societies fare better in the social treatment of old people. This is far from the truth. The conclusion that is warranted seems to be that the well-being and integration of the aged in any society are dependent on the availability of a role-set that is valued by its members. Continuity of important activities contingent upon devalued responsibilities, which usually involve extended family units or community organisations, seem to enhance the self-esteem, whereas the presence of cultural values that espouse rugged individualism and self-reliance decrease the self-worth of the aged. Urban societies, where technology and science have infiltrated familial activities, do not seem to offer the same importance that older persons enjoy in traditional societies as sources of valuable information regarding life sustaining activities. In urban Western societies their marginality is due to alienation from the extended family, loss of work roles, devaluation of traditional knowledge, a series of institutionalised social losses and the stress on self-reliance as a core value. Only empirical evidence, however, can bear out whether these negative traits relating to the marginality of the aged are as prevalent as once suggested.

The extent to which cultural patterns can be maintained in the host society depends on the economic and social independence of the ethnic groups. Most immigrant groups have been unable to maintain a close integration of cultural ideology and social interaction patterns that tend to dissipate under assimilationist pressures. These pressures in the host society preclude a tight integration of the cultural processes of social organisation, ideology and cultural distinctiveness. The discrimination felt by the migrant family determines the degree of preferred integration, and influences which of the social and cultural traditions will be preserved. The need to become good and successful citizens, at least in the economic sense, pushes the ethnic distinctiveness to the background. The very high value placed on the educational achievements of children strains the close bond between children and adults which, no doubt, is carried on to later years. However, it cannot be totally denied that the respect and responsibilities towards the aged have not been passed on to the younger generations but the question is posed as to the intensity of that transference. Reports about psychiatric stress among some of the ethnic aged do indeed suggest a strong correlation with decreased family ties, lack of inter-generational solidarity coupled with other social and economic problems.

Cultural perceptions influence the subjective assessment of age but the aged themselves. Their thinking, acting and feelings are affected by these. As symbolic interactionists maintain, the socially constructed definitions of ageing bear the stamp of culturally given meanings regarding old age. Relative to the culturally prescribed norms, adaptive

behaviour in old age is variable. A problem or a solution to a problem is seen very much in culturally appropriate terms rather than in the scientific-rational way. As Regan and Grisby (1976) point out, whether the solution to a problem is seen more as a public concern than as an individual responsibility is dependent upon the cultural perceptions regarding old age. The extent to which the aged are optimistic or tranquil is culturally given as much as it is socially determined. Many of the ethnic aged feel a sense of oneness with contemporaries from the same background and seem to relate to each other in an understanding manner. These can be ascribed to the similarity they share in cultural perceptions.

Social Support Systems of the Ethnic Aged

The social support system available to the aged in urban industrial society is an amalgam of both formal and informal services. The formal services are offered mainly by governmental instrumentalities and non-governmental bodies while the informal services are given out by family, friends and neighbours. Kinship systems have adopted the needs of the urban society by devising a partially autonomous extended family system where income maintenance functions are taken over by the state and the social supports have become the responsibility of family and the community. In the case of the ethnic aged from many cultural contexts this neat dichotomy of functions is not worked out very clearly. The informal support system is the culturally desired and preferred option but modern living makes it impracticable. When the interested parties have not worked out the implications of these dilemmas well in advance, bitterness and despair settles in the family system.

Theoretically, the subdimensions of the family support system need examination. These include the availability of kin, the proximity of kin, frequency of contact and the functionality of kin (Gibson 1972:14). The availability of kin is of paramount importance since the traditional measures of family interaction usually fail to note this attribute. Functionality implies the meaningfulness of the relationship to the elderly person. Gerontologists are agreed on the importance of family relationships in old age. Perhaps it is through the younger family that the old persons continue their integrative functions with mainstream society. Bereft of family connections the old tend to lead segregated lives. In Australia it is also the case that the kinship network offers financial assistance, household help, warmth and integrative socialisation (Bryson and Thompson 1972). But what is of utmost significance in old age, and this applies equally to all aged, is 'the quality of the relationship between older persons and their adult children, and the meaning of that relationship to the older person' (Wood and Robertson 1976:303). In the analysis of the affectional lives of ethnic aged the importance of the subjective element cannot be overstressed.

CONCLUSION

In the concluding remarks it needs to be mentioned that there is a tendency in multicultural research to explain society in cultural terms away from the structural wholes in which they are manifest. It is easy to fall into a fallacy of cultural reductionism in the descriptions of the ethnic aged as an entity that is totally divorced from conceptions of power, class, and inequality in society. The knowledge that migrants have of themselves and others is conditioned by those who have power over the construction and dissemination of such knowledge. The ideologies that migrants believe in or act out are part and parcel of a society which is the custodian of such knowledge and power. We do not deny that migrants do not participate in the formation of their own consciousness and that ruling ideas are merely foisted on them without their compliance. A good many of these complex processes can be understood in relation to the life chances available to the migrants, both past and present.

Ethnicity is one of the dimensions through which life chances are distributed in our society. Research on ethnicity can hide this unequal distribution of life chances in relation to other groups in society. De Lepervanche (1984:210) argues that multiculturalism represents 'an ideology that attempts to resolve the contradictions between immigrants' awareness of inequality and the efforts of the powerful in society, to defuse the social conflict attendant upon increasing class consciousness'. She makes the point that writers on ethnicity fail to see the explanatory potential of a structural analysis as the centre-piece of ethnic research. The social scientist must be aware of the traps in culture studies. Immigrants explain exploitative experiences as necessary sacrifices that should be borne graciously and thankfully. The entry of women into the workforce may appear as an equitable distribution of labour in a patriarchal household. Trauma associated with settling in a new country may strengthen family solidarity.

Prejudice and discrimination at school may galvanise students to achieve educationally and move up the social class ladder. Class and ethnicity must be seen therefore as concepts of comparable validity, and if taken in combination yield a penetrating social analysis.

Ethnicity is fundamentally a mode of communication in a linguistically-based model of society. To understand it we must interpret sensitively not only the instrumental, but the affective; not only the macro, but the micro; and beyond the objectivist versus subjectivist confrontation (Encel 1985:32).

CHAPTER 2

DESIGN AND SCOPE OF STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The conviction that multicultural Australia should promote equity and access to all, regardless of ethnicity or cultural differences, has prompted social scientists to undertake numerous surveys to investigate the needs and concerns of different ethnic groups. The ethnic aged, often seen as a disadvantaged category, have been the focus of many commissioned and non-commissioned inquiries. Kendig (1986) concluded that a vast majority of the ethnic aged are unable to manage independently, that the difficulties they face are primarily cultural, that access to community services is restricted and that they enjoy a lot of family support. The Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (AIMA) (1983) identified loneliness as a common problem affecting the aged, and the Ethnic Communities Council of Western Australia (1985) came up with similar findings in its discussion with ethnic organisations. Overberg (1985) makes the critical observation that 'loneliness and isolation are a widely recited litany of platitudes about the ethnic aged' and little is done to clarify the issues. Kendig (1986) and AIMA (1985) draw attention to the need for enhanced social participation by the ethnic aged. Keane argues that 'In a strange environment, away from all that is familiar and dear to them (the ethnic aged) have nothing to do but sit and wait for death' (cited in Colson 1986). Many older ethnic people prefer residential concentrations less open to external acculturation, and physical distances and spatial distance are related in the life world of the ethnic aged (Burnley 1985).

In the area of family support and care, research suggests that the ethnic aged are not deficient (Kendig 1983, 1986; Rowland 1983). Yet the fact that older people from more than seventy countries make up aged Australia and that they differ in their socio-demographic characteristics suggests the need for more research data to address the specific policy issues (Kabala 1986). Until social scientists are able to systematically determine how cultural values, traditions and other variables are tied up with ethnicity and old age, the providers of services will continue to consider the ethnic elderly issues as marginal and transient. This research, we hope, is a step in that direction.

OUR RESEARCH

A variety of factors influenced our research. As Encel et al (1985:2) state, '... while perhaps not multicultural in feeling, Australia is rapidly becoming so in fact'. The assumption of Anglo-Celtic homogeneity is rapidly being whittled away both in appearance and reality. Irrespective of where our political interests lie, ethnicity will eventually become one of the important dimensions of social differentiation in this country.

There is a lot written about the needs of migrants in Australia. Our research belongs to one of the sub-areas within ethnicity which is little explored, at least theoretically. In various ways it has been the popular opinion that unlike other older people the ethnic aged suffer additional burdens of living in a society where racial and ethnic discrimination is a contentious issue. Ethnic leaders have often voiced the plight of the ethnic aged and demanded special social policy palliatives to redeem distress and deprivation. We decided to research, with the aim of clarifying the real life situation.

In a multicultural society, groups differentiated by ethnic cultural heritage have contrasting orientations towards old age. Cross-cultural research on the sociology of the family has demonstrated that definitions of old age, its rights and obligations, vary across different cultures (Cowgill and Holmes 1972). The differences that appear across ethnic groups suggest the importance of the subjective aspects of ethnicity and ageing above and beyond the general qualities of the human condition of old age. Does ethnicity therefore offer a new mediating variable in the problem of ageing? It is an important and interesting topic for research.

If ethnicity does make a difference in old age it will certainly be of interest to gerontologists in general. How environment and physiological variables that affect old age are mediated through ethnicity will be useful sources of information in planning and providing services. Similarly, the concerns expressed by spokespersons about differences, discrepancies and misunderstandings reflect unshared ethnic orientations which need to be addressed in the interest of broader social harmony.

In order to highlight the ethnic variable we decided to research some ethnic groups that do not often appear in survey data. Also, we wanted to break away from the Anglo-Celtic concepts as much as we were able to and hence decided on people from the Asian region. Given the Australian immigration policy operative in the early post-war years, we were unable to achieve our objectives to the extent we intended. This being an exploratory piece of work, we needed to get close to the people in order to talk to them at length on retirement, their migration experiences, old age, children, grandchildren, kin, friends and the future. Given that it was such a vast area that we were interested in, simple statistical techniques were considered inappropriate and at the expense of such statistical rigour we ventured out for subjective richness.

The person whose interests in ethnicity are highly research-oriented may use computer techniques to separate out variables in a neat statistical package, but one wonders whether method should be given such a sacrosanct place above substance. We did not believe that ethnicity was one more variable which could be easily abstracted out of real life easily. At least for those who investigate either new research propositions or new populations, building up scenarios is more useful than pure statistical tabulation. We were keen to grasp the whole situation where ethnicity and old age were but two more variables. 'Ethnicity or old age do not stand alone, just as we do not encounter pure age, pure gender, pure renal failure, pure fluid intelligence or pure anything else' (Kastenbaum 1979:91). It is always the person in a situation and neither of them is standing still.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

Our scientific interest in the aged ethnic groups from the Asian region crystalised around very specific questions.

Does life in retirement present particular problems for people from the Asian region? Do aged migrants who originate from cultures with strong familial values suffer isolation, loneliness and intergenerational conflicts in their later life? In order to investigate these problem areas we listed certain major constructs in an old person's family and social life and then identified relationships between key variables incorporating those major constructs.

Major Constructs

1. Background characteristics: age, sex, marital status, work experience, occupational status, reasons for migration.
2. Frequency of contacts with family, quality and meaning of such contacts.
3. Frequency of contacts with friends, quality and meaning of such contacts.
4. Frequency of contacts with community groups, quality and meaning of such contacts.
5. Changes in values and beliefs between generations and the effects of these changes on intergenerational relationships.
6. Changes in the values and beliefs between friends and the effects of these changes on peer relationships.
7. Isolation and loneliness in retirement in Australia.
8. General feeling of satisfaction in old age. The factors in their life histories that contribute to it.

9. Plans for the future without partners. Preparations for alternative living arrangements.

Relationships Between Key Variables

1. What impact do the background variables such as ethnicity, age, marital status, family structure and reasons for migration have on the retirement years of older ethnic groups? While most of these variables have been utilised to gain knowledge about specific populations, we were interested in their association with the quality of life in retirement. For example, we hypothesized that the acceptance of one's ethnicity is a matter of choice, and a person can emphasize or de-emphasize its expression during his or her life cycle. Different cultural orientations have varying degrees of normative potency concerning age, sex, marital status, and the structure of the family and residential living patterns make up an important part of an older person's life world. In the case of a migrant, the process of migration will be an important variable that impacts on other variables.
2. What is the nature of social contact that aged persons have with support groups such as family, friends and community? Is the family the centre of interaction as well as of satisfaction? What is the role of the aged in the family and friendship network? We were interested to ascertain the significance and meaning of those activities.
3. To explore the connection between shared values and beliefs and integration contacts, to explore the connection between friendship patterns and similar orientations regarding life activities, and to identify the manner in which assimilationist pressures affect these relationships.
4. To explore the feelings about retirement in a host country. Loneliness and stress during retirement years often crop up in gerontological literature. Do people who supposedly suffer from multiple hazards because of ethnicity evoke these problems any more than the general community? Are cultural orientations that emphasize family solidarity and honour affected by problems of modern living such as mobility, employment patterns, equality between the sexes and familial support in old age?

THE RESEARCH ACT

Three countries in the Asian region were chosen for investigation: India, Sri Lanka and Burma. These three countries share a geographical proximity as well as a long history of British colonialism followed by the granting of independence shortly after World War II. They also share similar cultural traditions, especially in the domain of family structures and values. The migrants from these three countries who arrived in Australia following independence movements in Asia share similar ethnic attributes. They are now retired in Australia after a relatively 'eventful' working life. Also, given that the Australian immigration policy prior to 1967 excluded people without a claim to 50 per cent European ancestry, our target group consists mainly of people from the Anglo-Asian category, ie Anglo-Indians, Anglo-Sri Lankans (Burghers) and Anglo-Burmese. Other indigenous people from these countries who migrated after the relaxation of the White Australia Policy do not qualify to be in our sample because of age, and those old people who have since come on the family reunion scheme and have not worked in Australia.

The Sample

In selecting our sample it was not at all possible to apply rigorously any text book method. Through the method of networking (if that is the correct description) we selected over one hundred (100) respondents from the three countries. When we had completed 90 interviews we considered that the data had reached the point of saturation and therefore terminated the interviews. Ten interviews were subsequently conducted with ethnic leaders whom we considered to be resource persons in their communities. Table 2 details the profile of the respondents by sex, country of origin and ethnicity.

TABLE 2:

Profile of Respondents:
Sex, Country of Origin and Ethnicity

	N	%
Sex:		
Male	41	45.6
Female	<u>49</u>	<u>54.4</u>
Total	<u>90</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Country of Origin:		
Sri Lanka	28	31.1
India	28	31.1
Burma	33	36.7
Other	<u>1</u>	<u>1.1</u>
Total	<u>90</u>	<u>100.0</u>
Ethnicity:		
Burgher	26	28.9
Anglo-Indian	26	28.9
Anglo-Burmese	31	34.4
Other	<u>7</u>	<u>7.8</u>
Total	<u>90</u>	<u>100.0</u>

Since it was not our intention to achieve a representative sample, the method of sampling used provided us with respondents living in close proximity to one another. This we considered as a drawback in our research at the outset, but during subsequent interviews with the ethnic leaders it was pointed out to us that certain ethnic groups who migrated during the early years tended to move into low cost state housing areas. It was apparent that many of our respondents were still occupying state housing facilities. Such residential concentration at the time of arrival, as we found out from our subjects, helped them with resources, information, material assistance and friendship networks to overcome the isolation and strangeness of living in a foreign country. Hence at times they were also able to talk to us of their aged friends who were having problems and concerns of various sorts. The aged ethnic concentration in a few of the suburbs we visited suggested to us a homogeneity in terms of social class, type of dwelling and ethnic mix.

We cannot overstate the difficulties regarding our sample. The communities that we selected were small and socially invisible. The biggest problem was one of contact, and the temptation to take short cuts was irresistible as well as unavoidable. Initially, we approached a couple of ethnic leaders - leaders in the sense that they had held or were holding office in some of the relevant ethnic organisations. This was not only convenient but in effect the only method available to outside researchers. This first step meant developing a rapport with the leaders themselves. The fact that we decided in the first instance to approach some of the respondents through the 'key informants' tells us something about the social isolation and invisibility of the migrant aged. It is true that as we progressed our

sample grew in numbers through relatives, friends and friends of friends - a list that we could not cover within the resources at our disposal. A snow-ball technique of sampling has the advantage of enlisting subjects who might otherwise be excluded.

Contacting the respondents themselves needed a lot of tact and diplomacy. Many would not talk to us unless an assurance was given by our key informant as to the purpose of our interview. They were undoubtedly fearful of many things. Some were apprehensive about a possible investigation of their pensions and benefits, not that they had any outside income other than the pension. There were others, mainly from Burma, who were fearful of spying by the present socialist government in Burma. The difficulties that this latter group faced in working their way out of Burma seem to still haunt them. They were concerned about the relatives who still lived in Burma and received the occasional gift sent by an Australian relative. Then there were others, interestingly enough, who resented the title of our project - The Asian Experience - because they were of European descent in spite of the fact that they had at least one full-blooded indigenous Asian ancestor. We gathered that it was the pejorative connotation of the term 'Asian' that bothered some of them. We decided not to engage in a time consuming discussion of these 'moot' points and left them out of the sample. None of the above comments detracted from the tremendous enthusiasm shown by many of the people whom we interviewed and who were eager to see the results of our investigations. We tried to play down the possibility of immediate gains on account of what we were doing, but whether or not we were successful in the task is unsure. In conclusion, it must be said that we were hopeful that our research effort will benefit those who needed help most in old age.

The Interviews

Talking about old age was at times a distressing experience for both the researchers and the interviewees. The stigma of being old, receiving a pension, being lonely at times, lacking both biological and material resources leaves little, if any, of the good things to talk about. There were some who refused our invitation to talk to us as mentioned earlier, but there were also others who were very interested in what we were doing. Of those who willingly and quite happily agreed to be interviewed we found that they were cheerful when discussing matters other than old age, future life, nursing homes, and death of a spouse. The data we obtained regarding their families, friends and grandchildren ought to be considered as subjective assessments by these people though they closely resemble the factual state. Though the interview schedule suggested specific questions with regard to each of the aspects, we decided to allow maximum latitude for the respondents just to talk.

Throughout the process of gathering data, we were made to feel welcome. The heat of the summer of 1986/87 often meant cool drinks, cans of beer, cups of tea and lots of talk. The interviews were always flexible and conversational. Both husbands and wives participated in the interview as we made it a point to get information from both because they varied at least in emphasis. Instrumental matters were mostly the husband's domain, and family, marriage and children were the wife's concerns. We must admit that this was not the case in every situation. There were cheerful occasions as well as stressful ones because retirement, family relationships, and loneliness are processes that do damage to some people and distort human relationships. In some instances we felt guilty of opening up old wounds or resurfacing painful feelings but these were all part of the story. Many a situation prompted us to think through various issues that we were not conscious of earlier or had not seen as central to the subject under investigation. It was one of our respondents who suggested to us that what mattered most was not whether the marriage partner of their daughter was from the same ethnic group, as much as whether they could enjoy the same informal 'intrusion' into their family and children. We understood that the elderly person's self identity was closely related to the identity of the family as a group. The needs of the family unit superseded those of the individual. A more empathic interpretation was to view this phenomenon simply as an excellent system for reciprocal exchanges and emotional security.

The interviews could not be the sort of thing done in social surveys. They had to be detailed and they had to be flexible so as to give the respondents an opportunity to get their ideas and life experiences across to us in the manner that they thought correct. Since we were trying to get inside their world through the interpretations that they had provided, however imperfectly, a lot of patient listening had to be endured. There were instances that necessitated either giving excuses to cut a long story short or directing the interview in a subtle manner. An important fact became obvious to us through the interview process, namely the common practice of enlisting part-time

interviewers could never have given us the results we wanted. Doing the interviews ourselves gave the research a depth which is hard to describe in a statistical formula.

DOING RESEARCH WITH MIGRANTS: REFLECTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Much of what is written up as normative methodology in research texts gives the impression that social research is a value-free activity of non-people in non-places (Bell and Newby 1977). We were 'ethnic' people, one Sri Lankan and one Australian, operating in a political context. Likewise our subjects were political subjects with various political and ideological viewpoints. The important fact about social research is to accept the presence of those impediments and to put them to analysis and interpretation. The fact that we were members of an academic institution obviously mattered in the reactions we received.

Research on human subjects poses difficult moral and political problems at all times. We were acutely aware of the ethical responsibility we had towards the subjects of our study. We were making intrusions into the lives of these people. Not only were some of the questions direct assaults on their private domains, they were also areas that were interwoven with their self-worth, esteem, family honour and pride. There were times when the respondents saw us as threatening the values and beliefs that they had held for decades. Rather involuntarily we were drawn into their conversations and a cool objective approach could not have produced the data that we were able to gather and infer. Despite our strong commitments to certain value positions such as the value of affirmative action with regard to Australian Aboriginals, we endeavoured to keep our partisan viewpoints to a minimum without disrupting the flow of the interview. Aged respondents, we learnt, were intolerant of alternative conceptions of reality, especially our respondents who were used to rigid dualities in cultural definitions. Even though it is difficult, one tries to remain calm against one's own instincts.

Working with migrant groups is an interesting experience in its own right. When interviews are scheduled practically on every working day for over two months you become an integral part of the research process. With elderly people you cannot pursue the research instrument to the letter. They digress, take over, romanticise - all of which you begin to endure. Demands on your emotions are felt when they are depressed, and when they talk of departed friends and spouses. When one is invited to look through their family albums, wander through their gardens, admire their curry-leaf plants, avocado pear trees and banana clumps, partake in home made sweets and dishes, politeness demands deference to the normal rules of human living. These no doubt question the required aloofness of researchers. We felt that what was at stake was the constant awareness and responsibility that you have towards the problem under investigation rather than the pure adherence to method. Quibbling over methods as a substitute for good explanation is indeed a weakness. Not to be unduly worried over method does not mean that we go as far as Evans-Pritchard when he said 'Anyone who is not an idiot can do field work' (Bell and Newby 1977:16). We were committed to a kind of methodological pluralism which does not idolise the imperialism of any one technique. Gouldner's discussion of 'Method' versus 'Methodology' reminds us of the need to keep both technique and epistemology in some sort of dialectical relationship in a creative controllable manner (Gouldner 1975).

Doing research with migrants adds another important dimension to the research act. That is to be aware of the factors that transcend the immediate surrounds of the research. We became acutely aware of the structural location of migrant communities in general and how that structural location affects their process of living. Not to let your family or friends down, insecurity of status, the necessity to guard one's honour and pride, were all exacerbated by their immigrant status. The tragedy and traumas of life on arrival, loss of status in jobs, 'the humiliation' of doing manual work, were all part of the politics of migration. These were not theoretically outside our ambit of research, for personal troubles and public issues are interwoven in any society. Neither can one isolate old age from one's younger years and the events in one's biography.

CHAPTER 3

BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we are concerned with the background characteristics of respondents. Factors such as ethnicity, marital status, residential propinquity, health and income are examined from the perspective that each has a bearing on how an aged person experiences life in retirement. We argue that if we are to have an understanding of life in retirement we must consider the social context involved, ie those factors that are seen to be operational in the on-going interaction between a person and his or her social environment. As Russell (1981:16) states, 'Each person brings to the experience of ageing a unique set of material, social and psychological resources, needs and desires.' Such factors help shape expectations, values and attributes, as well as being affected by the availability of resources for, and community attitudes towards, elderly people in our industrialized society.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN AND ETHNICITY

While it may not be necessary for the purposes of this study to discuss in detail the history and geography of Sri Lanka, India and Burma, it is important to have an understanding of the social, political and economic position our respondents occupied in their country of origin. They formed a particular ethnic grouping within ethnically plural societies and, as such, migrated with a distinguishable identity, set of values and expectations. While it is not suggested that immigrant populations from the same or similar cultural backgrounds are internally homogeneous, there can be little doubt that the ageing person redefines his or her identity and renegotiates relationships with others on the basis of a subjective reality shaped in the country of origin.

Australian immigration policies prior to 1967 largely excluded people without a claim to at least 50 per cent European heritage. Most Asians (Sri Lankans, Indians and Burmese) migrated to Australia after the 'White Australia' policy was abandoned and most have yet to reach retirement age. Where there are Asians living here in retirement, the majority migrated in later life through the family sponsorship system and have not worked in Australia. As we were mainly concerned to investigate the experiences of those people who migrated from these countries, worked in Australia, and are now living in retirement, our interviews were conducted within the Anglo-Asian category, or to be more specific, Burghers from Sri Lanka, Anglo-Indians from India, and Anglo-Burmese from Burma.

We have assumed that people migrating from these three countries share a broad similarity of cultural experiences and values. In particular, the common influence of a long history of British colonisation followed by the establishment of independence shortly after the end of World War II was taken into account. As Wriggins (1980:3) writes,

Between 1946 and 1949, over 600 000 000 in former colonial Asia gained their independence. Ten newly independent states arose where four Western empires once ruled ... Although each of the newly independent countries has difficulties and opportunities peculiar to itself, the first decade of independence has demonstrated that all of them face certain common fundamental problems.

Our analysis is based on the cultural similarities between the Burgher, Anglo Indian and Anglo Burmese, while still recognising that there are distinct differences in culture and identity. The over-riding theme running through the three ethnic categories is one of an identity dilemma, or that of the person caught 'in-between' two cultures. Continuity of identity is very much subject to the political, social and economic forces of the day. With the marked changes occurring in Asia and later through migration to Australia, members of the Anglo-Asian community have

much in common. The following analysis of language, religion, employment, family relationships and community pride serves to illustrate this point further.

Despite living in predominantly non-English speaking countries, English is the 'mother tongue' of the Anglo-Asian. The families have tended to adhere to endogamous marriage patterns although few Anglo-Asians can claim pure European descent. Their values have always tended to be Western - particularly English - coupled with loyalty to the British Empire, therefore ensuring their privileged position in a colonial society.

Indeed most Anglo-Asians in Sri Lanka, India and Burma prior to independence, held elite positions based on their 'Englishness' and their English education. Most entered the professions or upper levels of civil service. Anthony (1969:5), when discussing the first period (1639 to 1791) of Anglo-Indian community, wrote 'There was no distinction between Briton and Anglo-Indian. The Anglo-Indian sons of British fathers were taken freely into covenanted ranks of the British services and reached the highest positions of trust and responsibility.' In Sri Lanka the term *Burgher* also held connotations of respectability, and generally speaking the same can be said of the Anglo-Burman in Burma.

On the other hand, to be associated with the Asian community rather than the British, that is, to be seen as 'Eurasian' was frowned upon in these three countries. It came to imply lower socio-economic standing and many of the negative stereotyped images associated with 'mixed blood' marriages. From the *Burgher* viewpoint, 'Eurasian' meant offspring resulting from illicit and *de facto* relationships. Anthony (1969:6) demonstrates the Anglo-Indian viewpoint in the following way: 'Very often, the specimen was a low-caste member of some other community, masquerading as an Anglo-Indian, and seeking social and economic betterment'. George Orwell's protagonist in "*Burmese Days*" (1934:117), an Englishman with an uncommonly sympathetic attitude toward the 'Eurasian', states that

Most Eurasians aren't very good specimens, and it's hard to see how they could be, with their upbringing. But our attitude towards them is rather beastly. We always talk of them as though they had sprung up from the ground like mushrooms, with all their faults ready-made. But when all is said and done, we are responsible for their existence.

Christianity represents the common Anglo-Asian religion adding to the already multi-religious nature of the three countries. Adherence to Christianity tended to enhance 'Englishness' and was not always simply an attachment to the Church or the religion. In many ways it was central to their social life as well.

The family also played a vital role in Anglo-Asian communities. Perhaps it is in this regard that there is the greatest overlap with the traditional values of Asian society. As Anthony (1969:8) states, 'The sense of filial duty and affection has been specially marked. The sense of sacrifice of parents for the welfare and education of the children has run like a golden thread through the Community's life.' The full meaning of this statement will become more apparent in our discussion and analysis of 'reasons for migration'. It may also be the case that the minority group status of a community encourages a reliance on family members and a sense of duty to one's own kind, thus operating as a self-protection mechanism. In any case such 'closeness' within families is synonymous with pre-industrialised societies and the traditional values of family support.

There is no doubting the sense of pride evident in the Anglo-Asian communities. This can best be summed up by the following statement by Anthony (1969:1) on the Anglo-Indian:

Important aspects of the Community's life are its social and psychological pattern, the considerable educational and cultural contributions it has made to India, the beauty and capacity of its women, the incomparable Anglo-Indian nurses, the indelible impress the Community has left on the annals of British Indian history and the saga of continuing service to Independent India inscribed by Anglo-Indians in blood and in valour ...'

The question of identity then, has an added dimension for the ageing migrant in retirement. Not only does he or she have to contend with the life-style changes associated with life in retirement but also with the question of ethnicity. For some this would seem to be a greater dilemma than for others. For instance, some members of our target groups refused, or showed some reluctance to be interviewed on the basis that they were not Anglo-Asian. They may have been born in Sri Lanka, for example, but they were not 'Asian' nor did they see themselves as having any connection with Asia. It must be noted that because of our association with prominent members of the respective ethnic communities, there was some pressure on the people we contacted to participate in the study. While we did not intentionally exert this pressure it was nevertheless a factor in influencing some people's involvement.

Seven percent of the elderly people we interviewed did not place themselves in the Anglo-Asian ethnic category despite having been born in one of the three Asian countries. During the interviews with these people there were many indicators of an Asian heritage and culture. They included 'mixed blood' marriage, Asian furnishing and decorations, Asian food and Asian gardens.

Many people spoke with pride of their 'different' migrant status. Statements such as 'Australia asked us to come because of the ease with which we assimilate', were common. Many spoke of the great thrill they had searching for evidence of European blood in order to be accepted by the Australian government. But the difficulty most had in this regard was clearly evident.

The reluctance to admit an Asian 'connection' may well be the result of government policy and community attitudes in this country. The immigrant perceiving that assimilation is expected of him or her either rejects or reduces open attachment to an Asian heritage. One person spoke of finding his home covered in anti-Asian slogans - 'Asians go home'. Under such circumstances it becomes difficult to assert one's cultural background for fear of racist repercussions. It is driven underground, as expressions of a different culture become confined to the immigrant's own family and ethnic community.

An interesting observation was made in respect of those respondents born in Burma. It presented itself as somewhat of an irony. We found in many instances that members of this community now emphasised particular cultural links with their country of origin which did not play a significant role in their lives prior to migration. Involvement in traditional arts and crafts and dancing, for example, have gained increased importance and serve as a unifying tie within that community. This seems to reflect the policy of multiculturalism first enunciated by Al Grassby in the Whitlam period and perhaps a redefinition of what society wants of the immigrant. While assimilation is still expected, or at least integration by the second generation at the latest, there is some recognition of immigrants' group identities. Castles (1986:2), however, is critical of this aspect of multiculturalism. '... this multiculturalism often trivialised culture to the level of cultural phenomena such as food, song and dance, neglecting structural issues of access and equality to the mainstream.' Nevertheless it serves to illustrate our point of the relationship between subjective perceptions of identity and the political milieu. The identity dilemma for the Anglo-Asian is not a static one.

REASONS FOR MIGRATION

It was clearly evident to us during the interviewing process that migration to Australia was accompanied by what we have termed a feeling of 'vengeance'. The Anglo-Asians had lost, as we described earlier, positions of authority and status in their countries of origin and the various privileges that went with these positions. Feelings of resentment or bitterness can consequently be understood or even expected. The fact that only 30 per cent of respondents gave political circumstances as a reason for migrations does not detract from this observation.

Jupp makes the point with regard to the Sri Lankan burghers that it was from that community many professionals, public servants, and politicians came prior to decolonisation. Nearly all burghers were prosperous and well educated. He goes on to comment that,

In recent years half the burgher population has emigrated to Australia, Britain and Canada, having lost their particularly favoured position under the British. (Jupp, 1978:34)

Many of the respondents from all three countries echoed the common sentiments of anger, injustice and lack of propriety for being 'driven out' of the country. This 'vengeance' coloured the responses with regard to the experience of migration to Australia.

Table 3 shows the reasons given for migration and the percentage of responses.

Table 3: Reasons for Migration		
Reasons	N	% of Responses
Better standard of living	2	1.1
Political	22	29.4
Children's Education	28	32.8
Children's Welfare/Future	21	28.8
Own Future	4	2.3
Other	13	5.6
Total	90	100.0

The length of residency in Australia (see Table 4) has helped to dull the feelings of what happened at the time of migration. The general feeling was, 'that was in the past', and the main concern was for what is happening now and what will happen in the future.

Nevertheless, the disappointment at the political changes in their countries of origin and the resulting determination and resolve accompanying migration was evident in most people's responses and while not always overtly expressed, feelings were often clear and can best be summed up by a statement from a 75 year old Anglo-Burman grandmother, 'The curry pot had broken, things would never be the same again.'

Political changes in the countries of origin after independence not only threatened their own position but also, and perhaps more importantly, that of their children. As Table 3 shows, over 60 per cent of respondents gave children's future or education as the reason for migration. In respect of education, English was no longer the official language in schools, and the rising tide of nationalism which followed independence also saw preference given to the indigenous population in the work place. The Anglo-Asian could no longer take it for granted that a position would be made available in what had been a traditional domain of this ethnic group. Belonging to a respected Anglo-Asian family no longer afforded people the privileges that they had come to expect and the writing was on the wall as far as most respondents were concerned. They resented the resurgence of nationalism and democratisation, feeling that they and their children would not fit into it.

Table 4: Length of Residence in Australia

Number of Years	N	% of Responses
0 - 5	1	1.1
6 - 10	5	5.6
11 - 15	20	22.2
16 - 20	24	26.7
21 - 25	33	36.7
26 - 30	5	5.6
40 +	2	2.2
Total	90	100.1

At the time these political changes occurred in Sri Lanka, India and Burma, the reasons for migrations may well have been expressed differently. The underlying reason for the lack of opportunity for respondents' children was, after all, political. In the case of Burma particularly, there was considerable antagonism towards the new socialist government and what was seen to be a real threat to individual liberties. Also, even though the standard of living had dropped for most Anglo-Asians after independence, only 1 per cent of respondents gave a better standard of living in Australia as a reason for migration. Indeed, the politics of the day seem to have been repressed and what has assumed the proportions of a 'mission in life' is the well-being of the children of the Anglo-Asian immigrant.

PLACE OF RESIDENCE

The concentration of an ethnic community within one neighbourhood is a common occurrence in our cities and social scientists have tended to view this residential concentration as one of the major indicators of assimilation and integration, or more accurately, the subjectively perceived lack of assimilation and integration. The visibility of ethnic communities tends to arouse accusations from the larger community that assimilation is not occurring. 'They won't mix' and 'they stick to themselves too much' are statements we often hear. Also, low concentrations of ethnic groups within neighbours are often incorrectly perceived as an indication of assimilation.

On the other hand, highly concentrated residential arrangements serve to reinforce ethnic community institutions and distinctive ethnic consciousness and behaviour. The visibility and awareness of ethnic identification is clearly maintained for the members of that ethnic community (Kobrin 1978:28). As a parish priest stated when referring to the high concentration of Asians in his parish,

This is a good place from them because it's more like Asia. When they arrive here it's important that they have their own communities around them. In old age it becomes vital that they still have that security, that their community is still around them.

We found that there was a high concentration of Anglo-Asians around particular suburbs in Perth. Table 5 shows the percentage distribution across the 23 suburbs incorporated in our study. Two suburbs figure prominently in our interviews (Balg and Cloverdale): 21.6 per cent of the people interviewed lived in one and 13.6 per cent lived in the other. These two suburbs are separated by a river and they are at the centre of a number of suburbs providing housing for people in lower socio-economic groupings. Our interviews were clustered around these two suburbs and all the people interviewed lived within a radius of 10 kilometres of the two central locations.

Table 5: Residence by Suburb

Suburb	N	%
Balga	19	21.1
Girrawheen	6	6.7
Joondanna	1	1.1
Greenwood	4	4.4
Warwick	1	1.1
Middle Swan	4	4.4
Nollamara	4	4.4
Morley	3	3.3
Dianella	2	2.2
Tuart Hill	2	2.2
Yokine	2	2.2
Bassendean	4	4.4
Bedford	2	2.2
Inglewood	3	3.3
Bayswater	3	3.3
Highgate	1	1.1
Cloverdale	3	14.4
Victoria Park	1	1.1
South Perth	2	2.2
Carlisle	1	1.1
Queens Park	3	3.3
Bentley	6	6.7
Bullcreek	3	3.3
Total	90	99.5

On one occasion after enquiring as to the address of other people within the same category, a respondent was able to name five other families in the same street. On another occasion two couples had purposefully moved to live next door to each other despite the fact that at the time of moving it meant an extra 40 kilometres driving each day for one of the couples to get to work. They expressed the importance of being close to their friends in their old age.

On consideration of the address of the nearest child to the person interviewed, we find an added dimension to this theme. In 85 per cent of the cases where respondents had children, the nearest child lived within a radius of 5 kilometres (see Table 6).

Table 6: Proximity of Nearest Child to Parent

	N	%
5km radius	72	84.7
20km radius	7	8.2
Country WA	4	4.7
Eastern States	7	2.4
Total	90	100.0

In most cases this meant sharing the same shopping facilities, public transport, and the range of other services offered within a particular suburb. It also meant the parents generally shared the same church and parish as their children. This point will be taken up in detail in Chapter 4.

Comparatively, the analysis of data shows that only 33 per cent of respondents had a sibling living within a radius of 5 kilometres. Table 7 shows the distribution of siblings across a range of proximities.

Table 7: Proximity of Nearest Sibling to Respondent

	N	%
5km radius	29	32.2
20km radius	6	6.7
Country WA	8	8.9
Eastern States	16	17.7
Country of Origin	31	34.4
Total	90	99.9

It seems to reflect a general attitude amongst respondents that the children are of prime importance resulting in a definite decision to ensure the closest proximity to them rather than to siblings. Sibling rivalry was often mentioned in the context of jealousy and competition over their respective children's advancement in school and the workplace.

MARITAL STATUS

Many researchers and sociologists have argued that the marriage relationship represents the most significant emotional bond in life for most older couples. In the symbolic interactionist view, marriage constitutes a fundamental social context which defines and sustains a shared social reality and identity for the partners. As Berger and Berger (1976:11) state, 'In each partner's psychological economy of significant others, the marriage partner becomes the other par excellence, the nearest and most decisive co-inhabitant of the world.' Russell (1981:43) also argues that 'In Australia, as elsewhere, expressed life satisfaction is most strongly correlated with marital status. Bereavement, rather than simply being alone, is the principle factor associated with feelings of loneliness.'

Table 8: Marital Status of Respondents

	N	%
Married	70	77.8
Divorced	2	2.2
Widowed	17	18.9
Never married	1	1.1
Total	90	100.0

Table 8 shows that 78 per cent of our respondents were married and living with their spouses. The majority of these couples also actively shared the same social context involving the family, friends and often the church. Many spoke warmly of their partners and the important role they played in their lives. A 72 year old man from Sri Lanka stated that 'Without "Daphne" I don't know where I would be now.' He had had several heart attacks and his mobility had been reduced considerably. Many other respondents openly displayed feelings of affection for a spouse and their shared histories were often discussed at length with us. Relationships had been strengthened through the sometimes traumatic experience of their countries of origin gaining independence and the process of migration.

Those respondents not married or living with a partner (most of whom were widowed) had had time to build up a social network around them, which, while not necessarily acting as a substitute for the marriage relationship, provided a level of emotional support perceived of as being, at least, satisfactory. In such instances, dependence on siblings had increased particularly. Only two respondents stated that living alone was a problem for them. Neither, however, saw that the lack of a partner was a contributing factor. Rather, it was the lack of support from family and friends that concerned them.

MARITAL STATUS OF CHILDREN

The question of whether or not children are married would not seem to be as important as to whom they are married. This is certainly true for minority ethnic groups where the family continues to function as the major vehicle for the socialisation of particularistic norms and provides the main link between the individual and the community. Intermarriage may reflect the dilution of ethnic cultural content and has implications for the maintenance of distinct ethnic communities (Gordon 1964). However, high levels of intermarriage may also see the emergence of new

forms of ethnic identification. The use of homogamy as an indicator of ethnic group boundaries may be changing as different forms of ethnicity emerge (Kobrin 64:66-68).

Given the small numbers of Anglo-Asians in Australia, homogamy within this ethnic community is virtually impossible, even if desired, and it seems inevitable that we will witness both a dilution of ethnic cultural content as well as redefinition of ethnic identification.

Ninety-six percent of respondents had at least one child who was married. This was to be expected, given the age of respondents (see Table 9), and the fact that almost all of them had children over the age of 20 years.

Table 9: Age of Respondents

Age in Years	N	%
Less than 55	1	1.1
56-60	5	5.6
61-65	24	26.7
66-70	30	33.3
71-75	14	15.6
76-80	12	13.3
81-85	3	3.3
86-90	1	1.1
Total	90	100.0

Only 17 per cent of families had children who had married exclusively within the ethnic group; 24 per cent had married entirely outside the particular group, while 58 per cent had children who had married both inside and outside the ethnic category.

While most respondents did not express strong feelings either way in regard to intermarriage, some were unhappy because the children had moved to the country or interstate after marrying outside the ethnic community and as a result their contact with them had diminished considerably. They were not opposed to the marriage per se, rather to the change of circumstances resulting from it.

Many were happy about the intermarriage and in all such cases they still had regular contact with their children and grandchildren. These families came together at least weekly to share a meal. The meetings assumed paramount importance in the lives of respondents, providing a cultural link between the in-law and the Anglo-Asian family. Friendship seemed to be cemented through the sharing of rice and curry, which seemed to have an almost symbolic meaning.

Religion, too, played an important role in determining the acceptance or otherwise of an intermarriage. Where there was a sharing of religious beliefs between a family and an in-law, this usually meant more opportunities to spend time together as a group (parents, children and grandchildren), thus emphasising the social activity aspect of religion discussed earlier.

So we could conclude from our interviews that marriage inside or outside the ethnic group for respondents' children was not of critical importance. While endogamy may have been desirable, exogamous marriages were accepted,

often happily, providing regular contact with the children was maintained. This ensured that there was still an exchange of ethnic values and culture and some control over any redefinition of ethnic identity. What was of paramount importance was that in-laws should 'act' as members of the family and facilitate the respondents' access to their grandchildren.

OCCUPATION AND STATUS

Since Marx began to speculate about the relationship between occupation and class, sociologists have increasingly relied on occupation as a social indicator. Indeed, it has become so reliable that, along with income and education, it is widely accepted as a measure of social difference. Encel (1970:116) pointed out that

The study of occupations provides a measure of social differences which is comparatively solid and reliable, which even the unsophisticated can recognise with some precision, which seems to establish a straightforward consciousness of common identity, susceptible to statistical analysis, and capable of experimental replication.

Traditionally, in Asian countries such as Sri Lanka, India and Burma, occupation ranks second only to familial ties as a measure of a person's position in the community. 'In India you are not judged by what you do, but for what you are' (Orwell 1934:129). In many cases what you are is determined equally by both familial ties and occupation, the two variables are separated only by a fine line.

As has already been discussed, the Anglo-Asian prior to independence in these three countries was usually employed in positions of authority, eg in the civil service, the mercantile sector and the armed services. In India, Anglo-Asian women were traditionally employed as teachers and nurses. The Anglo-Asians owed their position in colonial society to the British. They were educated in English schools - although very rarely to tertiary or university level - and their economic and social well-being was tied to unquestionable access to occupations with high levels of prestige and status. The income such occupations generated provided the Anglo-Asian family with a standard of living sufficient to ensure that servants were commonplace within the community. Political power was derived from and associated with these positions of authority, and occupation remained the most important way of moving up the socio-economic scale.

After independence, however, with the growth of nationalism in these countries, there was a concomitant change of orientation in regard to language and culture. English was no longer the prominent language in the schools or the workplace, the value of the mercantile sector, particularly import and export, dropped in relation to other aspects of the economy, and there was a general rejuvenation of the indigenous culture with less emphasis on materialism.

While the position of the Anglo-Asians in the workplace may not have been immediately threatened after independence, particularly if they were willing to learn the relevant language and accept the emerging structural changes, they certainly saw that the future of their children was bleak. The most important way of climbing the social scale, that is occupation, was no longer a birthright.

All of the people interviewed who had worked in their country of origin, had been employed in either the armed services, a profession or in management. That is, no-one had been employed in the generally accepted lower status positions of trades, clerical or manual. A marked change in this statistic is apparent when we analyse the positions held after migration to Australia (see Table 10).

Table 10: Occupation in Australia

Occupation	N	% of Responses
Professional/Management	14	26.9
Trades/Clerical	14	26.9
Manual	24	46.2
Not in workforce	38	-
Total	90	100.0

Only 26.9 per cent of those who continued working after migration to Australia did so at the same occupational level: 26.9 per cent took on work in either trades or clerical positions, while 46.2 per cent were employed in manual areas.

Despite there being a low frequency of responses giving work opportunities as a reason for migration, no one we interviewed anticipated the difficulty they were to have obtaining employment in similar fields to those in the country of origin. They may not have expected to walk into similar employment immediately, but expectations were certainly far higher than what was to be the reality. Engineers in Sri Lanka, for example, could only obtain work as fitters and turners in Australia. There was a considerable imbalance between the educational requirements of the two countries. Ironically, for the same reason their children would have had difficulty in the country of origin obtaining work, they too were excluded from higher status positions in Australia because of a lack of a recognised education.

Many men, in fact, spent up to 12 months after arriving in Australia unsuccessfully looking for work before resorting to something far below the status they were accustomed to. For the women who had worked as teachers and nurses in their countries of origin the same sort of work was relatively easy to get. Those without such experience, however, faced the same problems as did the men.

As well, some women spoke of the difficulty they had in adjusting to life without servants. Within the traditional role differentiation of families most had to learn to cook, to take full responsibility for the care of their children, and a range of other domestic tasks they were either unfamiliar with, or once had help in performing. A 65 year-old Anglo-Indian woman with 6 children stated that 'I had to get used to doing the house cleaning. It was a very big thing for me.' Another Burgher mother of five children spoke of how she 'threw everything away to come and be her own slave.'

In answer to our question on the relative status of their occupational position in the country of origin and that in Australia, where there was a status difference, 100 per cent of respondents favoured their old position. Given the degree of difference explained above, however, it was surprising that only 58 per cent felt that the status difference was important to them. Almost all of those who stated that they were not worried by any difference in status were philosophical in their responses. They had accepted the situation and had 'made the most of it'. One Anglo-Burman man who had been a senior civil servant in Burma and had only ever worked as a security guard in Australia had this to say: 'At the time it was the most degrading job imaginable. But everyone had to do it, so I made the most of it. I had to, but I was very deflated.' A 72 year-old man from Sri Lanka who had also had a

senior position as a civil servant spoke of the chauffeur he had at his disposal in that country, but he stated that 'I came to Australia with a purpose and I felt that I had to accept the changes'.

It seemed that most respondents had stressful experiences due to role loss after migrating to Australia. For some, however, the combination of pride and the number of years since migration had served to 'dull the pain'. Nevertheless, as Elwell and Maltbie-Crannell (1977:230) state, 'Both the literature review and the empirical evidence suggest that role loss is a stressful experience which affects both coping resources and life satisfaction.'

HEALTH

As our research is primarily concerned with the personal meaning of health to the ageing person, the measure was completely subjective. We asked whether the respondents thought they were in good or bad health. We were not concerned with the description or frequency of particular health problems although this information was made available to us in some instances and tended to contradict the 'good health' subjective assessment.

Self-ratings of health tend to be more favourable in judgements of health than objective measures. Aged persons report their own health as good-to-excellent, often despite the presence of a chronic disorder (Estes 1979:100-101). This was certainly true in the case of the Burgher men we interviewed. Almost all of them had suffered more than one heart attack followed by major surgery but still stated they were in good health: 84 per cent of respondents indicated they were in good health compared to 15.6 per cent who rated their health as poor.

It seems that the principal consideration is the ability to function more or less autonomously. It is only when independence of action is grossly impaired by illness that elderly people who are actively involved in various kinds of social activities tend to rate their health higher than persons who are less involved. The more mobile someone is, the more likely he or she will say their health is good. In the case of those men who had serious illnesses it was vital for their own self-esteem and personal sense of autonomy that they viewed their health as good even though any 'objective' measure might indicate otherwise.

Considerable overseas evidence attests to the absence of close correlation between aged people's attitudes to their health status and their actual physical disabilities (Roscow 1967). When autonomy is obviously restricted, it becomes increasingly difficult to view subjective well-being in positive terms. Hutchinson (1954:77-78) found that '... elderly people who were unwell during the four weeks preceding the day of their being interviewed were three times as likely to complain of loneliness as those who were in good health during the same period. Similarly, people who are (on self report) physically restricted in their movements, through arthritis or some similar disorder, are more prone to loneliness.' In other words, as Russell (1981:42) points out, '... subjective life satisfaction is more closely related to autonomy than to "objective" health status'.

INCOME

The age pension is the sole source of income for the majority of aged Australians. Relative poverty is generally accepted as a major disadvantage associated with ageing in modern society and has received considerable attention in recent years. The Commission of Inquiry into Poverty found that aged pensioners constituted the largest single group in poverty, or 47 per cent of all poor income units (Henderson 1975:235). All of the respondents involved in our study relied on the age pension as their sole source of income but only 5.6 per cent reported that this was less than sufficient for them. Again there is a discrepancy between 'objective' factors which seem to be important and the individual's perception of the same factors which say they are not so important. In fact, 92.2 per cent of respondents regarded the aged pension as sufficient for their needs. A small number (2.2%) felt it was more than sufficient. These results concur with the study by Radford and Peever who found that only 5 per cent of the aged pensioners they interviewed were 'unable to manage' on their income (1976:69).

There may be a number of reasons for the satisfaction respondents showed with their level of income. One may be that as 'immigrants' they may have been unwilling to express dissatisfaction openly to 'outsiders' for fear of recrimination. Despite making it as clear as possible that our research had no connection with government, other than in an educational sense, such fears remain. Another more likely reason for the expressed level of satisfaction with the aged pension is based on comparative need. In their countries of origin they would not have received comparable financial assistance in retirement, and as such their perceptions are influenced by comparatively lower expectations. Many respondents spoke of the overall material advantages of living in Australia. These will be discussed in some detail in Chapter 5, with the corresponding perceptions of social disadvantages.

SUMMARY

In this chapter the meaning and characteristics of a number of background variables in the life of the elderly Anglo-Asian immigrant have been delineated. We have illustrated and analysed the relationship between these variables and the influence they have over the experience of ageing in a foreign country. Our concern was with the analysis of those material, social and psychological resources, needs and desires a person brings to the experience of ageing.

In the process of migration from countries where their social and economic standing had been reduced considerably, the Anglo-Asian community developed what we have described as feelings of vengeance. From the loss of social and economic privilege in newly independent and nationalistic Sri Lanka, India and Burma, the Anglo-Asian's resolve to maintain a sense of individual and group identity was fuelled, playing a major role up to and including life in retirement.

The Anglo-Asians migrated relatively late in life with the expressed purpose of improving the life chances of their children. They were unable to gain employment within their field of experience and qualifications and generally suffered a marked loss of status in this regard. In many cases, particularly for the men, severe health problems resulted in later life, but the subjective perceptions of health remained optimistic and positive.

Residential propinquity, particularly involving children and grandchildren, has developed along with a concern that the family remain integrated within traditional cultural boundaries. What is important is the need for a degree of control over the maintenance and re-structuring of particularistic ethnic community values and attitudes. Disadvantage experienced as a result of low income, poor health, age, loss of a spouse, or loss of occupational status has been overcome by the aforementioned resolve and the propagation of strong familial and ethnic group ties.

CHAPTER 4

SOCIAL SUPPORT SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we move from a discussion focused primarily on those individual characteristics a person brings to the experience of ageing to an analysis of the relationship between the elderly Anglo-Asian immigrant and his or her social environment. We look at the social environment in terms of informal (primary) and formal (secondary) social structures and base our analysis on the respondents' relationship with family, friends and community organisations.

There is considerable evidence that social support networks influence the manner in which individuals define and act upon symptoms and life crises (Freidson 1961, McKinlay 1973). Neither informal or formal networks, however, are single, unidimensional entities. Granovetter (1973), for example, distinguished between strong and weak ties, such as those involving friends and neighbours. Shanas (1979) suggested that older people generally possess a solid core of social support, both instrumental and expressive, with family members playing a primary role. Krause (1986) in his study on the relationship between social support and stress isolated four separate dimensions of support: emotional support, integration, tangible help and informational support. Emotional support is based on personal qualities including empathy, love and trust. Integration reflects the degree of involvement a person has in a reciprocal network of shared obligations and a sense of belonging. Tangible help is the result of instrumental behaviour which helps the person directly, while informational support is the provision of knowledge which might help to overcome a problem or difficulty.

A great deal of gerontological research has concerned itself with the frequency of contact elderly people have with others in their social environment. Such research, based on activity theory, assumes that a certain level of social activity is necessary for successful ageing. The central proposition of activity theory, as summarised by Blau (1973), is 'The greater the number of optional role resources with which the individual enters old age, the better he or she will withstand the demoralising effects of exit from the obligatory roles ordinarily given priority in adulthood.'

While we recognise the importance of developing a profile of our respondents' social support systems and the frequency of contact with them, we also acknowledge that regular social contact is not necessarily an indication of fulfilled expectations. In line with the proponents of symbolic interactionist theory who have conceptualised ageing as 'A dynamic process which is responsive both to individual capacities and perceptions' (Russell 1981:54), we assert that ageing outcomes reflect the reciprocal relationship between the individual and his or her social support system. Not all activities provide equal support or have the same meaning for the elderly person participating in them. We need to take into account the potentially differential effects on life satisfaction and well-being (Gubrium 1973, Hendricks and Hendricks 1977:111). What is important is the person's subjective experience of the situation.

FAMILY

For the Anglo-Asian in his or her country of origin the extended family played a clearly defined role in the lives of the elderly. Although the conjugal household formed the basic and most intimate functioning unit, its relationship with the wider, often geographically dispersed, kinship network was closely linked and strengthened by a strong sense of filial responsibility to the aged. Asian culture confers status and honour on its aged based on a tradition of respect which has its roots in the vertical society and the religious doctrine of filial piety.

On the other hand, the Anglo-Asian immigrant arrived in Australia where the extended family is institutionalised around specific and limited dimensions of social action, beyond which its roles are ambiguous and vaguely defined. The dominant perspective is that this supposedly traditional source of support for our elderly has broken down in the

wake of industrialisation. What is closer to empirical reality, however, is that the constellation of high status and extended family care has never been a common characterisation of the position of old people in pre-modern western society (Russell 1981).

It is common practice for our elderly who become frail or ill to reside in either government or private nursing homes. The lack of suitable nursing home beds has become a popular social issue and families are advised to plan for admission to prevent trauma when the time does arrive. The care of the elderly has been communalised, unlike the case in Sri Lanka, India and Burma, thus adding to the lack of clarity in defining the role of the extended family. Estes (1979:2) describes the 'congeries of programs, organisations, bureaucracies, interest groups, trade associations, providers, industries, and professionals that serve the aged in one capacity or another' as the ageing enterprise.

The way we treat our elderly is often determined by structural and situational factors, the distribution of resources being the most important of these. For some the options are numerous - extensions to the family home, incorporation of a 'granny flat', placement in a conveniently-located private nursing home or the provision of material and economic support. For others the options are limited - caring for an elderly person in an overcrowded family home, attempting placement in a government nursing home with a 3 year waiting list, or reliance on an over-worked domiciliary service. As Russell (1961:161) states,

A variety of social, economic, and political factors constrain the interaction between aged persons and other family members. The conceptions which family members hold of their role in relation to aged relatives differ not only from what governments would wish to establish, but also in some ways from what the elderly themselves expect.

Such a conflict would seem to be particularly salient in the life of the Anglo-Asian immigrant.

Family Contact

In the interview situation the 'family' was defined as those members of the kinship network with whom the respondent did not live. Social contact included face-to-face visits, telephone conversations or written communication, and we based the frequency of contact on a subjective response of 'often', 'sometimes' or 'never'. Table 11 shows that 94 per cent of respondents had frequent ('often') contact with their children. Six percent had infrequent contact and none of the respondents had severed links with their children completely.

Table 11: Frequency of Contact with Children

Frequency	N	%
Often	81	94.2
Sometimes	9	5.8
Never	0	0.0
Total	90	100.0

Distance between a parent and child did not have a bearing on the frequency of contact. Infrequent contact was determined by the nature of the relationship between the two. There seemed to be a strong voluntary character to the kinship tie between parents and children, concurring with Martin's findings that 'People were highly selective in their interaction with kindred near and remote' (1970:313). In most instances the responses to our questions about

children were answered spontaneously and with a marked degree of contentment. The meaning of this social contact was often evident without having to ask its importance.

In respect of contact with siblings social contact was not as frequent. Seventy-one percent of respondents had contact with a brother or sister often, while 28 per cent had contact sometimes. One person had no contact at all. Again, the frequency of contact was not determined by distance but by more personal and voluntary factors. Sibling rivalry appeared to play a significant role in this regard.

As to frequency of contact with grandchildren the responses were almost a reflection of those for children (see Table 12).

Table 12: Frequency of Contact with Grandchildren

Frequency	N	%
Often	77	96.3
Sometimes	2	2.5
Never	1	1.2
Total	80	100.0

Importance of Contact

When considering the importance of family contact and whether or not respondents were happy with the frequency, we made no distinction between family members. It was clear, however, that respondents made their own distinctions when answering these two questions. In most cases the use of the term 'family' was interpreted in the first instance as meaning children and grandchildren. It was only after prompting that a response was gained in reference to siblings.

Table 13: Importance of, and Contentment with, Family Contact

Importance	N	%
Very Important	86	97.4
Important	4	2.6
Not Important	0	0.0
Total	80	100.0
Contentment		
Yes	87	97.7
No	3	2.3
Total	90	100.0

As Table 13 shows, 97.4 per cent of respondents felt that contact with family members, particularly children and grandchildren, was very important: 2.6 per cent considered such contact as important and no one regarded it as not important; 97.7 per cent were happy with the frequency and quality of contact they had with their family, again particularly their children and grandchildren, while 2.3 per cent of respondents were unhappy.

The responses can best be summed up by the following statements, the first by a 70 year-old Burgher mother of eight children who has lived in Australia with her family for fourteen years. She migrated with her husband and children from Sri Lanka 'because of the children'. All of the children live within a five kilometre radius of the parent's home and are married inside and outside their ethnic group. She stated that 'Life wouldn't be worth living without the children.'

The second statement was made by a 73 year-old Burgher mother of seven children who migrated from Sri Lanka with her husband and family twenty years ago. Her reasons for migration were: 'We knew what was happening, there was no future for our children or for us. The children's education was the most important thing.' Six of her children live within a radius of ten kilometres of the family home and she sees the importance of contact with them in the following way: 'It is very, very important to both of us. In fact, it is everything.'

With regard to the relationship between respondents and their grandchildren we found that as grandparents they often fulfilled an instrumental role within the family network, providing child care, a focus on ceremonial occasions such as birthdays, a place to share traditional food, and discipline based on the 'old way'. If one or all of these functions were removed the grandparent often reacted in an expressive manner, that is, they felt the loss emotionally. It was not just something they did because of traditional obligation, but because it was something they enjoyed doing. It gave them considerable satisfaction and it could be said that what was viewed as an instrumental role by their children was seen as more of an expressive function by the grandparent.

Further evidence of the 'closeness' of families involved in our study was apparent when considering the responses to our questions as to the possible changes in family relationships since migration. Twenty-two percent of respondents felt that their relationship with other family members had strengthened, while 72 per cent felt that nothing had changed in this regard. Only 5 per cent considered that the intensity of their relationship had weakened since migration.

Probably the most revealing aspect to this question lay in the spontaneous manner the majority of answers were prefaced: 'We have always been a close family.' This statement was repeated often across all three ethnic categories and was always spoken with pride, almost as though it would be impossible for the family to be any 'closer'.

Generally, there was a mixed reaction to our inquiry as to whether respondents missed their relatives in their country of origin. More than 50 per cent of the respondents had relatives who had migrated to Australia, England or Canada. In the case of the latter two countries most people communicated regularly by telephone or letter and there was no great yearning expressed for more frequent contact. The passage of time seemed to have affected most respondents' reaction to this question, although it did spark some reflection on the feeling at the time of migration and some more general reflections about what is now lacking in their lives. For example, 'My heart is still in Sri Lanka' and 'I cried for a year when we first arrived from Burma. But now with the children and grandchildren around me I am happier.'

Values and Beliefs

Attitudes regarding activities such as marriage, religious behaviour, politics and bringing up children reflect cultural values and beliefs which are viewed as being important to a community's identity and well-being. Cultures are often characterised by values and beliefs that reinforce each other and affect the most varied and important kinds of behaviour (Broom and Selznick 1973:60). Relationships within a family, particularly between parents and children, are often drastically affected because of the changing attitudes children may develop toward activities based on deeply-held values and beliefs.

It would seem that one of the most likely scenarios to influence such attitudes in children would be when a family changes its cultural milieu - for example, when a family immigrates to a country that does not share the same history or particular cultural values. It is because of this that we were anxious to determine the extent to which respondents felt they shared the same values and beliefs on what we would describe as important social activities, such as marriage and religious behaviour.

Values are often held unconsciously or are expressed as themes cutting across a variety of specific attitudes, and may not be immediately apparent. Also, we found that our investigations in this regard often left respondents unsure as to what we meant. The use of the word value or belief does not always imply clarity of meaning or understanding - it means different things to different people. This problem, however, was largely overcome by probing deeper into the area of shared (or otherwise) attitudes regarding those specific activities mentioned above.

We found that 25 per cent of respondents felt their children still shared the same values and beliefs as themselves, while 48 per cent felt their children's attitudes were different. For those who felt their children had developed different attitudes to marriage, politics, religious behaviour and bringing up children, they stated this was particularly so with the younger members of the family. Those children who arrived in Australia either prior to commencing school or at a young school age were 'more Australian than the older ones'. Their value base had been largely shaped in Australia rather than in the country of origin.

Many comments were passed in this regard and can best be summed up by the following statement by a 65 year-old Anglo-Burmese mother of nine children:

The children have definitely been influenced by the culture here, especially the younger ones. The youngest three are more Australian than Burmese in their ways. Overall the children are more open with their views, particularly about marriage. They are more slack with their religion and I don't agree with the way they are bringing up their children.

There was also a tendency among those who felt that their own children had not changed to suggest that other members of their ethnic community did have problems because of changed values. As an Anglo-Indian man of 72 years stated, 'My children's formative years were in India so no change. But in my friends' families there has been drinking and smoking etc.'

FRIENDS

To add another important dimension to our understanding of respondents' social support system we proceed from a concentration on familial interactions to one based on the role of friends. We begin our analysis with an attempt to determine the objective aspects of the friendship network before moving on to the subjective meaning respondents give to this form of social integration.

Given that there is a qualitative dimension to friendship - we tend to differentiate between 'close friends' on the one hand and people with whom we are just 'friendly' on the other, we also set out to determine to what degree ethnicity influences the quality and quantity of the friendship network among aged Anglo-Asian immigrants. What differences, if any, exist between friendships within a common ethnic category and those outside it? To what degree does an ageing group solidarity or consciousness have a cross-cultural component?

Rose (1965) argues that the aged constitute a subculture with a partially distinctive value system. His evidence reveals the tendency for older people to form voluntary relationships with others of the same age, reflecting the 'positive affinity' they feel for each other vis-a-vis other age groups. If we add an ethnic component to this equation we would expect to find a more narrowly-defined subculture with a more distinctive value system shaped in the aged person's country of origin.

Frequency of Contact

To begin with we looked at the frequency of contact respondents had with friends in the metropolitan area. Ninety-five percent had people they would describe as 'close friends' living in the same suburb. At this stage of the interview process no distinction was made by us as to the ethnic origin of the friendship network. However, in most cases the question was interpreted in the following way: 'Oh, yes, we have lots of Anglo-Asian friends. We meet with each other often.' There was an almost automatic correlation between the word 'friend' and the respondents' own ethnic group.

Also, the frequency of contact was described as 'often' by 82.2 per cent of respondents (see Table 14). In other words, the majority of respondents met with close friends at least once per week; 15.6 per cent stated that they met with their friends 'sometimes', while only 2.2 per cent had no contact at all with friends.

Table 14: Frequency of Contact with Friends

Frequency	N	%
Often	74	82.2
Sometimes	14	15.6
Never	2	2.2
Total	90	100.0

Many retired couples of the same ethnic origin stated that they met together often to share a traditional meal of curry and rice. The discussions usually revolved around a variety of topics common to all - for example, the welfare and advancement of their children, their gardens (abundant with Asian vegetables and fruit), and involvement in church and recreational activities.

Importance of Friendships

Eighty-three percent of the people interviewed valued the contact they had with their friends very highly. For those people who felt that friendships were not important at all (7%), the family was the only form of social interaction they felt they needed. This point of view was shared equally by men and women but is best summed up by the sentiments of a 65 year-old Anglo-Burmese mother of 4 children: 'I have no need for friends, my family keeps me busy enough'. All of the respondents of like mind in this regard, in fact, had four or more children and three or more siblings living within a 10 kilometre radius of the family home. In these cases the family would appear to fulfill all relevant social support functions required by respondents. They could 'do without friends' and would agree with the findings of Roscow (1967:135) when he argues that 'The primary emotional orientation of older people is towards their families. Friends and neighbours rate far lower in terms of expressed identification, loyalty and closeness.'

For the majority of respondents, however, this was not necessarily the case. The importance of friends in the lives of respondents was clearly emphasised and every indication was given that there was a high degree of emotional attachment as well as involvement in a reciprocal network of shared obligations and a keen sense of belonging. As one 81 year-old Burgher man responded, 'In case of necessity my friends would always be here. We are a very close community. Everyone knows when someone is having trouble.' And a 72 year-old Anglo-Indian man who regarded himself as a leader in his ethnic community said, 'What would life be without friends?' Overall, 96 per cent of respondents were happy with the frequency of contact they had with their friends.

Our question as to whether a respondent had good friends in Australia from his or her own ethnic group had been pre-empted. The fact that 96 per cent of respondents answered in the affirmative was to be expected, given the above. Also, we would expect there to be a corresponding response to the question of shared values between friends of the same ethnic group. As Gubrium (1973:88) points out, 'Friendship is not as much a normative relationship as it is a sharing of particular sentiments between individuals.' And Martin and Encel (1981:12) state that '... ethnicity must now be regarded as the focal point of group identity.' Indeed the majority of respondents stated 'Of course they share the same values and beliefs. They wouldn't be our friends otherwise.'

Because the majority of respondents have developed a strong friendship network within their ethnic category it is perhaps not surprising that only 40 per cent stated that they still 'missed' their friends living in their country of origin. As well, general impression was, given that due to the length of time respondents had lived in Australia, friendship ties had weakened in this regard. However, for some, this question provided the opportunity to express the strength or depth of feeling still evident despite the number of years since migration. For example:

Miss my friends, everyone was a friend of mine there.

My heart is still in Sri Lanka. We have wonderful friends still there.

The closeness of people and affection is greater in India than it is here. We were surrounded by more solid things, less materialistic. There's something missing here.

Another respondent spoke of how he had 'buried everything about Burma', but he often thinks of his friends there and later stated that he missed Burma very much.

Friendships Outside the Ethnic Groups

What then of friends outside the ethnic category? If we look first at the number who regarded Australians among their group of friends the response is significant. Eighty-two percent, in fact, told us that this was the case. There was also a high number of respondents who felt that they shared a similar set of values and beliefs as their Australian friends (77%). One response to the value question was, 'I am a Burgher, I am already Westernised, so of course I share the same values'. This 62 year-old man migrated 20 years ago and has no family living in Australia. He was very reluctant to participate in our study, expressing the attitude very strongly that he was not Asian in any way at all and he had severed all links with Sri Lanka. To a lesser degree several other respondents expressed a similar view, but overall the majority made a point of delineating between the role their ethnic friends played in their lives compared with their non-ethnic friends.

Non-ethnic group neighbours figured prominently in this discussion in most cases fulfilling an instrumental role in the life of a respondent. There was often a reciprocal arrangement concerning the maintenance of each other's gardens during periods of absence, or other examples of tangible support. There were many comments like: 'Our neighbours are very friendly, we get on very well. They are very kind.' Some families swapped recipes, discussed their children and sometimes shared the same religious affiliations. However, there was very little evidence, if any, of an exchange of emotional support.

Despite the fact that respondents had in some cases worked for more than ten years at the same workplace, they had not developed any 'close friendships' with their fellow non-ethnic group workers. After retirement there was no further contact made. So it could be argued that the role loss for the Anglo-Asian immigrant after retirement would not be as significant as it might be for an Australian worker who is more likely to experience an expressive component in the workplace as well as an instrumental one. He or she is more likely to develop emotional ties with fellow workers. In most cases retirement for respondents meant more time to be spent with those people with whom they felt the closest, that is, within their own ethnic community.

We could therefore conclude from these discussions that although the majority of respondents did develop friendships with people from other ethnic groups, such relationships were based on an exchange of tangible support and information, with only a minor emotional or expressive ingredient. Respondents rarely mixed socially outside

their own ethnic group unless they shared the same church or recreational activity. Understandably, respondents felt 'closest' to people from their own ethnic background and their preference was to mix socially with them rather than with people with whom they had less in common.

Despite this conclusion, however, 93 per cent of the people interviewed still regarded friendships with others outside their ethnic community as being very important. But they were important for different reasons. When asked why such friendships were important the responses were split almost evenly between 'the need to assimilate' (55%) and, 'the need for cultural exchange' (45%). Typical statements for each of the reasons given are as follows:

We are living in the country so we should assimilate.

We should learn from each other. We all have something to offer.

It could therefore be argued that the importance of friendships outside the ethnic group for Anglo-Asian immigrants might be over-emphasised because of external pressures on ethnic communities to assimilate or to be seen to be 'mixing' with the main stream. In reality the benefits of these friendships are based on the need for practical assistance and information rather than on a need for emotional support.

COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

The final component in our consideration of respondents' social support system is an examination of the role played by community organisations or formal social structures. To what degree do Anglo-Asians living in retirement have an involvement in the wider community outside their families and friends?

Eighty percent of the people interviewed stated that they have contact with one or more community organisations, and as Table 15 shows the church was by far the most popular. Over seventy percent had regular contact with either a Catholic or an Anglican church. Most went to a weekly church service as well as being actively involved in social activities in their parish. Of the other community organisations named, 14.4 per cent were involved with a Senior Citizens' Club, 15.6 per cent with an ethnic association and the same proportion with a recreational club or activity.

Table 15: Community Group Contacts

Organisation	N	%
Church	64	71.1
Senior Citizens' Club	13	14.4
Ethnic Association	14	15.6
Recreational	14	15.6

Religion

Why is there such a high level of involvement in church activities? Broom and Selznick (1973) argue that if people are denied access to social institutions such as politics, education, the arts and recreation, then religion often fills the breach. It is not the only way of meeting people's needs, but if other avenues are denied to them or other sources are not traditionally accessible, then religion plays an increasingly important part. A Catholic priest we interviewed in a parish where 40 per cent of the parishioners were of the Anglo-Asian origin expressed similar sentiments: 'They are more faithful than Australians. They are more church-going people, but as they become more assimilated this may not be so.'

While religion may have been important in their countries of origin, it seems its role in the life of the retired Anglo-Asian immigrant has widened. As one respondent told us, 'Our faith has always been fervent but we did not have as much contact with the church in Burma as we do here.' Religion has taken on more of the social activity function in the absence of ease of access to other social institutions in Australia. According to the same priest quoted above, 'The Church is a social community for these people. They are particularly involved in the more tangible activities, not so much the discussion groups we are running. I believe it helps them to feel productive and this enriches their lives.' In many cases respondents shared their involvement in church activities with friends from the same ethnic group, thereby satisfying their expressive needs while involving themselves in instrumental activities.

It could be argued that the Church provides a 'legitimate' reason for involvement with the wider community. This organisation offers the aged Anglo-Asian an opportunity to be involved in activities which do not stigmatise and are seen to serve a 'useful' role within the community. Activities such as charity work and money-raising functions enable respondents to be seen as 'helpers' rather than 'the helped' or the dependent ethnic aged. Religious organisations are likely to be supportive and sensitive to the needs of their donor supporters. In this sense, respondents are not viewed as clients. As Jones (1977:89) states, 'In a society that places a high value on self-reliance, hard work and thrift, those who obtain aid from others will be subject to some degree of stigma.'

While some studies have shown that where there are strong family ties there is less reliance on formal organisations, our data do not necessarily add weight to this theory, for most of those involved in the Church have strong family ties. Two respondents left without partners, however, did turn to the Church to 'get involved in something'. As one 74 year-old Anglo-Burman widower stated, 'Since my wife died I have become more involved in the Church, for both religious and social reasons'. This elderly man had no children and saw his only brother infrequently.

Senior Citizens' Clubs

Rose (1960) argues that there are three reasons for the proliferation of old people's clubs in modern society. He suggests that each of these factors has special significance for the elderly participants. First, membership is a status-generating mechanism for those in our society without automatic access to high status. Secondly, these clubs arose as institutions to replace the withdrawal of support by the extended family. Thirdly, the value of membership for elderly people extends to a sense of personal identification within a group. This proposition is based on activity theory, that is, a high rate of participation is seen as being conducive to 'successful' ageing.

Russell (1981:109) asks the question, 'If participation in old people's clubs is so good for the elderly, why do they stay away in droves?' Many other researchers note that although the existence of such clubs is widely known, membership is small and utilization even smaller. Local studies (eg Hutchinson 1954, Fink 1973, Duigan 1975, AIMA 1985) report very low rates of utilisation of, or desire for, clubs and centres for older people.

Indeed, even though our own data suggest a relatively high level of involvement in senior citizens' clubs (14.4% of respondents) closer analysis shows that this involvement is restricted to such recreational activities as bingo. There is very little socialising with elderly people outside a respondent's ethnic group in such activities. Respondents attend infrequently (usually once per month) and those clubs play only a minor support role in their lives, certainly far from the significance Rose (1960) suggests. We found no evidence to suggest that respondents gained any status, emotional support or personal identification through their involvement in senior citizens' clubs.

Goffman (1962:486) draws an interesting comparison between the criminal term 'cooling out' and many of our social institutions. The term refers to the terminal stage of a confidence game whereby the target of the con operator - the 'mark' - is persuaded to accept what has happened and to see that creating a disturbance would only make matters worse. Russell (1981:115) uses the cooling out metaphor to suggest that one of the important functions of a senior citizens' club is as a social agency for cooling out the elderly. 'The more the aged become institutionalised, the easier it is, too, for the non-aged to define them as a different kind of human being and to thereby protect themselves from remorse and guilt.' Senior citizens' clubs are organised by the non-aged and the non-ethnic, and as such reinforce the dependency element of these social institutions. A number of respondents commented that the activities of the clubs such as cards and bowls were culturally alien to them. Furthermore, on

occasions that they attended the clubs they were ill at ease because interactions were limited to previously established social networks and their presence was not comfortably acknowledged.

Ethnic Associations

Each of the three ethnic categories involved in our research project were represented by an ethnic association. Annual senior citizen parties are held by each of the associations and the elderly are invited to all cultural functions, but none provides frequent social activities specifically for the elderly in its community. This seems to reflect the traditional aspects of these cultures in that functions have always had a cross-generational flavour. The elderly are not seen as a separate group within the association. There were instances where office bearers, including past presidents, were elderly members of these ethnic communities and still played an active role in their particular organisations.

Involvement in the Burma Star Association was an important social activity for those men who had served in the army in Burma. These men meet regularly and close friendships have been sustained over many years. No such organisation exists for the women of the three ethnic groups under study.

Recreation

There were very few respondents involved in recreational activities outside the Church or senior citizens clubs. As we have stated, bingo and dances are popular activities held under the umbrella of these organisations. Some men played golf regularly with friends from the same ethnic group, generally people they have known in their countries of origin. There was no evidence to suggest that Anglo-Asian women in retirement actively participated in sport.

SUMMARY

This chapter discusses the relationship between the Anglo-Asian and his or her social support system. Based on an understanding of expectations shaped in the country of origin we concentrated on the social environment in terms of the family, friends and community organisations. The analysis was based on frequency and meaning of contact within the social context prescribed by these informal and formal support networks.

The Anglo-Asian immigrant has in retirement frequent contact and involvement with his or her family, particularly the children and grandchildren, ethnic-group friends of the same age, and social activities under the auspices of a church. These three elements of the social support system perform mainly an expressive function, satisfying the need for emotional support and reciprocity. Activities associated with the Church, while instrumental in origin and content, are based primarily on the interaction between members of the same ethnic community, overlapping significantly with the expressive role played by the family and friendship networks.

While relationships with non-ethnic group friends, particularly Australians, is regarded as very important, in reality the ties are not strong and can best be described as fulfilling an instrumental function such as minimal practical support and the passing on of information. The importance of such friendships appears to be motivated more by what is perceived as the necessity for the ethnic minority groups to assimilate and to participate in cultural exchange. This is not to diminish the genuine nature of such relationships in any way. Rather it recognises their limits.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the most important social contacts for Anglo-Asian immigrants living in retirement, namely with family, ethnic friends and the church, provide the foundation and framework for a way of life that most closely resembles what was experienced in the country of origin and helps to overcome social disadvantage, contributing significantly to life satisfaction and well-being.

CHAPTER 5

LIFE IN RETIREMENT - A SUBJECTIVE VIEW

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the final in our analysis of the data. It deals with what could be regarded as the culmination of the relationship between all the factors considered in Chapters three and four, namely the subjective perception of life in retirement for the Anglo-Asian immigrants. It also addresses a major concern of this research project - to determine the extent to which the dominant value system influencing the treatment of our elderly has affected the life style and life satisfaction of aged Asian migrants now living in retirement in Australia.

BEING OLD

In most modern societies the proportion of the population classified as aged is expected to increase rapidly as we move into the 21st Century. With the growing awareness of this trend the elderly are seen more and more as a burden by the non-aged. A definition of old age is couched in problematic terms and our culture devalues and encourages a pessimistic and unfavourable image of ageing and old people. According to Hutchinson (1954:21), aged Australians 'do not in general regard old age as a period of their lives to which they look forward ... Altogether, old age, both in prospect and in actuality, is felt to be a distasteful necessity with few pleasing features to redeem it.' Most old people are reluctant to identify themselves as being old for fear of placing themselves in a stigmatized category. They consequently employ a definition of age which enables them to maintain distance from a social grouping to which, in outsiders' eyes, they objectively belong.

On the other hand, in the countries of origin of our respondents (Sri Lanka, India and Burma), old age is seen as something to look forward to without the negative perceptions others might place on this social grouping. The aged are valued members of these cultures because of their economic contribution to the economy, care of children, and wisdom and counsel. They are seen as integrated and important members of the community without the attachment of stigma. As Callan (1986:109) states,

The status of the aged is also high in societies where the extended family is strong, and where nuclear families are more common. It is the individualistic value system of Western societies that especially reduces the security and status of the aged.

Western societies tend to base reciprocity in relationships on what the individual is prepared to do for him or herself. Our acceptance of the aged is seen more in physical terms. We accept that they deserve material assistance in retirement because they have contributed individually throughout their working lives. Their social or spiritual well-being, however, is left up to them. Their material needs are catered for through housing, health care systems, senior citizens' centres and nursing homes, but it is up to the individual to find his or her own way in this physical environment. If he or she is not happy or active it is the aged person's fault not society's.

In Asian cultures and pre-industrial societies, reciprocity in relationships is seen more in moral terms. The aged are not segregated from mainstream society, there is a strong sense of belonging to the group and a sense of being involved and integrated without having to prove that they belong. It is a right and not a privilege to be, and to feel, productive. An example of the absence of equal rights for the aged in our society is put succinctly by de Beauvoir (1970:263). 'Today a miner is finished, done for, at the age of fifty, whereas many of the privileged carry their eighty years lightly.'

Respondents' Perceptions

We asked respondents whether they thought that they were getting old. Fifty-four percent replied affirmatively, while 46 per cent felt that they would not regard themselves as getting old. As the chronological definition of old age labels all of our respondents as 'old' it appears that some (46%) are exercising some control over their construction of reality, choosing to identify themselves with a more favourable self-image, that of the non-aged.

A person is old ... when he is so regarded and treated ... and when he himself has read the culturally-recognised individual and social signs symbolic of membership in the generation of elders. The only matter of individual choice open to the old person has to do with whether he wishes to accept or postpone belief in his new identity and act accordingly. (von Mering and Weniger 1959:280)

Evidence of the way that negative stereotyping of the aged influences respondents can be seen in the comments made to explain why they do not feel old. Many followed up a 'no' by saying 'I am still very active and autonomous so I couldn't say that I'm old. Everybody knows old people are inactive and dependent.' An Anglo-Indian woman of 84 years, who has lived in Australia for 17 years, did not see herself as old. 'I'm ready to join in anything. I'm still living the same life as always.' Another Anglo-Indian woman, aged 69 years, considered she wasn't old because she had learned to adjust to the Australian way of life. When asked what she meant by this, she said 'Well, I make sure I keep active and in good health. I don't want to be seen as relying on anybody.'

Overall, there was a diversity of comments, some specific, others more philosophical. A 75 year-old Anglo-Burman man illustrated other people's perception of old age in Australia when he said 'I am not feeling old because I'm still enjoying life.' Another stated: 'You are only as old as you feel.' Some were contradictory, for example: 'I ride with the tide', but later added 'I miss my friends to share my old age with.'

It could be hypothesized that the 56 per cent of respondents who responded positively to the question, 'Do you feel that you are getting old?', did so largely because their perceptions of old age are not negatively charged, that is, they still view their age in cultural terms relevant to their country of origin. The following analysis of responses and comments made during the interviews, however, disproves such a hypothesis. Many, in fact, stated that they could not deny their chronological age, but they 'escaped' any negative reference to themselves by adding that they were active, healthy and secure. There was nothing for them to worry about. The theme that an active old person is a good old person ran strongly through the statements. As one elderly respondent stated, 'People should keep themselves occupied, not lie back and die'.

We followed up the age category question with: 'If you do feel that you are getting old, is this made worse because you are in a foreign country?' For most of the respondents the fact that they were living in Australia was of no concern. They felt that they were materially better off, they had close contact with their children (most important), and they had access to medical facilities and housing opportunities they would not have had in their countries of origin. As a 75 year-old Burgher male stated, 'I feel old now, especially after the illness. But at least we have a pension and facilities we would not have in Sri Lanka.'

Only four percent of respondents were concerned about growing old in Australia, the majority of this small number being Anglo-Indian women who missed having servants to look after them in old age. For them to be reliant on servants was acceptable but it was not acceptable for them to be reliant on the state or their children. An Anglo-Burman male felt very sad to retire, 'I am feeling worthless, not worth my salt. This would not be so in Burma.' This statement really sums up this age issue in respect of most respondents. Whether they regarded themselves as chronologically old is not the salient point, what is important is whether they feel involved as an integral part of their immediate social environments - their family and friends, and their church. Being involved, but not dependent, is very important to these people.

LONELINESS AND LIFE SATISFACTION

Loneliness is often associated with commonplace feelings of boredom, emptiness and exclusion. Most people who experience loneliness do so because they are socially or emotionally isolated. For the purposes of this study, however, we are not so much interested in a definition of loneliness as we are in whether or not loneliness is ever a problem with respondents and why this may or may not be the case.

Ninety-three percent of respondents felt that loneliness was never a problem with them. Almost all answered this question with a laugh, saying: 'I'm never lonely, I'm too busy.' Being 'busy' meant their involvement with family and friends. For some, their involvement with the church; for others, activities such as gardening and reading. The general theme running through these responses was the association of being busy within the context of a community or group of people with whom they have much in common. This 'community' is made up of family, friends and the church. Even gardening is not just a physical activity, it has a cultural relevance to the group in that the produce is exclusively Asian. The vegetables and fruit were once cultivated in the countries of origin, seedlings are distributed between families and friends, and the produce becomes the basis of the meals shared between friends and family.

While we recognise the difficulty or reluctance some people may have in telling complete strangers that they sometimes feel lonely, our overall impression was that the responses were spontaneous and definite. There appeared to be no attempt to cover up because of pride or because they may not want to be seen as failing in the eyes of an outsider.

For those seven respondents who felt that loneliness can be a problem, only one said that this was often the case. The other six stated that loneliness was a problem 'sometimes'. The only respondent who stated that loneliness was 'often' a problem was a 77 year-old Burgher male who left Sri Lanka 27 years ago. He lives alone, having divorced his wife some time ago, and he complained that he rarely sees his two children. 'They visit me on my birthday and at Christmas.' He also told us that he had lied to his son by telling him he had cancer, to get him to visit more often. He has also lost contact with a group of Burgher men of the same age he once had regular contact with, he has no contact at all with a church or other community organisations, and he stated that 'I am just waiting to die'. Apparently the previous tenant in his flat was found dead by the caretaker and he has issued instructions for when the same fate falls on him.

All the respondents who stated that loneliness was a problem 'sometimes', related these feelings to a lack of involvement in things that were a part of their lives in their countries of origin. For some it was their children and friends; for others, it was their servants and their work. Two elderly women spoke of their ability as teachers but they were frustrated at not being able to use their talents. Another woman, 71 years old from Burma, stated that 'When we first came I cried with loneliness. It is a bit better now but we both miss the involvement with our friends in Burma'. Neither she nor her husband has adequate contact with their children who live in the Eastern States. A 70 year-old Anglo-Indian woman spoke of her regret at not having servants to 'watch over her' and the fact that she missed her life as a teacher in India, particularly the status she had there. 'Things have never been the same. Life is somehow very different.'

In the analysis of the factors involved in contributing to life satisfaction, we need to extend our investigation beyond a subjective assessment of loneliness. Hutchinson (1954:77) and Robb and Rivett (1964:11) found when measuring loneliness and life satisfaction that they were not necessarily measuring the same phenomenon. In other words, one might be lonely but satisfied with life, or conversely, dissatisfied with life but not lonely. Fulfilment of expectations also plays an important role in any assessment of life satisfaction.

We constructed a number of questions in order to draw a subjective comparison between respondents' present position in Australia and what they thought their life might have been like had they not migrated. We began by asking whether they thought that their decision to migrate was a wise one or not. They could answer 'yes' or 'no'. All respondents replied 'yes'. When asked to explain why, most related their answer to the position of their children in terms of education and work, the most typical statement being: 'My children have done very well. We are both very happy because of that.' Considering that most respondents gave their children's future as the reason for

migration, it is not surprising that they consider their decision to migrate to be a wise one. Their expectations had, on the whole, been fulfilled. They had achieved their goal.

The other prominent reason given to justify migration was that most respondents felt that they are materially better off in Australia than they would have been had they remained in their countries of origin. While financial reasons were almost uncited in 'reasons for migration', they received greater emphasis in old age. Most respondents felt privileged to be receiving a pension, living in their own homes and receiving the benefits of the health system in Australia. An Anglo-Indian woman spoke of not owning 'a brick' in India but being fortunate to own a house here with her husband. Most people seemed to be saying 'Our children are doing well and we have financial security, so we can't complain.'

When asked whether life in retirement would have been more satisfying or fulfilling in their countries of origin, respondents again referred to the material and financial benefits of living in Australia. The consensus of opinion was that they would be better off socially in their countries of origin but not financially. Of the 40 per cent of respondents who felt that their lives would be more fulfilling had they not migrated, most qualified their response with: 'If things remained as they were'. This statement referred to the state of their countries of origin prior to Independence, when their economic positions and social status were secure. Overall, there was a general impression given that the negative aspects of migration, such as the loss of social arrangements so important in, and culturally relevant to, their countries of origin, were outweighed by the financial benefits and the security of their children's future.

RELATIONSHIP WITH COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

We had anticipated that by determining how often respondents visited their countries of origin we would add another dimension to our understanding of the relationship between the 'old life' and the 'new life'. We hypothesized that feelings for the old life would be strong if a person visited his or her country of origin frequently. Frequency was determined on a scale from 'never' to 'once per year'.

Table 16: Frequency of Return Visits

Frequency	N	%
Once per year	3	3.3
Once every two years	2	2.2
Less than once every two years	31	34.4
Never	54	60.0
Total	90	99.9

The results shown in Table 16 indicate that the majority of respondents have never visited their country of origin since migration. This tells us little, however, about what might have been the case, given adequate resources and opportunities. To begin with, as was discussed in Chapter 3, the aged pension is the sole source of income for the majority of respondents, and although most expressed this to be 'sufficient', it is not enough to pay for trips overseas. Those who visited frequently, at least once per year, had financial resources above those of the pension. For example, a 72 year-old Anglo-Indian man was an ex-pilot with Air India and he and his family had the benefit

of free air fares. It could not be validly argued that their feelings for their country of origin were necessarily stronger than those of respondents who never visited.

All the respondents from Burma, 36.7 per cent of the total sample, are unable to return to their country because at the time of migration they were required to sign a statutory declaration stating that they relinquished their rights in this regard. Even if they had had the money, the health and the desire, they would have been unable to return to the country. As well, several respondents from both Sri Lanka and India could not travel overseas because particular medications and medical resources they required were not freely available in these two countries. In reality, then, of the 60 per cent who stated that they never re-visited their countries of origin, most have not been in a legal or medical position to do so. The same can be said of those 34 per cent who visited 'infrequently' (in most cases only once). The infrequency of their visits is largely determined by forces beyond their control.

Some respondents did not want to return because they did not want to re-establish a bond with their country of origin. As a 72 year-old woman from Sri Lanka told us, 'No, I wouldn't like to visit. I don't want another heart break.' It had been very difficult for her to establish a new life in Australia, and now that she had, and the memory of the old life had faded, she did not want to rekindle the negative feelings and stress she experienced at migration.

To the question, 'If you had the opportunity would you return to your country of origin to live?', 75 per cent said 'no'. Only a very small percentage of these people, however, wanted absolutely no contact with their place of birth. Most said 'no' to returning to live, but would love to visit if they had the opportunity. Others said 'no' because their children were now living in Australia and that was the most important thing for them. Others said that they would not want to see the present state of their country - they would prefer to remember things as they were.

The 25 per cent of respondents who said 'yes they would like to return to live if they had the opportunity', did so with the qualification, 'If things were as they were there before Independence.' That is, they would return to their country of origin to live if they could be guaranteed the social and economic status they were afforded prior to migration. Other respondents spoke of the bond they had with their country of origin despite having lived in Australia for many years. A 78 year-old man from Sri Lanka who migrated at the age of 50 had more than just fond memories of that country. His friends are still living there and he said 'My heart is still in Ceylon'. He does not, however, wish to return there to live.

RETIREMENT PLANS

To the question 'Have you made any plans for your years in retirement?', 91 per cent of respondents said 'no'. Most stated that they intended to continue on as they had been - keeping busy with their family, friends and other social activities. There was overall a general impression given by respondents that they did not want to think about making plans. To contemplate their old age in such terms was to see their life without a partner and being dependent on others. For most, old age is not something you plan for. Rather, that responsibility rests with the children while the aged still maintain independence and self respect. For the nine percent who stated they had made plans, all did so on the basis of making themselves more busy by becoming involved in more activities both in the home environment and outside it. Again, the emphasis was on the maintenance of their independence.

Finally, we proposed the concept of a retirement village for elderly people from the Asian region. We suggested that such a concept would enable people of common cultural backgrounds to share their years in retirement and for there to be an element of self-management within it. Sixty-seven percent of respondents thought that was a good idea, that it was something they could take advantage of later on in their life when they might be less able to look after themselves. However, this level of positive response was only gained after reassurance by us that such a retirement village would not discourage non-Asian participation but merely provide the opportunity for elderly people of common backgrounds to share a lifestyle based on what is most important for their well-being.

We used an example given to us by a leader in one of the three ethnic communities in the study, namely that the elderly Asian woman placed in a nursing home, unable to communicate with others because she had no knowledge

of English and there were no other Asians in the home, unable to enjoy totally unfamiliar food, and being very depressed. Generally, respondents felt that if they had to go somewhere then such a retirement village where there were cultural and social affiliates would be more suitable for their needs.

SUMMARY

The Anglo-Asian immigrants' perception of old age is influenced by the dominant value system in Western industrialised society. While we view the number of elderly as a social and economic problem, encouraging stigmatisation and dependency, the Anglo-Asian in retirement attempts to maintain a sense of independence and self worth by defining his- or her-self as a busy active person. 'No, I am not old because I am healthy and active.' 'Yes, I am old in years, but I am still active and involved.' The value 'A good old person is an active old person', is socially pervasive.

Whereas in the country of origin respect and social position increased with old age as a right, the Anglo-Asians in retirement in Australia have had to accept them as a privilege. Along with the majority of elderly people in our society they have been expected to accept the very limited social role offered them, and to accept it quietly, without a fuss. To tread the path to the nursing home, described by Russell (1981:158) as: '... the institutionalisation of dependence, places its residents beyond the pale. They are, for even their "good friends", socially dead.'

The Anglo-Asian living in retirement in Australia avoids the loneliness and dissatisfaction through the construction of a social reality based on the interaction with family, ethnic friends and the Church. Where there are still strong bonds with the culture of the past, and the sense of an important social ingredient missing in life, this is compensated by perceived material and financial advantages, and a knowledge of having achieved a major goal in life - the securing of their children's future.

It is an inescapable fact, however, that the elderly Anglo-Asians living in retirement in Australia are caught in a dilemma. They are also caught between accepting dependence on the state on the one hand, and demanding what they have grown-up to believe is their right (that their own family and community take full responsibility for their well being and life satisfaction), on the other.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND COMMENTS

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will summarise our main conclusions and provide brief comments on each of the conclusions. In the concluding pages we will make a few observations based on the interviews conducted with the caretakers of the three ethnic communities. We are hopeful that some of these will become topics for further research and policy discussions.

Conclusion 1

The factors connected with the migration process such as proficiency in language, degree of westernisation, adoption of western life-style and a resolve based on 'vengeance', have contributed to the successful adjustment to old age in the case of the Anglo-Asians.

Comment

There are several reasons to suggest that successful adjustment to old age is based upon a continuity of life patterns. The opportunity to maintain language and life-styles of the country of origin is one of the main considerations in the evaluation of the life of the ethnic aged. The ethnic groups that we studied were sufficiently resourceful in many of these aspects. The fact that the Anglo-Asians had migrated to Australia at relatively younger ages than those aged migrants entering on the family reunion scheme, has made integration into the new society easier. Moreover, it has made them less vulnerable to frustrations regarding the non-realisation of their traditional cultural expectations. Those families who were early arrivals were less likely to be shattered by events such as divorce, separation, death of spouses or of children, than those who were allowed into Australia in recent years. The fact that the Anglo-Asian population had moved from urban areas of the Asian countries to urban cities in the new society has made the immigration process smoother. The forces of urbanisation and modernisation which engulfed the Asian countries in the middle of this century may have provided the first generation settlers with an orientation to the new way of life.

The hypothesized consequences of urbanisation, however, such as the devaluing of the status of the aged, the spatial separation of the generations, and break-up of the extended family, have not taken place in these ethnic categories to the extent noted in the literature on modernity. Perhaps the move into a new country, the need for help by older parents, the general insecurity felt upon arrival, and related factors have kept the generations together. We gathered that the status deprivations suffered by the adults were endured for the sake of children. The strong links are evident and often talked about. The loss of status in jobs has been counteracted by the animosity displayed towards the elites and political regimes of the countries of origin. The factors, taken together, have contributed to the successful adjustment of the older generation in the new society. The family as a unit or a group has negotiated itself into a new position of equilibrium.

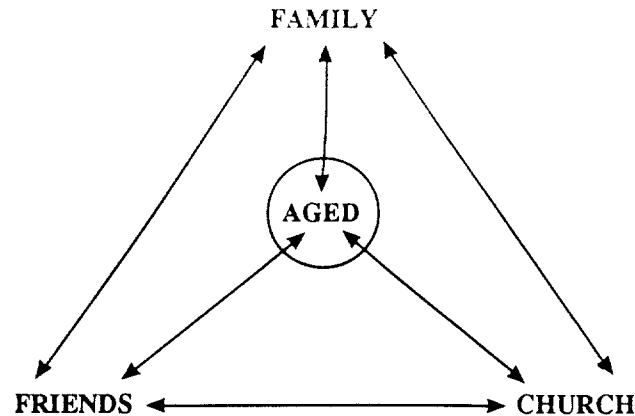
Conclusion 2

The Anglo-Asian aged have constructed a life-world with family, friends and the Church as the boundaries, which if unimpaired make life in retirement pleasant and fulfilling.

Comment

The inescapable conclusion that we came to in our research was the central position held by the aged parents within a triangle of family, friends and church.

THE AMBIT OF INTERACTION



The aged parents enjoy a very happy existence if the triangle is maintained through exchange transactions. As noted earlier, the transactions between the family and friends exhibit a considerable degree of reciprocity. Reciprocity is interpreted in the Asian culture to include not only the present but also the past. Living in Australia has not eroded the cultural attitude of these migrants. Although it is claimed that in the Western world only the form and the ideology surrounding the family have remained, this was not our observation, the main reason being that migration and the attendant traumatic times have strengthened the character of the family. The ethnic family performs some of the traditional functions that in the West are taken over by outside agencies. The reciprocity in exchange which makes the aged parents vital and productive applies to the transactions with friends and church as well. We found high levels of emotional and instrumental flow-through with friends and the moral community. We also noted that in those families where there were strained feelings with adult children, due to either marriage or values, this was compensated for by the availability of nearby age peers who, through early socialisation or friendships formed usually in the home country, share a sense of mutuality. If the family and friends were not available due to distance or death, the total energies were directed towards the Church and even there our respondents were more active in instrumental tasks than passive recipients in a moral community.

The family of the aged did have a limited degree of adaptability. Old people who never married maintained relationships with siblings, and widowed parents turned to their married children. The conclusion that we arrived at here was the attempt by the old to maintain some degree of control over their life-worth as a mechanism which gave them pride and self respect. It is never a fixed entity but one which is constantly constructed and built up through interactions with significant others.

Conclusion 3

The family occupies a central position in the life of the aged.

Comment

The success of old age in the Anglo-Asian ethnic groups studied here rested heavily on the centrality of the family in their life span. The meaning of the family, its pride and honour, fuzziness over its boundaries and solidarity were intimately connected with ethnicity, culture, the migration process and old age. The central role accorded as an informal support system of care has evolved through living, talking and interacting frequently. Perhaps the negative labelling of one of its members, on shared experiences of discrimination with regard to employment or other events in the past, may be woven into the history of the family in the process of reconstructing its present boundaries.

In our sample, religious rituals were celebrated in the parental home. Other rituals of significance such as birthdays, anniversaries and weddings were celebrated with the aged parents as the focal point. The parental home itself provided space which was the symbolic spatial representation of the extended family. It was the aged parents we interviewed who brought out these as signifying the high value placed on family intimacy and, by implication, its impact on their happiness in retirement. We did not get the impression that they were making desperate attempts to maintain a reality which was difficult to hold on to, or one which was inappropriate for the younger members of the family. We are inclined to conclude that the maintenance of a significant place for the family in the life-space of older parents is not an accomplishment merely on the part of the parents, but arises out of the interchanges between all members of the immigrant status family and the wider society.

Conclusion 4

Reciprocity in exchange relationships makes the intergenerational contacts more rewarding.

Comment

Kinship is the strongest basis of attachment and the most valued basis of care for the aged. Between mothers and daughters especially, any call for help is legitimate and will, if at all possible, be satisfied. In many of the houses we visited for the interviews, we were interrupted by the arrival of married children, or the grandparents baby-sitting grandchildren. These seemed to us to be significant as a productive balance of trust, dependence and reciprocity existed. A socially significant relationship between the generations had been arranged.

The net basis of involvement was with friends and with the church. Neighbours, or the local community, ranked last in this network. Titmuss (1972) claims that the gift of relationship binds people together in complete societies. In urban societies, however, the aged are excluded from this relationship. They are expected to receive support but are unable to reciprocate. They are almost excluded from the economic structure and often from the family structure as well. The ethnic minorities under study were fortunate in this regard. There were many activities that the aged parents performed until an age of their choosing. Family activities, religious meetings, child care and socialisation of the young were tasks that were conducive to long-range reciprocity in exchange. This is not to deny the lack of adherence to the core familial values of gratitude, sincerity, duty, and forbearance in many of these cultures. In the groups we surveyed, the elderly valued these tasks because they were, in their opinion, fit, vital, and having much still to give in return for the care and assistance offered to them. Almost all of our respondents pointed to these aspects of their living as the basis for a happy and enormously fulfilling life. Mark Abrams (1978) was correct in remarking in relation to Western industrial societies that these conditions cannot be improved by public policy based on the form of cash benefits. An increase in the resources devoted to health care and to the provision of acceptable surrogates for good neighbours and good friends and devoted kin, may be money well spent.

Conclusion 5

The friends of the aged perform a very valuable function in their lives.

Comment

While the overwhelming majority of respondents rated the family as the main source of emotional and instrumental assistance, the friends were rated as the next important category of support. Satisfaction with the affection, loyalty and persistence of contacts they enjoyed with peers cannot be underestimated. Although not directly related to the frequency of contact, the friends that many of them had were life-long friends, having been either play-mates or school-mates before coming to Australia. These contacts meant a lot in terms of morale and happiness. The values and interests they had in common with them accounted for the intensity and continuity of friendships. The past rather than the present is the cementing link in the interaction.

Lena Blau (1973:67) says that contacts with friends constitute an alternate for the occupational role because of 'mutual choice and mutual need, and involves a voluntary exchange of sociability between equals. It sustains a person's sense of usefulness and self esteem.' In the case of the majority of those who maintained very close

contacts, we are confident that the recurrent gatherings supported the conceptions of self-identity in a fast changing 'hostile' world. There was a certain degree of truth in the contention that active, independent and mobile friends helped to psychologically separate the respondents from those aged living in segregated environments. We did not find any of the close friends of our sample living in such segregated institutions. In fact, the very few whom we interviewed in such accommodation were at pains to dissociate themselves from others who were in the same environment, for they had very close friends who were still in the general community.

Conclusion 6

The close relationships that the aged maintain with their families help them to be integrated with the general community to some degree.

Comment

It has been said that the family balances the segregation of the aged from the social and economic institutions. Integrative functions, such as mutual affection and care, are executed through family members and the quality of the contact is the key variable. In our study sample, it was quite clear that it was the quality rather than the frequency of the relationship the aged had with their adult children that contributed most to their life satisfaction. It is postulated in the literature that it is not the actual contact as much as the satisfaction regarding the contact that counts (Medley 1976). The contact with grandchildren has limited significance, and Russell's contention was correct in that, as grandchildren get older, the contacts grow away (Russell 1983). The Anglo-Asian grandparents were acutely aware of this possibility and accepted the reality with resignation.

Though beyond the concerns of this project, the questions of emotional dependence on children and activity decline in old age were not strongly evident in these ethnic groups. This is contrary to some of the research evidence in urban industrial societies (Lopata 1973, Roson 1967:197). That ethnicity is an important factor in old age cannot be underestimated. Cultures which give little importance to individualistic values tend towards a convergence of high morals and group identity rather than individual self-identity. In this context whether the aged consider themselves as integrated or segregated will be more a psychological than a sociological issue.

Conclusion 7

A feeling of adequacy regarding material and financial circumstances adds to the social fulfilment in old age and outweighs social disadvantage.

Comment

We were struck by the contentedness of the respondents as a group regarding their material and financial position. Though we did not investigate this area of living other than in a cursory manner, they were thankful to the State and God for the comfortable existence they enjoyed in retirement. We were made to understand that the immediate family was there to fall back on in times of financial need. But they asserted that this need rarely arose - as a matter of fact never. The pension which we believed was the main source of income was adequate to meet their needs of daily living, which they claimed were moderate by any standard. It was apparent that this estimation was guided by their comparative assessment of the aged peers in their home country. They were at pains to stress that retirement living in their countries of origin would have been 'dreadful' without the pensions and benefits that they were fortunate enough to enjoy in Australia.

With regard to needs such as health, respondents had the utmost confidence in the professionals operating even at the most basic level. But we would like to add a word of caution here. Whether their responses were influenced by the strong values of self-reliance, hard work and thrift combined with the stigma attached to aid which is part of the dominant ethos in Australia, we were unable to ascertain. There is of course a strong possibility that to be more dependent for one's existence was not in the best interests of the standing of their children or the family in the community.

Our sample was satisfied with the standard of accommodation. Most were owner-occupiers, which meant a certain amount of pride and status in themselves. Many were quick to point out the comparative luxury in which they lived in relation to their peers in the home country. The fact that they maintained a home meant the ability to grow and consume cultural foods, and most importantly offer a common domicile to the extended family. The independent living by the grandparents offered the maximum latitudes to continue their customary role in the family in the new society. A separate domicile gave equal status to the aged parents in the exchange transaction. In instances of separation or divorce of the adult children, the parental home offered emergency and long term accommodation. Availability and easy access of transport in the host country has made possible this alternation to the concept of the extended family in ethnic communities.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Measuring Need Among the Ethnic Aged

The fundamental problem of how need is to be measured among the elderly is still an unresolved issue. In the case of the subjects considered in this study it can be said that ethnic continuity alone cannot be considered a satisfactory index given the variations in life styles and life chances within and between ethnic groups. The aims and objectives of any social policy concerning the ethnic aged might be expressed in terms of the quality of life that they should lead, the help and support they are entitled to, and the appropriate contributions made by the welfare state. Expectations held by the potential recipients and the ethnic leaders acting in the role of caretakers differ on the type and quality of care of the aged. This is not surprising, given that professionals disagree on the care of the aged in general. There is bound to be a large amount of subjectivity in the pronouncements that various groups make on this aspect of the ethnic community. In this final section we will draw on the concerns expressed to us by the caretakers of the ethnic groups under study.

A distinction must be made between needs and demands. It is not always the need that is reflected in demand. The caretakers claimed that the demands made on behalf of the ethnic aged failed to reflect their felt needs. It is understood that the level and pattern of need in any group varies according to historical and local factors as well as supply. People demand the only commodity available but an elderly person's demand does not necessarily coincide with his or her need. The ethnic leaders commented on the fact that their aged members were products of the assimilationist era and the views were affected by that ideology. They also made the comment that welfare provision for the aged in general tends to be insensitive to the needs of specific minority groups.

The following broad aims and objectives in service provisions to the ethnic aged were apparent in our discussions with the elderly and the caretakers:

- (a) To enable the ethnic elderly to maintain their independence, privacy and self respect
- (b) To enable them to lead a normal life in the community as far as they are willing and able
- (c) To enable them to live in their own homes as long as they choose to do so
- (d) To provide support for families and friends who attend to the aged.

These aims and objectives were suggested to supplement the general objectives that underpin the services to the aged in our society. We should note that the concept of services as a right may be foreign to some groups. The translation of private troubles as the property of public authorities is not concordant with some of the ethnic perceptions. Deeply entrenched ideas regarding charity and welfare seemed to trouble some of our respondents. The views expressed regarding the provision of public support were evidence of the confusion and dilemmas in their minds.

Assisting and Enhancing the Present Living Arrangements

Independent living in the home was the preferred form of living arrangement. Since most of our respondents were married couples still relatively young in terms of old age, they seemed to enjoy their early years of retirement. The respondents in our sample were contented and happy, given the reasons that we have alluded to before. The caretakers were more concerned about the future rather than the present and hence were pessimistic about the future outlook. While acknowledging the fact that many of the ethnic aged were enjoying a relatively high standard of living compared to their peers in the country of origin, these couples were unprepared for the future. We gathered this from our investigations about the fatalistic resignation and reluctance to contemplate the future without a partner. The possibility of entering nursing home care was not an appealing option. In some instances, although indicated in a lighthearted manner, the possibility of suicide was mentioned. One of our interviewees who was lonely at the time of the interview has since been removed to a nursing home because of serious depression.

We believe that the emotional support and comfort that they seek in the marriage partner can only be substituted by the family. Those who desired to live with an adult child, a daughter, were reticent about its feasibility in the new society. Some thought that such an option was not very 'Australian', meaning that it was contrary to assimilationist philosophy. The ethnic leaders were aware of this potential problem facing many elderly people.

Our respondents were confident of the support of their families in their later years. They preferred to live at home with this assurance of support by their children. Though we did not talk to those potential carers except for a very small number who were present at the interviews, we do not doubt this presumption. Moreover this is the pattern in the general community, as Graycar and Kinnear (1982:54) established in their survey. They claim that 'Far from being isolated from the living circumstances of the elderly, the family appears to be the fulcrum around which are built the networks that sustain the well-being of the elderly.' Only a very small number of our respondents contemplated institutional care even as a last resort. Whether the aged parents will move in with their children in later years or on the death of one partner has yet to be seen. Despite the reluctance to do so now, when the need is absent, living together may become the alternative to the institutional care which they detest (Schorr 1980, cited in Graycar and Kinnear, 1982:54).

Partners in Care

We identified the degree to which the aged ethnic persons cherish independent home living combined with being a central link, both spatially and culturally, with the whole family. Since our target group did not include many 'very old' persons, this is the valued living arrangement as long as it was practicable to do so. They were conscious of the utility of the concept of a partnership in caring arrangements for the elderly among the family, friends, ethnic community and the state. Though some argue that intervention by the state in what has traditionally been the responsibility of the family would mean a weakening of filial duties, Moroney (1976) is of the view that research evidence does not support the contention that the family is giving up its caring function. There were a few in our caretakers' sample, however, who indicated that a partnership with the state may be beneficial in those situations where some of the aged felt the kin ties were limiting, confining and frustrating both to the carer and to the receiver.

Advocates of a partnership between ethnic community, families, and the state claim that changing patterns of family life in the general community are beginning to have an effect on the ethnic family as well. The impact of divorce and the remarriage of caring children, employment trends and mobility, job relocation and geographical mobility affect this taken-for-granted modus of caring. Other social changes such as equality between the sexes can also affect the carer's role, which is traditionally taken by a female child. If this concept of community care is not supported by the state there is the possibility of an increased rate of institutionalisation in the ethnic aged category.

There was a consensus of opinion even among respondents that State and Federal bureaucracies ought to recognise that the pool of available resources is diminishing. A realistic assessment of the families willing to look after the aged parents is essential. From a cost-effectiveness angle this is a proposition that is beneficial to the community. There is a special value in a service that enables the family and friends to support the aged in times of special need or emergency. The existing family care arrangements are burdensome because of a lack of acknowledgement by the community and also there is a taken-for-granted attitude regarding the familial bonds in ethnic populations. There

were aged respondents in our sample who had moved their parents to institutions much against their will because 'no one knew the difficulties that my wife was going through with her mother. She could not look after her any longer after she (my wife) fell ill.' This Anglo-Burman told us that his wife visits her mother daily and spends 'the whole day' in the nursing home. It is true that 'many families want to look after their elderly relatives but they are not equipped to do so nor do they have the social support they need' (Graycar and Kinnear 1982:6).

In terms of accommodation the ethnic aged and also their spokesperson were eager to see a full spectrum of housing options ranging from conversion or adaptation of existing homes through to types of accommodation incorporating substantial levels of supervision and assistance, as mentioned by Rossiter (1984:37). Given the strong desire of elderly persons to remain in the home, continuing the existing social and family network, there must be maximum assistance made available to them. Rossiter notes a number of possibilities such as adaptations, small flats or units, groups of self-contained units and hostels, before entering the far end of the continuum which is the nursing home (Rossiter 1984:38-39). The next question concerns how best to broaden the existing services to meet the needs of the ethnic groups. The main objective to be achieved here is more social than medical in that the present patterns of familial living must be sustained and facilitated. Resources should be made available to those undertaking to care for the aged in their own homes. Our data from the Anglo-Asian groups concurs with the evidence from the Ageing and the Family Study (Kendig et al 1983) regarding instrumental support from children. The friends were also supportive both instrumentally as well as expressively in our case. This valuable resource cannot be disregarded in any program of comprehensive provision for the ethnic aged at a future date.

Under the goals and philosophy in the **Nursing Homes and Hostels Review** (1986) the Department of Community Services maintained that

Services should as far as possible be provided to people in their own localities and in forms which positively encourage independence and involvement in the person's own community, including the special needs of ethnic communities and aborigines, and people in rural areas. (1986:4)

With the ageing of immigrant settlers the demands for the ethno-specific variety of accommodation away from home has increased. Services that are culturally and linguistically appropriate are becoming popular in spite of the lingering fears about assimilation. There is an ignorance about the existence of such facilities for many ethnic groups. Ethno-specific services are defined as: 'Those which identify with particular ethnic groups and serve as an identifiable clientele, with facilities suited to that group in terms of language, meals, religious activities and cultural activities' (Wilkinson and Taylor 1986:194). The development of such services becomes valuable when the ethnic aged cannot maintain themselves in their own homes. In the existing ethno-specific services, however, the major emphasis has been the linguistic facility rather than other social factors. The Commonwealth has made funds available under the Aged or Disabled Persons Homes Act to various ethnic and community organisations towards an expansion of this service. To make equitable access available to all, the Department of Community Services **Report of the Ethnic Aged** (1986) recommended that such ethnically-based services be contracted out to appropriate ethnic or other community agencies.

There are many appealing aspects to ethno-specific services. The care of the elderly becomes in fact the property of the ethnic community, thus cementing the bonds between members, both young and old. The potentials available within the facilities to make use of abilities of its resident population in matters such as housekeeping, cooking, gardening, administration, and others make the members active participants of the institution. Such a personal stake in the running of the institution should make their living meaningful and productive. The opportunity it allows the families of residents and friends to meet in one place will add to the continuity of their associations. In a survey of such accommodation facilities, Wilkinson and Taylor (1986:223) refer to the fact that

Meals were typically prepared in accordance with the cultural expectations of the residents and over a quarter of the facilities had been constructed to physically recreate an environment reminiscent of the cultural background from which the clients had come.

We have also witnessed that social interaction patterns are limited in the case of the foreign-born aged person. When the contacts they have with children and their own ethnic friends are excluded, there is a general lack of participation in the community. They were less likely to be 'close friends' with neighbours except for some instrumental flow-through over the fence. This is not to infer that they are lonely or isolated, for in fact it is the exact opposite. Their lives were full of interesting activities but contained within a very closed circuit. They had, as they put it, little time for anything else.

Recreational facilities such as senior citizens' clubs did not appeal to our respondents. To many, these facilities were inappropriate places for 'meeting friends'. Neither sports nor politics figured prominently in our conversations and travel was beyond the financial reach of many. The lack of these broader interests highlight the significance of the limited social network of the aged ethnic people. The provision of viable and acceptable alternatives to the home becomes important in this context. If ethno-specific services are made available, elderly people will not be obliged to move into accommodation facilities that may, even inadvertently, take the joy out of living.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL POLICY

Although our research methodology does not permit broad assertions of any kind, there are obvious implications for social policy regarding the ethnic aged in Australia. This study demonstrated the diversity prevalent among the ethnic aged. The fact that our respondents had certain advantages, mainly in terms of English language proficiency and affinity with the cultural values and life experiences of the Australian-born counterparts, old age as such did not pose significant problems to the aged persons in these three communities. Consequently, it was possible for the majority of these elderly people to benefit from general social provisions to a large extent. However, we noted instances where circumstances which were beneficial upon arrival had deteriorated, or the support networks had broken down due to lack of inter-generational solidarity to warrant specific policy provisions. Moreover, factors such as language proficiency and cultural affinity tend to lose their potency where family and social relationships are strained and material disadvantage is acute. It is possible to argue that in multi-ethnic societies general social provisions must therefore possess that added flexibility to incorporate specific programmes to cover cases of need which cannot be encompassed with the broader categories.

Living at home was the preferred option of a majority of our respondents. As noted earlier in the report this leaves a heavy burden on the family members. The Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs (1985:48) reported that in the case of the ethnic family these loads are heavier at times than for the average Australian family. Appropriate community support to supplement and assist family care makes private dependency less burdensome and manageable. It seems reasonable therefore to demand a balance in the distribution of resources between those who are cared for at home and those seeking institutional accommodation in the aged population in general.

In the communities studied here the aged are considered a valuable human resource. Such a healthy cultural attribute towards the aged cannot be sustained without assurances of support from the general community. In addition there must be mechanisms to monitor the circumstances of the family dependent ethnic aged to respond to changing circumstances of need of the aged as well as of the carers. Such information is of value in planning services according to changes in the demographic patterns of the ethnic population. Information about important elements that contribute to the quality of life of the ethnic aged cannot be left out of consideration in planning services especially in a context where societal aspirations are measured mainly in economic terms.

The notion of ethno-specific accommodation facilities is not the preferred option of the majority of the respondents interviewed in this study and it is argued elsewhere that persisting community values especially those tied up with the assimilationist ideals account for much of this antipathy. However, the AIMA (1983:165-66) points out to the growing demand for ethno-specific accommodation services among some large ethnic communities and it is likely to become an attractive concept in the future. This is a view that is strongly held by the leaders of the ethnic groups studied here. They maintain that all other options must be explored before institutionalising the ethnic elderly. Guaranteeing the cultural life styles of ethnic aged is to safeguard their broader social rights and this is a strongly held view at a time when ethnic communities are attempting to place a higher value on their self-identification in

relation to other Australians. The ethnic leaders are correct in their concerns that moving out of home means loss of control over their familiar 'ecological bubble'. It is empirically demonstrated that loss of control has been associated with impaired physical and mental health, decreased personal and social well-being and increased rates of mortality (Slivinski & Fitch 1987). Caring at home becomes a difficult task as the ageing parents present physical as well as emotional burdens on the family of the carer. As a result the culturally valued attribute takes a negative value that is grudgingly endured. It is the accurate perception of this hard reality that prompted ethnic leaders to paint a pessimistic future for the ageing population from the Asian region. It is important for policy makers to examine ways and means to neutralise the negative effects of institutionalised care, should this be needed by these people. Ethno-specific accommodation options offer many positives to warrant thorough scrutiny. Finally, before sound social policies are initiated valuable insights can be gained by talking to the prospective recipients of the service and no other consultative process can yield such rich dividends. The utilisation of culturally valued attributes to enhance the personal behaviours of people in the human services can be maximised by getting close to the consumers of such services.

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