

## Capability Approach: A Real Challenge for Senior Citizens in Nepal

Durga Bhusal\*

\*Population Studies, Butwal Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

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### ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between the capability approach of Amartya Sen and the state of senior citizens in Nepal. The changing context of the world scenario is influencing the increasing population of senior citizens in Nepal. The problems facing by the elderly are different between those living in old age homes and own houses, although income is only a required condition for attaining freedom of human beings in both living settings. Information used in this comparative study is secondary and obtained from various scholarly assets. Senior individuals who can hold working at least to their job retirement age, old age allowance age, or years beyond their age 60 years are understood as potential later life because of their involvement in the cumulation of their capacity to consume products and to procure services. Their contribution to the national economy helps directly to employment growth by developing a suitable work environment for senior citizens and giving them training for active aging. The challenge developed by the contradiction between senior citizens and service providers cannot be resolved but mitigated through the interaction.

**Keywords:** Capability approach, Senior citizens, Inequality, Empowerment

### INTRODUCTION

Science and technology have gifted the longevity that is one of the greater achievements of this first quarter of the twenty-first century for human life. The increase in the population proportion of the senior citizens in Nepal is due to increasing life expectancy, decreasing birth rate and decreased death rate. Living longer life demands various alternatives that may create problems which is time and often confronted in both developmental and humanitarian areas. How to deal with this situation is a real challenge for senior citizens in Nepal. All societies develop their understandings of human behavior, although thinkers like Plato and Aristotle were insightful about humanity and society, most historians do not credit them as a founding figure of social science [1]. The social sciences hold to different assumptions about the world and about social knowledge than do the traditions of premodern social thought- the universe as an unchanging hierarchical order. Meeting the social, emotional, spiritual, and economic needs of senior citizens in a real sense is a challenge in the context of Nepal with traditional practices in growing modern complexities.

Textbooks of anatomy emphasize growth and development of the individual start from embryo to maturity and the standard medical writings advocate that capacity of the individual increases smoothly to maturity, remains unaffected until 65 years of age, and then drops quickly [2].

The declining capacity of elderly people may lead the behavior resulting in problems either social or individual. Social problems are the problems, maybe faced by an individual, must be realized by society i.e. wider section of society. A girl child, for example, may lack schooling opportunity, it is still an individual problem unless it is collectively realized that girls should be provided schooling opportunity equal to the boys. According to studies [3,4], a social problem is a condition that is defined by a substantial number of persons as a deviation from some social norms they value. It clarifies that social problems are a condition of adverse situation deviated from an ideal situation and required a cooperative action for the solution. It has time, space, and cultural dimensions. The factors of evolving social problems are categorized as social, economic, religious, and political systems.

Rural Nepal is striking against poverty with quality education

**Corresponding author:** Durga Bhusal, Lecturer, Population Studies, Butwal Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal, Tel: +977-9857058459, E-mail: db67092@gmail.com

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and proper health services where youths are heading to labor migration leaving behind the children and elderly people in the origin that results in a lack of agricultural workers. Elderly people and children cannot dig and plow the fields by traditional means or modern technology, thus resulting in large area of cultivable land left barren. In another side, urban Nepal is also bearing the elderly people with the problem of abandonment from their children. Some cases can be experienced as the ownership of property-based abandonment in both cases before transformed and after transformed. The biggest issue of urban elderly is loneliness due to their children's busyness in technology according to their business. The elderly does not get the opportunities as in rural lives to share feelings and passions with close friends and do not enjoy proper financial activities.

## MATERIALS & METHODS

This study has tried to clarify the relationship between elderly status in Nepal and the capability approach of Amartya Sen. Various scholarly assets have been used as secondary sources of information in this study. Problems of senior citizens-agitation, soreness and doubt, and their working activities in the context of Nepal are described for the application of the capability approach in Nepal, particularly in the senior citizen population subgroup. Being more descriptive, no statistical tools for explanations have been used in the establishment of relation. The conclusion of the article has been drawn from the strikes of arguments based on various scholarly knowledge.

## DISCUSSION

Nepal, the country situated between two mega economics of China and India, is understood as one of the poor countries across the world. Education is not suitably proper for employment, which is leading to poverty. The majority of young people with the degree of the university are engaging in the motherland and as well as foreign jobs with the work that does not demand the skill. Unskilled manpower does not get the salary that is adequate in amount which creates a limited scope for the development of the country's economy. The sector of agricultural production depends only on the rainfall due to the incapability of irrigation management. The new generation gets the little opportunity for proper education and results in child marriage that ultimately develops misunderstanding with the senior citizens spending lives in a similar situation in the past. Illiteracy of senior citizens help them to practice on superstition with the narrow mindset, and many senior citizens even having the capability of working stay passive. Some environmental problems for senior citizens to work according to their experience are not resolved due to poverty compelled to stay dependent. It is seen that the male personality tries to control the activities of the female members to enjoy an equal position at the workplace because of the false societal believes on men are more capable to earn more. This gender

inequality at work in Nepal is also responsible to gear down the developmental speed.

## Capability approach

Diversity of adhesive factors with personal features and social preparations comes under the capability of a person. Capability differs in terms of personal features which is illustrated from the functioning of mobility where a physically unimpaired person needs fewer resources than an impaired person to achieve the same. Political arrangements can also influence capability through opportunity provision. The disparity in capabilities between social classes and between men and women is described by institutionalized structures in society but not explained by inequality in resources or personal differences [5]. Amartya Sen wrote 'Development as Freedom' in 2000 having the notion 'Freedom as the foundation of justice'. Income is only a necessary condition for achieving the freedom of human beings. Sen sees development as freedom from different forms of un freedom like famines and hunger, undernutrition, morbidity and premature death, health care, functional education or gainful employment or economic and social security, inequality between men and women and denial of political liberty and basic civil rights. Political and civil freedoms are constitutive elements of human freedom, their denial is the handicap in itself. The individual capability of a person echoes the substitute blends of functioning the person can attain. Elementary Functioning (EF): Being in good health, being educated and Complex Functioning (CF): Self-respect, being socially integrated, where EF is universally valued and less contested, while CF is universally valued but may be contested. Individuals may differ in their ability to use these functions. Functioning is situated somewhere between the subjective feeling of happiness on the one hand and a more objective measure of resources on the other.

Influence of the political system, interest-specific movement, egoism may also put reflection in the evolution of social problems. Causes of the evolution of social problems identified in the special context of the nation help to formulate policies to solve the problems. It is mentioned that the time dimension of social problems means it differs from one historical period to another but has not been given a social problem-free period of society. According to [6], "a social problem exists whenever we become conscious of a difficulty, a gap between our preferences and reality". All social problems are a deviation from the ideal situation, have a common basis of origin, are social in origin, are interconnected, are social in their results, and the responsibility for social problems is social [7]. Types of social problems, according to [3], are three as Physical-flood, famine; Ameliorative- crime, poverty, drug addiction and moral-gambling, divorce.

## Income inequality in old age

The quality of life of people of any age group in terms of functioning can differ even if they have equal access to opportunities or resources. Unequal distribution of opportunities and desirable life outcomes and the distribution among individuals/groups posits the social inequalities where good health, happiness, educational success, or material possessions are desirable life outcomes and access to power and the life-chances facilitating to attain the life-outcomes are opportunities [8]. Exclusion from prosperity, resources and decent work are causes of economic inequalities that exist both between older persons and other people and among older persons themselves. Older persons engage in work in three kinds, first: till their ability remains to work, second: till the legal retirement age to work, and third: rely on family support and/or pension [9].

Economist [10] examines the factors in the process of industrialization that tends to counteract the concentration of savings in the hands of the wealthy. He finds five specifications answering, 'Does inequality in the distribution of income increase or decrease in the course of a country's economic growth?'. First, the units for which incomes are recorded and grouped should be family-expenditure units; second, the distribution should be complete; third, if possible, we should segregate the units; fourth, income should be defined as it is now for national income; and fifth, the units should be grouped by material levels of income, free of cyclical and other transient disturbances. Income distribution in the underdeveloped countries is somewhat more unequal than in the developed countries during the period after the second world war. The lack of proper investment in education by the poor country like Nepal is the main factor behind inequality. Education, in every country, helps to promote equal opportunity for all from an early age.

### **Empowerment debate about elderly people**

We have listened to time-and-again the expression of elderly people that the time has come to have some external help because of weakened muscle power struggling to preserve progressive continuity of careers. Most of the scholarly works on elderly people posit a dependency approach due to which they are interpreted as a problem, but our cultural ethic does not permit us to look at them in isolation except a few unethical exceptions. We can see on the one way the promoting activities of dependency of elderly people from professionals, voluntary workers, friends and kin in the society, and on the other elderly people are striving to retain control over their own lives, to maintain their independence, to solve their problems, to make choices for themselves. This power struggle or contradiction cannot be resolved but can be mitigated through recognition of the problem and the interaction between the elderly person, and service and care provider. The degree of elderly people enabling the practice to make them feel independence seems likely to promote happiness which ultimately reflects in both good health and longevity of elderly people [11]. Qualifying senior citizens

to live longer independently in their households should be one important goal of society besides the government.

The lifestyle of the elderly determined by the lack of proper dietary fiber in the Nepalese diet, individual's image, role model and physical constraint presents the elderly weaker status in Nepal. Normally elderly are recognized traditionally as fragile instead of resource in the wider thought of the society. So, there is paucity of information on the economic aspects of elderly people in Nepal. It needs to mention that search of employment for senior citizens to engage in economic activities does not mean to hamper the younger generations' employment opportunities. Senior citizens are those human beings full of experience, skill and knowledge, they must be utilized creating a suitable work environment to earn money because Sen says income is only a required condition for attaining freedom of human beings. Intergenerational solidarity is essential to mitigate the gap, cause of familial conflict, generated between the younger generation having ambitions of modernization and the older generation wanting to continue traditional norms and values [12].

### **Status of Elderly People in Nepal**

Legal and moral obligation to provide care and support to their parents is one of the most important familial responsibilities of the son in the Nepali tradition. Eroding respect towards senior citizens and leaving parents alone by the younger generation to grasp the employment opportunities far from their home, made the elderly living alone with loneliness, depression, like psychological problems. Modernization has created fault in familial relationships along with facilities easing the lives between the younger generation and elderly that would be a result of interest or compulsion.

According to a study [13] in Kathmandu, the effect of neglecting families regarding elderly living in institutional setting can be seen that they face more psychological problems and are not able to cope with the problems effectively than the elderly in-home setting. It shows the need for encouragement to keep them in work activities to get rid of psychological distress. The caring of the elderly instead of social isolation is not only the caring but also the meaningful generational learning step to teach the new generation not to misbehave with senior citizens. A large number of elderly people with poor nutritional status are living in rural areas in Nepal are habitually active and productive in their proceeding years engaging in childcare, cattle herding, handicrafts and the like are vulnerable to exacerbate chronic and acute diseases along with degenerative illnesses linked with aging [14]. Old age itself is not the problem but it would be a problem when the noticeable physical and mental changes come with the age and make the elderly unable to do their work for their own need [15].

Constitution, development plans, senior citizens act and policy acknowledge the senior citizens about their rights and the responsibility of younger to care and respect them, but the weakness in the part of implementation is always carrying a question for a long time in the history of Nepal whether or not they have come as a result of proper recognition of age structure transition as such [16]. The realization of opportunities and facilities to cope with the challenges should be the prime concern of policy tuning to play in age structure transitions to contribute to sustainable social and economic development.

## CONCLUSION

Income distribution in underdeveloped countries is somewhat more unequal than in developed countries. The direction of improvement of society from traditional to the age of high mass consumption has been experienced in the world [17]. The culture of poverty is not just a matter of deprivation or disorganization, but also a term signifying the absence of something [18]. Economic expansion of a country applies the condition for another economy to develop is the situation to which the dependence is exposed [19].

Drug abuse, alcoholism, terrorism, poverty, unemployment and crime seeming as an individual but affect the society at a large proportion. These problems result in deviation from the ideal situation of society and hence are recognized as social problems. The information base of the Capability Approach of Amartya Sen is elementary and complex functioning that says the proper identification of types and characteristics of social problems and measurement of the degree of injustice are primary essentials to alter the adverse situation into favorable. The behavior of senior citizens in society may be social problems if their problems' identification could not be done primarily. The economic dependence of elderly people with traditional behavior in modern society in Nepal can be identified as a social problem due to the result of a culture of poverty which signifies the 'absence of something' that verifies the theme of the Capability Approach-income is only a required condition for attaining freedom of human beings.

The demand for justice increases with the raising of consciousness of people on the social problems. Without understanding the social problems, the need for social justice cannot be experienced. Without experiencing the need for social justice, no ideas run towards the resolution of the problems. Without generating the ideas or foundation of justice, no steps pace towards the eradication of injustice from society. Hunger, undernutrition, morbidity, health care, functional education, and premature death like unfreedoms demand the resolution from effective implementation of policies developed at the national level in Nepal. Poverty decorated with unemployment associated with the education system guided in the theoretical realm is a real challenge for development as freedom. The absence of an age-specific

environment to work in the context of Nepal particularly for the senior citizens traditionally alleged as a dependent group is the main reason contradicting the Capability Approach seeing freedom as the foundation of justice.

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