

ROLE OF RELIGION IN LATER LIFE: A CASE STUDY IN KOLKATA

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Introduction

The supreme reality is one, unknown, but not on that account of unknowable. When it reveals itself, it lend itself to be experienced as a sheer existence, an existence that is not merely aware, but powerful, potent, and the nature of this consciousness-force is bliss, delight.

During the stage where life is moving in the path of sunset, most individuals lose their jobs because they retire from active service. They begin to fear about their physical and psychological health. In our society, the elderly are typically perceived as not so active, deteriorating intellectually, narrow-minded and attaching significance to religion. Many of the old people lose their spouses and suffer from emotional insecurity.

The socio-economic and psycho-physiological phenomenon associated with old age arouse anxiety in individuals and thus create a special need for reassurance and security in life which have throughout the ages come from religious belief. Participation in religious activities given fairly high position as compared to other leisure time activities by elder persons. There is an immense need of serious and intensive research regarding the adjustment value of religion in old age indicate that certain religious activities are related to good personal adjustment in old age.

At advanced old age when life's journey is ending, the need for integration increases. This is mainly due to the "awareness of finitude" (Munnichs 1966) or the heightened awareness of the reality of death and the attendant search for meaning to one's life. Human beings choose a variety of threads to integrate their lives, religious beliefs being one of the more prominent ones in this research. Both in the personal as well as social spheres, these beliefs (with their attendant behaviors expressions) manifested their influence on the lives of the very old respondents. (Mehta, 1997: 101).

The Indian elderly believed that old age was a time to think of God, and to focus on spiritual pursuits. In the Indian context, the four stages of the life cycle (ashramas) according to Hindu philosophy had a salient bearing on old age experience (Unni and Paran 1988). The four stages are Brahmacharya (student) Gharhastya (householder) Vanaprastya (late middle age-withdrawal from worldly activities) and Sanyasha

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(old age-period of renunciation). Such lifespan categorization simplifies the understanding of the concept of DHARMA or duty which each individual has to perform at each life stage. (Mehta, 1997: 104). On the other hand the law of Karma, which is the law of cause and effect, continues through lifetimes. This law or principle states that an action will always have a reaction in that a good act will bear good consequences and vice versa. Thus it is often used as an explanation for positive or negative occurrences in one's life, thus easing the acceptance of adversities as well as disappointments in life.

Literature Review

In this paper there is an attempt to find the influence of religion in later age where the individual is mostly alone and dropped down with all the traumas of life. Individuals become lonely for many reasons one of that is loss of spouse in later life and inevitable crisis that one at least of the couple will experience before their own death, is a circumstance where the presence or absence of religious belief was likely to be strongly felt. Often they feel that their lack of economic viability makes them impaired and at moments of crisis they are in need of divine solace. Following are some of the instances and writings which will connect the lives of the elderly more to the religious beliefs.

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) says that to get lost in *realization of god is the real religiousness*. C. R. Trivedi (2007) says *Dharma is one with the practice of which we can live a better life*. Dharma is slightly flexible conduct that is in tune with the demands of the situation. Yoga described in Gita, is *a state of equipoise (samatva)-external freedom from sorrow and craving, equipoise in success and failure – a state par excellence, a state of steadiness of mind*. Yoga is at peace with himself and the world about him-the ideal of mental health. Yoga again according to Bhagavad Gita and Markandeya Purana, is Vairagya-detachment of mind from misery and sorrow, ignorance and impurities. At the same time, Yoga is the art of performing your routine skilfully. *Yoga leads to cessation of craving for pleasure and readiness to accept any situation that one confronts without fear and despair*. This is, perhaps, the happiest state of behavioural adjustment of an individual to his surroundings. Yoga is union with cosmos, the whole fraternity of mankind.

Dr. (Mrs.) S. Murty (2008) shows the ways of passing time, hobbies and type of entertainment enjoyed by women. *Worship of god (pooja), going to temple, religious assemblies and gospels, watching TV, listening to radio and music, going to movies, going to clubs or mahila pandals, going to motels and hotels, gossiping and chatting, playing and going with children, visiting friends and relatives, going for walk, going to park, tour and travel, visiting religious places and tirth yatra, reading, writing etc are some of the ways of passing time and entertainment*. Anand Akundy (2004) views social and cultural factors weigh heavily in considering the mental health and illness among older persons. The kind of social relations in which the aged engage is a crucial factor in the origin of their mental disorders (Barron, Milton 1961). Psychologists and sociologists have tried to characterize some of these social relations as *“loss of significance” (Jung, 1960), “Anomie” (Durkheim, 1951)*.

Wolfe (1996) summarized psychological aspects of ageing states that geriatric patients who have ambivalent feelings towards life and death may turn toward religion which “gives them emotional support and tends to relieve them from the fear that everything soon will come to an end.” A higher proportion of old people believe that here is a life after death, there is a god and apparently are more inclined to hold traditional and conservative beliefs of their religion (Gray and Moberg, 1962). Ainley and Smith (1984) investigated the multidimensional conceptualization of religious participation among the aged. Data on attitude towards religious participation and on the frequency of public and private religious behaviour were obtained on 947 church members (age 50+ years). The results revealed that *religious attitudes and behaviours became more homogeneous as age increased*. Secondly, *the dimension of participation became more distinct with advancing age, showing an increase in private religious behaviours and a decrease in public religious behaviour*. The results of the study imply that those groups who are disadvantaged in society, such as, lower class and females, are more religious than the advantaged groups. Thus J.P. Yadav (2004) concluded from the findings that socio-economic status is a significant factor influencing life styles and religiosity among aged in India.

Swami Rama (1980) has shown the path for those who care to seek. The fear of death which overshadows the life of the elderly will vanish and thus improve the quality of life not only of the elderly but of the entire population. Meditation should not be a prescription for the elderly alone as the *impact of meditation is all-pervasive*. Swami Veda Bharti has already advocated the introduction of meditation in educational institutions so that children “grow into adults who are confirmed in peace, first in inner peace and through that in the exterior one”. Dr. Mala Kapur Shankardass (1995) advocated for retirement planning, social adjustments in later years, awareness of legal and social measures to prevent abuse, adopting healthy lifestyles, and promoting the concept of self-care. A strong emphasis has been given to voices of older people and the needs of them as perceived by the elderly themselves.

Objectives

- Socio-demographic profile of the respondents.
- To study the nature and practice of religion in their later life.
- To study the impact of the religion on the role and the status of elderly within the family and community.
- To study how far social gathering based on religion helps in successful ageing.
- To find out the prevalence and impact of religious tour and pilgrimage helps the elders to combat the pains of ageing.
- To study how far the practise of religion and religious tour helps in giving solace to the elders.

Methodology

The study was conducted among the elderly living in family setting and residing in and around Kolkata.

Sample Size

The total numbers of respondents interviewed in the present studies are 100, out of which 89% are mainly Jains and 9% and 2% are Hindus and Buddhists respectively. Among respondents most of them are engaged in business, some were ex-teachers and ex-government professionals. Respondents are selected on the basis of purposive sampling method.

Research Methods

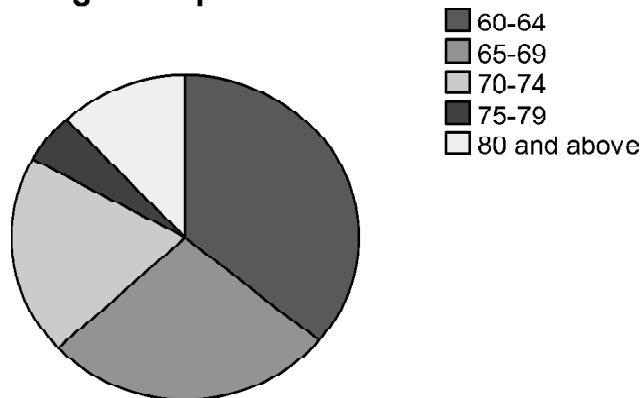
The researcher has employed survey research methods to collect the data. The technique of the data collection is face to face structured interview. Data has been analyzed with the help of percentage table.

Result Analysis and Discussion

Age Composition		
<i>Age-Interval</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
60-64	36	36.0
65-69	27	27.0
70-74	20	20.0
75-79	5	5.0
80 and above	12	12.0
Total	100	100.0

Out of 100 respondents 36 per cent belongs to the age group of 60-64 and 27 per cent belongs to the age group 65-69 .20 respondents falls within the age group 70-74 and 5 respondents falls within the age group 75-79 . 12 respondents are above the age 80.

Age Composition



Marital Status of the Respondent

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Valid	Unmarried	2	2.0
	Married	76	76.0
	Divorced	1	1.0
	Widow	21	21.0
	Total	100	100.0

From this study it is evident that out of 100 respondents 76 respondents are married, 2 per cent are unmarried and 1 is divorced. 21 per cent falls under the category of widow.

Religion Status of the Respondent

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Valid	Hindus	9	9.0
	Buddhism	2	2.0
	Jainism	89	89.0
	Total	100	100.0

Out of the 100 respondents 89 per cent are jains and 9 per cent and 2 per cent of the respondents are hindus and buddhist respectively.

Independent Income of the Respondent

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Valid	2000-5000	42	42.0
	5001-10000	12	12.0
	10001-20000	43	43.0
	20001-30000	3	3.0
	Total	100	100.0

Out of 100 respondents 42 % have independent income within 2000-5000. 43 % have their income between 10001-20000. 12 % are under the bar 5001-10000 and 3 % are within 20001-30000.

Monthly Income of the Respondent

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
	20000-30000	3	3.0
	30001-500000	10	10.0
	500001-1000000	28	28.0
	1000001-2000000	53	53.0
	2000000 and above	6	6.0
Total		100	100.0

The above table states that most of the respondents are within the income group of 10000001-2000000 and only 3% of the respondents are within the income group of 200000-300000.

Family Type

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Joint family	92	92.0
Nuclear family	8	8.0
Total	100	100.0

Out of 100 respondents 92% reside in joint family and rest live in nuclear family.

Believe in God

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Yes	81	81.0
No	19	19.0
Total	100	100.0

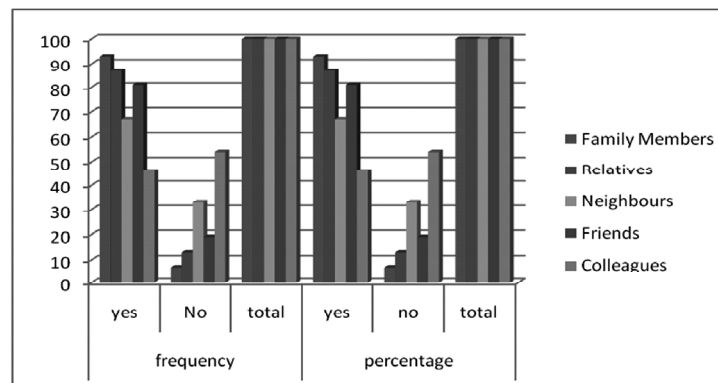
Out of 100 respondents 81% believe in god and rest doesn't have faith in god.

Frequency of Worship

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Occasion based	21	21.0
Monthly	3	3.0
Regularly	76	76.0
Total	100	100.0

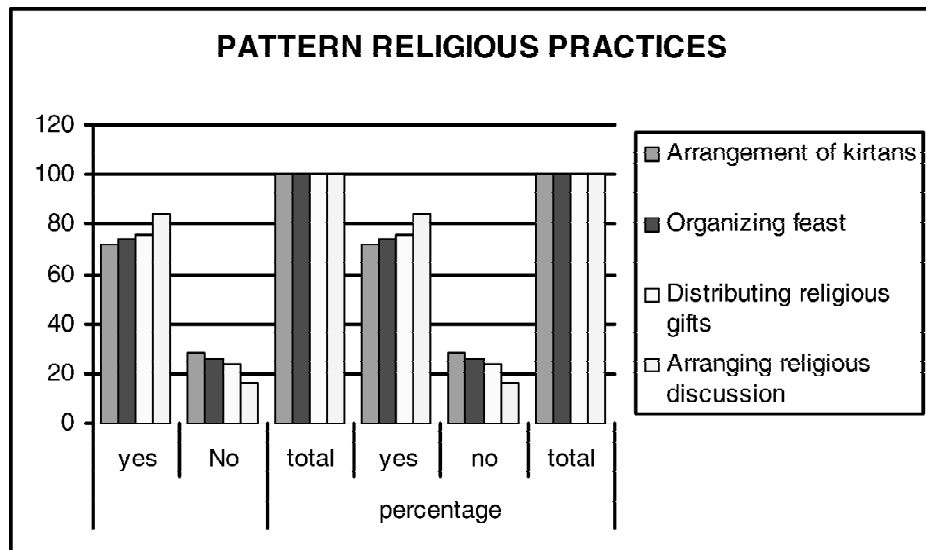
The above table represents the worship pattern of the respondents, out of 100 respondents 76% worship god regularly, 21% and 3% worship occasionally and monthly basis.

Nature of Religious Gathering



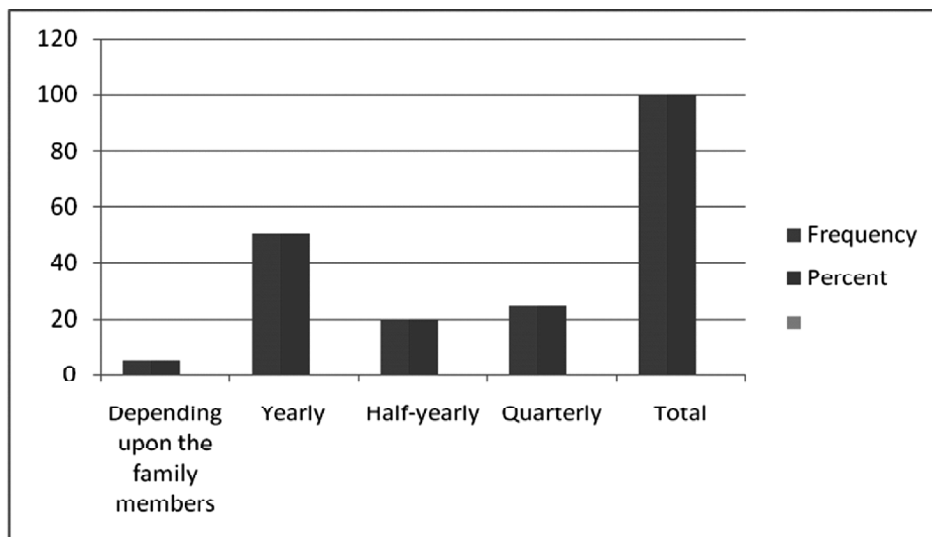
The above graph shows that most of the religious gatherings are attended by the family members and relatives.

Pattern of Religious Practices



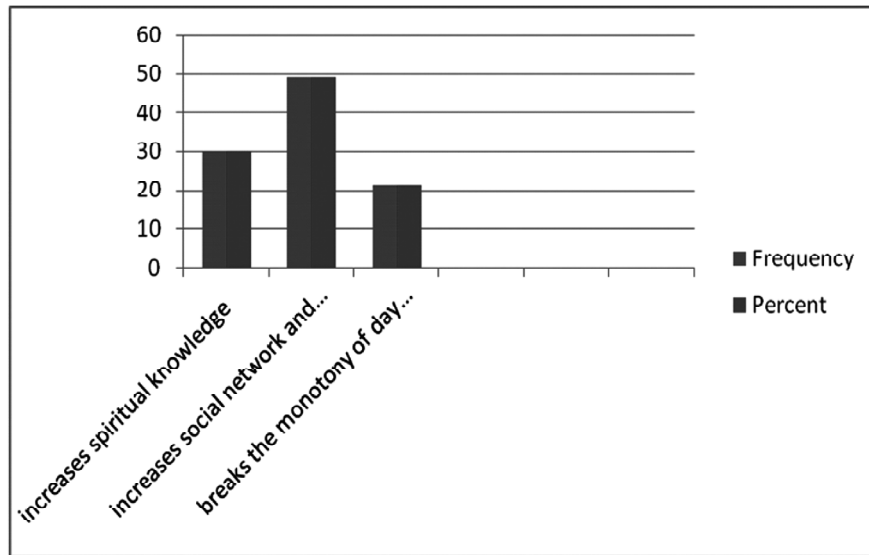
The above graph states about the pattern of religious practices where most of the respondents prefer participating in arranging religious discussions.

Frequency of Religious Tour



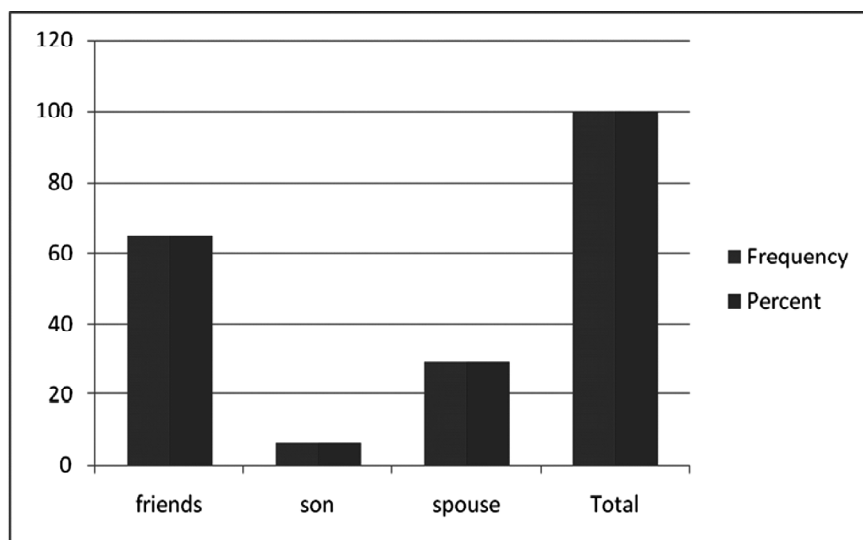
The above graph states that most of the respondents go out for religious tours half-yearly.

Importance of Religious Tour



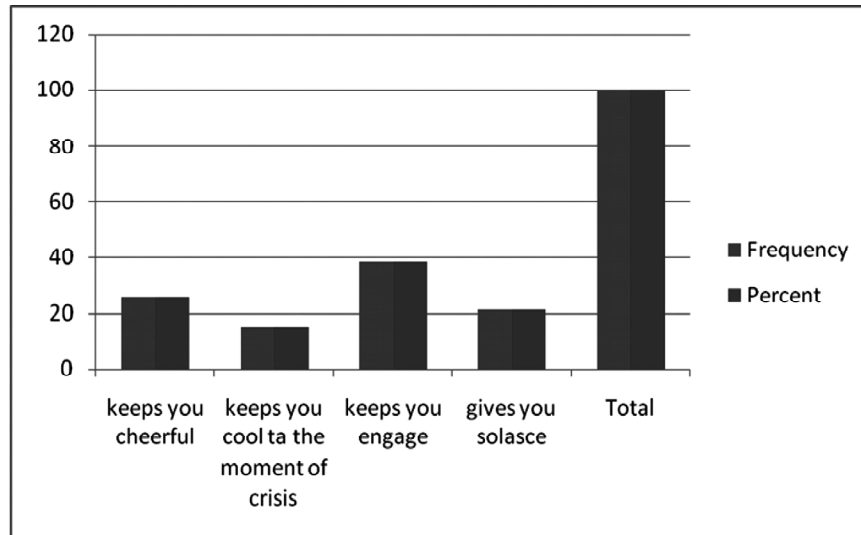
The above graph shows that most of the respondents feel the importance of the religious tours is because it increases social network and also gatherings.

Level of Satisfaction from the Tour Companion



Out of 100 respondents 65 per cent of the respondents finds its comfortable to go to religious tours with friends, 29 per cent of the respondents likes to go to the religious tours with their spouses and only 6 per cent with their sons.

Impact of Religious Tour



Out of 100 respondents 38 per cent of them finds religious tours keeps them engage,26% finds it helps them to be cheerful.15 per cent feels that it helps in the moment of crisis and 21 per cent of the respondent feels it gives solace.

Conclusion

The interconnections between religion and old age are complex; the more so given that the concept of age itself has – for a large part of human history – been determined by religious understandings of life. In traditional societies, religion played a crucial part in structuring the transitions between one stage of the life and the next and in defining maturity and fulfilment. In modern industrial materialistic society it is very complicated to state that how far this religion act as a guiding spirit for the elderly. But in this study a factor that can be traced is that dependency on religion works as a one of the most important resort for providing solace to the elderly. However on the other hand practice of religion is depended upon the economic grounds. Religious tours and social gatherings are organized at expense of money which are enjoyed by the elderly people and also provides them a mental satisfaction. However in certain cases individual worship also keeps them cool, cheerful and engaged.

Recommendation

The present study reveals that religion plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life of the elderly. We can also infer from the study that through the religious gatherings

they feel themselves connected to their peer mates and the younger ones. So the nongovernmental organizations, welfare clubs and religious institutions should organize more gatherings so as to increase the networking of the elderly people. The government in collaboration with different religious communities may construct temples and also may conduct religious functions.

Acknowledgement

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