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Intergenerational Bonding: A Pathway to Social Cohesion with special references to Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizen Act, 2007

AJEET KUMAR¹ AND DR. ANUPAMA BHARTI²

ABSTRACT

Intergenerational bonding is crucial in fostering social cohesion, transmitting cultural values and ensuring emotional well-being across different age groups. This paper explores the significance of intergenerational relationships, factors influencing bonding, challenges in maintaining these relationships and policy implications for strengthening them. Through a review of existing literature and empirical studies, this paper highlights how intergenerational interactions contribute to societal wellbeing and proposes measures to enhance these relational ships, particularly in the elderly care and the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of intergenerational bonding is deeply rooted in Indian society, where family structures have traditionally been strong. Intergenerational bonding refers to the social and emotional connections between different age groups, particularly between the elderly and younger generations. These relationships are fundamental in maintaining cultural continuity, providing emotional support and fostering mutual understanding. (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010). Aged people are the senior members of the family who know better about society, family history, value value-related customary practices. They possess a better understanding of family values and society. Elders pass these family values and societal knowledge to the upcoming generations. Young generations, while living with their ways and style, also kept these values and information and lived their life.

However, rapid modernization, urbanization and nuclear family structures have significantly impacted the strength of these bonds. Due to rapid urbanization and societal modernization have brought in their wake a breakdown in family values and the framework of family

¹ Author is a Research Scholar at Himachal Pradesh University Shimla, India.

² Author is an Assistant Professor at Himachal Pradesh University Shimla, India.

support, economic insecurity, social isolation and elderly abuse, leading to a host of psychological illnesses. In addition, widows are prone to face social stigma and ostracism. The socio-economic problems of the elderly are aggravated by factors such as the lack of social security and inadequate facilities for health care, rehabilitation and recreation. Also, in most of the developing countries, pension and social security is restricted to those who have worked in the public sector or the organized sector of industry. Many surveys have shown that retired elderly people are confronted with the problems of financial insecurity and loneliness.

Thus, intergenerational bonding refers to the meaningful connections and relationships formed between individuals of different generations, such as younger people and senior citizens. These bonds can foster mutual understanding, respect, and support, benefiting both the young and the old. In the context of India's Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 (Issac et al., 2021) Intergenerational bonding takes on a significant legal and social dimension, as the Act emphasizes the responsibility of younger generations to care for their elderly relatives while highlighting the need for societal mechanisms to support such relationships.

The MWPSA Act, 2007, enacted by the Government of India, aims to ensure the maintenance and welfare of parents and senior citizens (defined as individuals aged 60 and above). It places a legal obligation on children, grandchildren, and, in some cases, other relatives to provide financial and emotional support to their elderly family members. This legislation reflects the cultural value of intergenerational responsibility, which has historically been a cornerstone of Indian society but has weakened due to modernization, urbanization, and changing family structures. By mandating care, the Act seeks to reinforce familial bonds across generations and prevent the neglect or abandonment of seniors.

One key aspect of the Act that relates to intergenerational bonding is its provision for maintenance. Under Section 4, children and grandchildren are legally required to ensure that their parents or grandparents can lead a "normal life," which includes providing food, clothing, housing, and medical care. (Behera, 2021a). This legal framework not only ensures the well-being of seniors but also encourages younger generations to remain actively involved in their lives, fostering regular interaction and emotional connection. For instance, the Act allows senior citizens to approach Maintenance Tribunals if their needs are not met, compelling younger family members to fulfil their duties, thus maintaining a link between generations.

Another notable provision is Section 23, which protects the property rights of senior citizens.

If a senior transfers property (e.g., through a gift) to a younger relative with the condition that they provide care, and the relative fails to do so, the transfer can be declared void by a Tribunal. This clause strengthens intergenerational bonding by tying material support to emotional (Behera, 2021a) and physical care, incentivizing younger family members to stay engaged with their elders rather than merely benefiting from their assets (Yadav et al., 2024).

Beyond its legal mandates, the MWPSA Act, 2007, implicitly promotes intergenerational bonding by highlighting the need for awareness among both seniors and the younger generation. Studies and critiques of the Act suggest that its effectiveness depends on social measures, such as educating young people about their responsibilities and the value of spending time with older relatives. Programs inspired by the Act, though not explicitly mandated, could include community initiatives where youth and seniors collaborate, such as storytelling sessions, skill-sharing workshops, or cultural events. These activities align with the Act's broader goal of preventing elder abuse and neglect by building stronger, more empathetic relationships across age groups. (Siwach & Kumar Malik, 2022).

However, the Act has limitations in directly fostering intergenerational bonding. Its focus is primarily on enforcement rather than proactive relationship-building. Critics argue that the fixed maintenance cap (initially set at INR 10,000 per month) and lack of provisions for emotional support fail to address the deeper aspects of intergenerational connection, such as companionship or mutual learning. Additionally, the low number of cases filed under the Act suggests a lack of awareness or accessibility, which hinders its potential to bridge generational gaps on a wider scale. (Sran Sarabjit Kaur & Gaur Pranita, 2020).

In practice, intergenerational bonding can complement the Act's objectives. For example, in cultures where elders are revered for their wisdom, interactions with younger people, whether through family or community programs, can enhance seniors' sense of purpose and reduce isolation. Conversely, the young gain patience, empathy, and historical perspective. While the MWPSA Act, 2007, does not explicitly fund or establish such programs, its emphasis on familial duty provides a foundation for society to develop initiatives that strengthen these bonds.

The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, serves as a legal tool to reinforce intergenerational bonding by ensuring that younger generations remain accountable for the care of their elders. While it primarily addresses material support, its underlying intent aligns with the broader societal goal of maintaining strong, supportive relationships between the young and old. To fully realize this potential, the Act could be

paired with social efforts that promote mutual engagement, ensuring that intergenerational bonding thrives both within families and in the community at large.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- **Social Cohesion Theory:** Social cohesion theory highlights the importance of strong family ties in maintaining societal stability and well-being. Social cohesion refers to the degree of social integration and harmony within a society, which is influenced by factors such as shared values, trust, and cooperation among individuals (Chan et al., 2006). In the context of intergenerational bonding, close relationships between older and younger generations foster a sense of belonging, reduce social isolation, and create mutual support systems. Studies suggest that societies with high levels of intergenerational cohesion tend to have lower crime rates, better health outcomes, and stronger civic participation. (Chan et al., 2006). The breakdown of traditional family structures due to urbanization and economic pressures weakens social cohesion, making elderly individuals more vulnerable to neglect and loneliness. By reinforcing familial responsibility, the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, aims to preserve social cohesion by legally mandating caregiving responsibilities within families. (Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, 2007)

- **Intergenerational Solidarity Theory:** This theory explores the multidimensional aspects of intergenerational relationships, including emotional, functional, and financial support (Bengtson V. L., 1991). Emotional solidarity refers to the feelings of closeness and affection between generations, which enhance psychological well-being and reduce stress. (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997). Functional solidarity pertains to the exchange of services and assistance, such as caregiving and household support, which are critical for elderly individuals who may struggle with physical and cognitive decline. Financial solidarity encompasses monetary and material transfers between generations, ensuring economic security for the elderly. Research indicates that stronger intergenerational ties lead to better social outcomes, including reduced elderly poverty and improved mental health (Albert & Ferring, 2018_Drustvena.The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, aligns with this theory by enforcing financial and caregiving responsibilities, thereby institutionalizing intergenerational support mechanisms (HelpAge India,2018).

- **Legal and Policy Framework:** The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, was enacted to address the growing concerns of elder neglect and abandonment in India. The Act mandates that children and relatives provide maintenance to

senior citizens, ensuring their basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare (Siwach & Kumar Malik, 2022). Additionally, the Act empowers tribunals to address grievances related to elder neglect and facilitates the establishment of old-age homes for destitute senior citizens. While the legislation provides a legal foundation for elderly welfare, its implementation faces challenges such as a lack of awareness, inadequate enforcement, and cultural resistance to formalizing familial obligations (Shankardass, 2016). Effective policy interventions, including awareness campaigns and community-based support systems, are necessary to strengthen the impact of the Act in promoting intergenerational bonding and social cohesion.

III. INTERGENERATIONAL BONDING AND SOCIAL COHESION

- **Traditional Family Systems in India:** India has historically followed a joint family system, wherein multiple generations live together under one roof. This structure provides economic security, emotional support, and social stability for elderly family members (Dandekar, 1996). In traditional settings, elder care was primarily the responsibility of the family, with younger members respecting and looking after their aging relatives. The joint family system ensured that senior citizens remained active participants in household decision-making, reinforcing their role in society. However, the increasing shift towards nuclear families, driven by urbanization and economic migration, has weakened these structures, leading to rising concerns over elderly neglect and social isolation.

- **Impact of Urbanization and Migration:** Rapid urbanization and migration have significantly affected intergenerational relationships. As younger generations move to urban centers for education and employment, elderly parents often remain in rural areas or smaller towns without adequate support (Shankardass, 2016). This geographical separation leads to weakened emotional and functional solidarity between generations, often resulting in increased social isolation and mental health issues among the elderly. (Shankardass, 2016). The reduced frequency of physical interaction affects the quality of relationships, and many elderly individuals face economic hardships due to the lack of direct financial support from their children. While digital communication tools have partially mitigated this gap, they cannot fully replace the emotional warmth and caregiving provided through in-person interactions.

- **Role of Shared Values and Traditions:** Cultural values and traditions play a crucial role in maintaining intergenerational bonding in India. The concept of filial piety, deeply embedded in Indian society, emphasizes respect, obedience, and care for parents as a moral duty (Anderson & Thomas, 2013). Religious and philosophical traditions, such as Hinduism,

advocate for the reverence of elders, often associating their blessings with familial prosperity. However, with the advent of modern lifestyles and global influences, these values are being diluted, leading to a decline in traditional caregiving roles. Strengthening cultural education and community-based initiatives can help revive these values and encourage younger generations to take a more active role in elder care.

IV. MAINTENANCE AND WELFARE OF PARENTS AND SENIOR CITIZENS ACT, 2007

- **Objectives and Provisions:** The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, was enacted to provide a legal framework for ensuring the financial and social security of senior citizens in India. The primary objectives of the Act include:
 1. **Right to Maintenance:** The Act mandates that adult children and relatives provide financial support to their elderly parents, ensuring their basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and healthcare (Sran Sarabjit Kaur & Gaur Pranita, 2020).
 2. **Tribunal for Redressal:** The Act establishes Maintenance Tribunals at the district level to address grievances of elderly individuals and ensure the speedy resolution of maintenance claims (Siwach & Kumar Malik, 2022).
 3. **Protection Against Neglect and Abuse:** The legislation includes provisions to safeguard senior citizens from abandonment and mistreatment by family members (Behera, 2021b).
 4. **Establishment of Old Age Homes:** The Act mandates state governments to establish old-age homes for destitute elderly individuals who lack family support (Thakur, 2008).
 5. **Legal Penalties:** Failure to comply with maintenance orders can result in fines or imprisonment, thereby reinforcing accountability (Behera, 2021a).
- **Implementation and Challenges:** Despite its strong legal framework, the Act faces several implementation challenges across different states:
 1. **Lack of Awareness:** A significant portion of the elderly population remains unaware of their legal rights under the Act. Studies indicate that many senior citizens do not seek legal recourse due to fear of straining familial relationships.

2. **Inconsistent Enforcement:** While some states have actively set up Maintenance Tribunals and publicized the Act, others have shown lax enforcement, leading to disparities in elderly welfare.
 3. **Social Stigma:** Many elderly parents hesitate to file maintenance cases against their children due to cultural norms that emphasize family honor and parental sacrifice.
 4. **Delayed Tribunal Proceedings:** Though the Act prescribes a time limit for resolving cases, bureaucratic inefficiencies often lead to delays, leaving elderly individuals in distress.
 5. **Financial Constraints:** Many children, particularly in low-income families, struggle to meet the financial demands imposed by the Act, leading to non-compliance.
- **Judicial Interventions:** The judiciary has played a crucial role in strengthening the implementation of the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, through landmark judgments:
 1. **Vasant Natthu Marathe vs. State of Maharashtra (2018):** The Bombay High Court upheld the right of elderly parents to seek maintenance from their children, reinforcing the state's responsibility to enforce the Act effectively (Bombay High Court, 2018).
 2. **Justice Shanti Swaroop Dhavan vs. Union of India (2019):** The Supreme Court emphasized the need for stricter enforcement of the Act, urging state governments to establish more Maintenance Tribunals (Supreme Court of India, 2019).
 3. **Rajan vs. State of Kerala (2020):** The Kerala High Court ruled that maintenance under the Act should be provided irrespective of the financial status of children, highlighting the moral and legal obligation of filial support (Kerala High Court, 2020).
 4. **Case of Abandonment in Delhi (2021):** The Delhi High Court directed authorities to ensure that elderly citizens abandoned by their families receive legal aid and shelter, setting a precedent for proactive state intervention (Delhi High Court, 2021).

These judicial interventions demonstrate the judiciary's commitment to upholding the rights of

senior citizens and ensuring compliance with the Act.

V. CHALLENGES IN ENSURING ELDERLY WELFARE

Despite the presence of legislative measures such as the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, elderly citizens in India continue to face numerous challenges. These challenges stem from social, economic, legal, and institutional constraints that hinder the effective realization of their rights and well-being.

- **Lack of Awareness:** A major challenge in the implementation of the Act is the lack of awareness among senior citizens regarding their legal rights. Studies indicate that many elderly individuals, especially those in rural areas, are unaware of the provisions that entitle them to maintenance and legal protection. This lack of awareness prevents them from seeking legal recourse, leaving them vulnerable to neglect and financial insecurity.

- **Social Stigma and Familial Dependence:** In India, traditional values emphasize respect and care for elders within the family. However, this cultural expectation often prevents senior citizens from asserting their rights, as they fear social stigma and familial estrangement. Many elderly individuals choose not to file maintenance claims against their children, believing that doing so would disgrace the family. This hesitancy results in increased dependency and vulnerability to neglect.

- **Economic Constraints:** Financial dependency is a significant issue among the elderly population. According to a study by Rajan (2010), a large proportion of senior citizens in India lack independent sources of income and rely on their children for financial support. In low-income households, financial constraints often lead to disputes over caregiving responsibilities, resulting in neglect or inadequate support. The absence of a universal social security system further exacerbates financial insecurity among the elderly (Dandekar, 1996).

- **Inadequate Institutional Support:** While the Act mandates the establishment of old-age homes for destitute senior citizens, the availability of these facilities remains inadequate. According to a report by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (2020), there is a significant shortfall in government-funded old-age homes, particularly in rural areas. Additionally, existing facilities often lack proper healthcare, nutrition, and psychological support, making them less effective in addressing the needs of senior citizens (Shankardass, 2016).

- **Delayed Tribunal Proceedings:** Although the Act establishes Maintenance Tribunals to expedite elderly grievances, bureaucratic inefficiencies and judicial backlogs often lead to

delays in case resolutions. Research shows that many cases remain pending for months, leaving elderly individuals without timely support. The lack of proper enforcement mechanisms further weakens the impact of maintenance orders, as many children fail to comply without facing significant consequences.

- **Healthcare Challenges:** Access to healthcare remains a critical concern for senior citizens. With increasing life expectancy, age-related illnesses such as arthritis, diabetes, and cognitive decline require sustained medical attention. However, the high cost of medical care and inadequate geriatric services in public hospitals make healthcare inaccessible for many elderly individuals. The lack of long-term care facilities further exacerbates the problem, leaving many elderly individuals without proper medical attention (Krishnaswamy et al., 2008).

- **Psychosocial Issues and Social Isolation:** The changing family structure, increased migration of younger generations, and urbanization have contributed to rising social isolation among elderly individuals (Srivastava, 2015). Studies suggest that loneliness and depression are common among senior citizens who live alone or in institutional settings. The absence of social engagement opportunities further deteriorates their mental well-being, increasing their vulnerability to emotional distress.

VI. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure the effective implementation of the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, and to improve the overall welfare of elderly individuals, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

- **Enhancing Awareness and Outreach:** Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should conduct awareness campaigns to educate senior citizens and their families about their legal rights under the Act. Public information programs, advertisements, and community-based awareness drives can help bridge the knowledge gap.

- **Strengthening Legal and Institutional Frameworks:** The government should ensure that Maintenance Tribunals function efficiently by providing adequate staffing, training, and funding. Special fast-track tribunals should be established to handle cases of elderly neglect and abuse expeditiously.

- **Improving Financial Security for Senior Citizens:** The introduction of universal pension schemes and enhanced financial support mechanisms can reduce economic dependence on children. Expanding the coverage of existing pension programs, such as the

Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme, can help improve financial stability for elderly individuals.

- **Enhancing Healthcare Services for the Elderly:** The government should increase investment in geriatric healthcare facilities, including specialized medical units in public hospitals. Mobile health units and home-based healthcare services should be expanded, particularly in rural areas, to improve access to medical care.

- **Promoting Alternative Elderly Care Models:** Community-based elder care programs should be encouraged to reduce reliance on institutional old-age homes. Daycare centers, senior citizen clubs, and assisted living facilities should be promoted as viable alternatives for elderly care.

- **Encouraging Family-Based Support Mechanisms:** Policies should focus on incentivizing families to care for elderly members. Tax benefits, subsidies, and home-care support schemes can help reduce the financial burden on families and encourage intergenerational bonding.

- **Strengthening Social Inclusion and Mental Health Support:** Programs aimed at reducing social isolation should be developed, including community engagement initiatives, digital literacy programs, and volunteering opportunities for senior citizens. Counselling and mental health services should be made more accessible to address issues of depression and loneliness among the elderly.

- **Ensuring Effective Implementation and Monitoring:** The government should establish an independent regulatory body to oversee the implementation of the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007. Regular audits, impact assessments, and grievance redressal mechanisms should be strengthened to ensure compliance.

- **Judicial Reforms for Faster Resolution:** Maintenance Tribunals should be empowered with greater enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with maintenance orders. Strict penalties should be imposed for non-compliance, and legal aid services should be expanded to assist elderly citizens in filing claims (Bombay High Court, 2018).

By implementing these policy recommendations, the government can improve the living conditions of senior citizens, reinforce intergenerational bonding, and enhance social cohesion.

VII. CONCLUSION

Intergenerational bonding remains a crucial pillar of social cohesion. It fosters mutual respect, emotional support, and the transmission of cultural values across generations, which are essential for a harmonious society. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, provides a legal framework to safeguard the rights of elderly individuals and ensure their well-being. However, the effectiveness of this Act depends on collaborative efforts from families, communities, and policymakers.

First, families must take an active role in maintaining strong intergenerational ties by promoting communication, caregiving, and shared responsibilities. Parents and children must engage in continuous dialogue to reinforce familial obligations and mutual respect, reducing the need for legal interventions.

Second, community engagement is essential to creating an inclusive society that values elderly citizens. Local organizations, NGOs, and religious institutions should facilitate programs that encourage intergenerational interactions, such as mentorship programs, storytelling sessions, and cultural events that integrate elderly citizens into social life. Such initiatives help bridge generational gaps and prevent social isolation.

Third, policymakers must ensure that existing legal provisions under the Senior Citizens Act are effectively implemented. This includes strengthening Maintenance Tribunals, expediting case resolutions, and enforcing maintenance orders to provide financial security to elderly individuals. Additionally, investment in geriatric healthcare, pension reforms, and elderly-friendly infrastructure is crucial to supporting senior citizens' independence and well-being.

Moreover, technological advancements should be leveraged to facilitate elderly care. Digital literacy programs can empower senior citizens to access financial, medical, and legal services independently. Governments should encourage initiatives such as telemedicine, online grievance redressal systems, and AI-driven eldercare solutions to address the evolving needs of the elderly population.

In conclusion, while the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, provides a necessary legal foundation for elderly care, a holistic approach is required for its effective execution. Strengthening intergenerational ties through legal, social, and economic measures will not only protect elderly citizens but also enhance societal cohesion. By fostering a culture of care and responsibility, we can ensure that future generations inherit a society that respects and values its senior citizens, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and compassionate social fabric.

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