Chapter-1

Introduction and Literature Review

1.1 Introduction

Family is one of the oldest social institutions and resilience is one of the main characteristics of this institution (Brubaker T., 1990). Different members of a family share love, affection, resources and extend support to members of same family and to those of other families as well. They assume certain roles and responsibilities. Roles of different members in a family largely depend on sex and age of the member. Importantly, the roles, responsibilities, functions and behaviours observed and practiced in society transform into social norms. The behaviour of an individual member of family isare largely affected by the social norms (Brubaker T., 1990). The social norms attach different functions and values to each member of a family. Additionally, these roles and responsibilities assumed by an individual control his/her behaviour. For example, in Indian context, as a social norm, (1) after marriage, a daughter is supposed to leave her maternal house and live with her husband at his house, (2) parents are not expected to stay at their married daughter's house, (3) children, especially sons, are expected to take care of family and old parents, (4) bride’s family is expected/required to pay dowry to the groom and (5) social acceptence to sexual relationships established through wedlock. These norms define some socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. The societal norms control almost all facets of life, from birth to death. Giving pre-lacteal feeds like honey, sugar water or jaggery to a new born is a social practice and so is the need of a son to kindle the funeral pyre. It can be observed that many social norms, though followed to date, do not have any rationale in the present scenario. While the age old social norms are
being followed, some deviations from certain social norms can also be seen. It can thus be considered that the social norms are functions of time and are subject to change. Nevertheless, the process of change is very slow and complex.

While considering family and social norms, it is imperative to give a careful consideration to another important and ancient institution called marriage. Murdock has defined marriage as “a socially approved sexual and economic union between two or more people which legitimizes their offspring and establishes rights and obligations among husbands, wives and their children”. Thus, both marriage and family institutions go hand in hand. On a time scale, families lead its members to the marriage institution which results in formation of a new family. The specific functions of marriage are-

- to provide a suitable environment for economic cooperation
- provide for material, educational and emotional needs of the children
- minimizes sexual competition

Hence, through marriage, societies create and maintain unions that will regulate mating, reproduction and child rearing. Marriage also establishes connections with another family. Looking at the functions listed above, it is evident that the entry into wedlock is also marked with changes in roles and responsibilities of the individual.

Over the period, family institution has undergone changes. In the Indian context, during ancient times, agriculture was primary occupation. Staying together as joint or extended joint families helped carry out the farm activities economically. This also benefited the families in keeping the landholdings intact and undivided. In addition, the joint families provided a very conducive environment for children to grow. This
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structure also helped to strengthen the feeling of affection among family members. In India, the peculiar pattern of centralized development of industries resulted in centralized employment opportunities. With loss of landholdings, increased educational attainments and industrial development, resulted in rural-urban and urban-urban migration. These migratory movements in search of better job prospects are not always accompanied by all the family members resulting in formation of nuclear families from joint or extended joint families. As mentioned by Brubaker (1990), “the children growing in this changing environment will develop different patterns of interactions” and hence this changing structure of the family can affect all the family members in some way or the other. However, the migratory movements being responsible for the disintegration of joint families cannot be considered as the only reason. The stressed relationships among different members of the family, family disputes and property disputes also adds to the list of reasons for separation of nuclear families from joint families.

We now understand that the roles, responsibilities and behaviours of members of the family at different time points influence perceived values of each family member and thus of different sexes. Literature provides evidence that the fertility decisions of parents are influenced by the values attached to children (Arnold F., 1972). In Indian context, along with the values of children, the fertility decisions of a couple are also influenced by parents and in-laws. In process of achieving desired number of children and the sex composition of children parents prolong child bearing (Rangamuthia et al., 1997). Parents try to maximize the utility and satisfaction by having a number of children of different sexes. It has been observed that the parents continue child bearing till the desired sex composition of children is achieved. In case of India, the
son preference has affected the pace of fertility decline (Arnold et al. 1998). The partilineal or matrilineal, partilocal or matrilocal and patriarchal or matriarchal nature of a society will, to a certain extent, influence the importance and values the society attaches to a particular sex, as the roles and responsibilities of an individual will change as per the nature of the society. The imbalance in the values attached to the male and female child gives rise to the much known phenomenon of sex preference. Murthy in a study mentions “where there is preference for one sex over other it is often due to the reason that the society has ascribed the different and unequal functional values to sons and daughters” (Murthy P.V., 1991).

### 1.2 Son Preference

Most of the societies in the world exhibit sex preference. Sex ratios and sex preference index help to ascertain the extent of preference for a particular sex in the society. With almost no exception, these societies are patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal, which puts male at the center of social, religious and cultural lives. Thus, these societies attach more value to a male child as compared to a female child.

A number of studies show that almost all the societies over the globe exhibit preference for male sex over female, though the strength may vary. Studies show that along with India, there are other countries which show a strong son preference and these include Korea (Williamson, 1976; Ahmed, 1981; Park, 1983; Cain, 1984; Arnold, 1985; Nemeth & Bowling, 1985; Park & Cho, 1995), Taiwan (Williamson, 1976), China (Williamson, 1976; Hull, 1990; Johansson & Nygren, 1991; Wen, 1992; Li & Cooney, 1993; Wen, 1993; Ahn, 1994; Li, 1995; Graham et al., 1998), Bangladesh (Williamson, 1976; Ahmed, 1981; Cain, 1984; Bairagi & Langsten, 1986; Amin & Mariam, 1987;

As far as India is considered, many studies have been conducted so far to explore son preference among different states of India. It has been observed that North Indian states exhibit strong son preference than the South Indian states. States of Uttar Pradesh (Poffenberger, 1967; Basu, 1992; Kulkarni et al., 1996), Maharashtra (Dandekar, 1963; Bhatia, 1978), Punjab (Wyon & Gordon, 1971; Singh, 1986; Das
Gupta, 1987), Gujarat (Lahiri, 1974; Das, 1987b), Delhi (Gulati, 1987; Shah & Taneja, 1991; Gangopadhyay & Das, 1996), Haryana (Singh, 1986; Malhi, 1995), Chandigarh (Manmeet, 1993), Rajasthan and Manipur (Kulkarni et al., 1996), rural areas of Karnataka (Rajarettnam & Deshpande, 1994) and scheduled caste population of rural Assam (Nath & Land, 1994) show strong preference for sons over daughters while states of Kerala (Ramakumar, 1988; Kulkarni et al., 1996) and Tamil Nadu (Basu, 1992; Kulkarni et al., 1996) show lesser extent of son preference. Studies show that strong son preference has a bearing on the fertility behaviour and couples may continue to have children until their desire for son is fulfilled (Arnold et al., 1998, Rangamuthia et al., 1997).

The sex ratios from past few censuses have invariably been seen favouring males and similar trends are also seen from 2001 census. The situation is more critical in northern states of Punjab, where sex ratio is well below 800 females per 1000 males in 10 out of 17 districts of the state (Census of India, 2001). Haryana is another state with overall sex ratio below 850. Even in the state of Maharashtra, the sex ratio has declined from state average of 946 to 917 females per 1000 males over 1991 to 2001 (Census of India, 2001). The extent of son preference varies from one part of country to the other depending on the existing socioeconomic conditions (Radkar, 1999). Female infanticides, use of prenatal diagnostic tests and sex selective abortions prevailing increasingly in the society also show glimpses of high levels of gender discrimination in the country.

Sons are desired for religious, cultural, social, economic and psychological reasons. Traditionally, in Hindu religion, sons are needed to kindle the funeral pyre of their
deceased parents and help in the salvation of their souls. Other than the religious reason, the other most important reason for the strong desire for a son is his “economic utility”. Unlike daughters, a son upon marriage stays at home and adds to the strength of family. He adds more members to the family hence contributing to the work force at home and outside. This addition of a member is beneficial in a society where primary occupation of agriculture requires more labour (Bardhan, 1988; Basu, 1989; Dharmalingam, 1996; Mamdani, 1972; Miller 1981).

Parents tend to give a variety of reasons to support the desire for a son. Women in a patriarchal society have low social status and are always in need of security. The low social, familial and educational statuses raise issues of security at all the ages and the fear of widowhood, living arrangements and financial security among women induces strong desire for a son. Giving birth to a male child elevates the social and familial statuses to a woman. A father desires a son as he feels that during his old age, the son would make his life secure. He will be the only one who will continue his family line, bring pride his family, perform final rituals, ensure against property loss and many more.

Sons are supposed to take care of parents in old age and provide economic and emotional support. On the other hand, girl child, upon marriage, has to leave parental house and stay with her husband. So the expenditure on a son is considered as an investment, which will give returns to the parents in future. But in case of daughters, spending becomes a dead investment with no returns for parents. Due to this reason, a daughter is considered as an economic liability where as a son is an asset (Murthy P.V., 1991). Psychologically, having a son is a very satisfying feeling for the parents.
The older parents without a male offspring not only suffer from less care in old age but also feel depressed (Zhenming Xie, 1994). Presence of a son in old age serves as a psychological boost. Becoming a part of the son’s family gives more satisfaction to the parents than just the monetary support from the son.

Looking at the fertility decline in India, strong son preference can be an obstacle for a decline in fertility, as couples will continue to have children until their desire for a son is fulfilled (Rangamuthia et al., 1997). Unambiguously, the Old Age Security perceived by parents is one of the major reasons for son preference (Srinivasan K. et al., 1979; Murthy, 1991; Karkal M, 1996; Willis Robert J, 1979; Jejeebhoy Shireen J, 1992).

The patriarchal societies put a greater onus on the male child. Society attaches more value to a son in terms of numerous functions and responsibilities expected from him. Additionally, the families with low levels of earnings also expect a son to earn money and take care of them. Thus, the socio-economic condition of the people of a country has influence on the extent of son preference observed in the society. Unlike developed countries, almost non-existent social security system for older age groups in developing countries indicates more dependency on the son at later ages and adds one more reason to the list of supporting son preference. This can very well be seen from the example of developed countries like United States of America and Canada. These developed countries exhibit a low son preference and have a very good social security system.
Through anecdotal references, it can be seen that a male child is preferred over a female child for the reason that fertile period of a female is limited as compared to that of a male. Cases of female feticide are commonly heard. Even today, few cases of a married man remarrying are seen just because he had no daughters from his first marriage.

To both fathers and mothers, a son is a must for various religious reasons. He also is important, as he satisfies the economic and psychological needs. Thus, in Indian context, it can be said that, sex preference is synonymous with son preference (Radkar, 1999).

1.3 Old Age Security

Sons are desired by parents for a variety of social, cultural, religious and economic reasons. Old age security forms a major reason of for son preference (Arnold F. & Fawcet J., 1975; Arnold F. et al., 1998; Bairagi R., 1986; Bulatao R. et al., 1986; Clelan J. et al. 1983, Parasuraman et al. 1994; Rangmuthiya et al., 1997). However, no study has yet come up with an explicit definition of old age security.

Robert Lewis (1990) defines Adult Interdependencies as “the weak, normative assistance or support given usually, but not necessarily, in times of need by other members of a family of orientation or of a modified extended family”. The paper also defines the Survival dependency as “normatively prescribed assistance provided to the family members who are in need of aid or support and are unable to help themselves”. Older parents look at children for support, both emotional and financial in the event of crisis. For parents, in the absence of sufficient instrumental resources, the dependence
on children may be permanent. In India, daughters are dependent on their husbands and in-laws for decision making, though they too provide support during crisis. Hence, sons are looked upon as a reliable sources of support during crises. Apart from the dependencies arising out of crises, there may be cases where a dependency that is perceived as necessary by older parents is seen as excessive dependency by children (Goldfrab, 1969).

Traditionally, after marriage, a girl has to leave her parental house and go to her husband’s house. This practice gives no returns to the parental house in the form of economic support or help in household chores or emotional support or care. The girl, may be, at times has to depend on her husband for visiting her parents, duration of stay, extending financial help, etc. Moreover, as a cultural norm, Indian society does not allow parents to stay at their daughter’s place. This makes the desire for a son stronger to secure the livings arrangements, financial and emotional support at later ages.

With the technological advancements, improved quality of medical care and standard of living accompanied by social and cultural changes, the roles and responsibilities assumed by the parents and children are also changing. These changes and the “westernization” have resulted in the deterioration of the traditional support system for the older age groups. Increasing levels of education has resulted in migration of children from villages to cities and from cities to metropolitans and abroad leaving behind the older parents all by themselves. The high level of aspiration, changing concepts of comfort and privacy and “modernization” have segregated older parents
from the lives of the younger generation. The older parents are more often looked down as a burden than as an asset.

In his study, Eldermire (1997) says, “The recent socio-economic changes including urbanization and economic decline have contributed to the changing circumstances of the elderly. These changes have resulted into weakening of the traditional informal support system, both, community and family, as well as marginalization and elimination of their purposeful social and economic roles.” He has also mentioned that isolation, irrelevancy and lack of meaningful roles also affect the elderly. Elderly persons often complain of loneliness and lack of respect than the lack of economic support. However, some studies have also contributed to the understanding of different aspects of the process of ageing, problems faced by elderly and also by the caregivers. The nature of parental expectations from children, especially son, and fulfillment of these expectations is very critical. The expectations related to the emotional support and care during illness can be considered more critical at later ages as indicated by Eldermire (1997). Secured life at later ages and support from the son and the overall levels of fulfillment of the parental expectations bring satisfaction/dissatisfaction to older parents. This satisfaction plays an important role in the overall well-being and quality of life of the elderly. Present study makes and attempts to understand the quality of life at later ages.

1.4 Quality of life

Quality of life is a very broad term comprising of different issues. Sometimes the Quality of Life is defined as level of happiness or satisfaction, sometimes as the health status of an individual. There are various studies which deal with quality of life
at later ages, but these studies targeted the health problems of the elderly (Guha Roy, 1989; Cicerelli, 1990). Focus of the present study is to explore the levels of satisfaction of the parents, emotional support, socio-economic status and general health and not the study of health status of the elderly. The present study adopts the definition of the Quality of Life mentioned by Ross Peters (2004). The definition considers four dimensions while defining Quality of Life viz. life satisfaction, self-esteem, general health & functional status and socio-economic status. These dimensions can also be broken down into more specific elements such as one's occupation, marriage, place of residence, etc.

In the present scenario, when a number of studies have shown that there exists preference for a son over a daughter and the Old Age Security is one of the most stated reasons, it is of interest to see the nature and the extent of involvement of children, especially sons, in the life of older parents and fulfilling their expectations. While looking at the quality of life, only health aspects cannot be considered. Leaving out the satisfaction that an individual earns from events during his/her life span play an important role in life. With this consideration, the present study is an attempt to look at the Quality of Life in terms of satisfaction from different achievements in life. The study confines itself to emotional, financial support and care during illness for the study of Quality of Life and looks at the quality of life at later ages from satisfaction point of view.

1.5 Need for the study

The studies related son preference and values of children conducted in India are mostly in context of fertility behaviour (Arnold, 1985 & 1987; Arnold and Zhaoxiang,
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1986; Bariagi and Ray, 1986; Rangmuthia et al. 1997; Arnold et al., 1998; Repetto, 1972). Studies from the National Family Health Survey have pointed out the differentials in the extent of son preference in northern, southern and western regions of the country (Rangamuthia et al. 1997). Furthermore, studies which looked into son preference have brought out that son preference can be attributed to various social, cultural, economic, psychological and religious factors. Parents expect the son to provide family labour on the farm or in business, earn wages, take care during old age, provide them emotional, psychological and financial support (Bardhan, 1988; Basu, 1989; Dharmalingam, 1996; Mamdani, 1972; Miller, 1981). Weakening of the traditional informal support system is the resultant of the socio-economic changes including urbanization and economic decline. With marginalization and elimination of their purposeful social and economic roles, elderly often complain about isolation, irrelevancy and lack of meaningful roles. Elderly persons often complain of loneliness and lack of respect than the lack of economic support.

Thus, in the present scenario, when number of studies have shown that there was and still exists preference for son over daughter for the most stated reason of Old Age Security, it is very important to see the actual involvement of the son in fulfilling parental expectations and providing the envisaged old age security. The present study is an attempt to study whether children, especially son, really fulfill the expected needs of old age security of parents? What role children, especially son, play in providing old age security to parents? The study will also attempt to look into quality of life the elderly lead.
1.6 Objectives

As mentioned, present study is an attempt to look into the role of children, especially son, in old age security. The study will also attempt to look into the quality of old age in changing the economic scenario where the cost of living is going up and the elderly population is facing problems of deteriorated or non-existing social or traditional old age support system. The study is an attempt to examine the relation between economic support, living arrangement, emotional support and care elderly get from their children and the quality of old age.

More specifically, the objectives of the study are as follows-

- To examine the type of old age security among aged people with reference to economic support, living arrangements, emotional support and care.
- To examine the role of son in old age security and to study differentials in the role of children by socio-economic status.
- To examine the relationship between economic support, living arrangements, emotional support and the care elderly get from their son and the quality of old age.

Hypotheses

Present study will attempt to test the following hypotheses-

- Having son/presence of son affects the old age security parents get positively.
- Role of son in old age security reduces with higher economic status of parents.
- Presence of spouse improves quality of old age.
1.7 Organization of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter divided into two parts. Part-1 provides general introduction to the present study and review of available literature on son preference, old age security and quality of life. Part-2 presents the statement of the problem and objectives of the study.

Chapter 2: Methods and Material

This chapter is presents methodology used for the study, various data sources used, profile of the study area and data collection experiences.

Chapter 3: Background Characteristics and Quality of Life

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part-1 presents the background characteristics of the sample while Part-2 presents the analysis of the data about the Old Age Security and its determinants.

Chapter 4: Role of Son in old age security

This chapter presents findings on the actual role played by the son in providing old age security to older parents.

Chapter 5: Role of Son and Quality of Life Index

An attempt has been made to quantify the involvement of son in providing old age security and also the quality of life. This chapter presents construction of the Role of Son and Quality of life indices and the distribution of elderly as per the indices.

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion

This chapter presents summary and conclusions along with some ideas for future research.