JEAN ELLICKSON

NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET: AGING MEN AND WOMEN IN BANGLADESH

ABSTRACT. The story of aging in Bangladesh may be quite different, depending on whether one is a woman or a man. There are rewards for the woman if she manages to become the head of the domestic realm of an extended family, but even this is brief, as she loses that role when her husband dies. The old man, however, does not relinquish his authority nor hand over the economic reins until his own death. Male and female roles cannot be said to converge in old age, let alone cross over, as described for a number of societies. Only in their roles as grandparents do males and females share similar behaviors.

Key Words: aging, gender roles, Bangladesh, grandparenthood.

"Heaven lies under the feet of one's parents." So states the Quranic injunction to obey, honor and eventually care for parents in Islamic society. In Bangladesh the father continues to be obeyed until his death, and honored even beyond that time.[1] That is, the old man usually does not relinquish his position as head of the household as long as he draws breath. In some cases, the old father may need to be propped up and the words spoken are those of his oldest son, but at least the pretense is maintained that the father heads the household. He is cared for in his old age, but his infirmities, whatever they may be, do not automatically cancel his authority.

The mother, on the other hand, is honored and cared for, but obeyed only by the younger children and eventually perhaps her daughters-in-law — often that is short-lived. Her words count for much only for a brief time in her life. The Quran on the subject of parenthood does not differentiate between male parent and female parent, but in Bangladesh the woman, even in old age, remains subdued, withdrawn at least from the public realm and, sometimes, even forgotten.

Old people in village society in general are respected. This was also the finding of a social psychological study done on village life in the 1960s (Zaidi 1970: 105—115). In the course of Zaidi's study a questionnaire was administered which presented a list of values to which the respondents were asked to reply: important, neutral or not important. Of the values suggested by the questionnaire, the one which was thought most important was "respect for old people both in the family and in the community." In descending order the next five were "respect for one's parents, financial support for one's parents in old age, respect for the religious man, respect of the wife for her husband, and respect for the head of the family." Though an anthropologist might have chosen to elicit values in a somewhat different manner, it is only with the first, the reported highest value,

Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology **3** (1988) 53—70.

that an observer might question whether reality coincides with the norm. The old and poor outside the family seem to receive their treatment based on their poverty rather than their old age, that is, they don't receive very much consideration. The general tone of Zaidi's results, however, emphasizing respect for authority in general and care for old parents in particular, seems to reflect a fairly accurate picture of the Bangladeshi village.

Studies have been done in a number of societies, including other Muslim societies, which describe a role cross over for men and women as they age. Gutmann (1977: 302—323) has developed a psychologically based model suggesting that after a man's family has matured he can put aside the aggression he made use of in supporting and defending them and indulge the more feminine side of his nature. The old man is said to become more passive and even sensual, concentrating on his own bodily pleasures. He gradually retires from the public realm to the domestic realm. This is typified by the old man sitting in the sun, occasionally napping, smoking and eating snacks. For the woman, this model describes someone who is initially submerged in the nurturance of others as she tends her growing family. After that task is accomplished, she can become more egocentric and aggressive, moving outside the domestic realm and seeking out other adults for conversation and stimulation. As she never has before, she expresses her opinion in public and may even take part in public decision making. For the woman, this increased freedom is considered to be partially related to her menopausal removal from a reproductively active role. In general, men are said to become more passive and domestic and women more aggressive and active in the public realm. In addition to Gutmann's (1974: 232—244) study of the Druze, other works on Mediterranean and Islamic societies have also used the model (Brown, 1982; Cool and McCabe, 1983; Goody, 1976; Keith, 1985). In many societies, one can find at least passing reference to increased freedom for women as they age.

Aging men and women in Bangladesh do not seem to follow these role changes. Old men retain their authority and remain heads of their households. Although they can occasionally be found sunning themselves, men of all ages enjoy more leisure time than women. The only sphere where men's feminine nature may be said to emerge is perhaps in their relations with grandchildren as will be described later. If old women move into the public realm in Bangladesh, it is not their age which puts them there, but their poverty. Reports tell us that more and more women, young and old, are being forced into the public realm to support themselves and their families.

Purdah confines most of the Muslim women of Bangladesh who can afford it, especially rural women, to the domestic realm for all but the earliest years of their lives. Even as children, however, little girls seldom venture far from their homes and from the women of their families. It

might seem that what women lack in freedom, they make up for in security. The female grows up, matures and ages within the protection of a family, unlike the male who as an adult must deal with the unforgiving harshness of the public realm. As women age and lose physical strength, they can still meet the demands of cooking, housework and child care, if more slowly and carefully. Such is not necessarily the case with men. As peasant cultivators of paddy, older men generally come to the point when they can no longer manage the heavy wooden plow and yoked oxen. They must relinquish this adult male role to younger, stronger men.

Numerous discussions in the literature of aging contrast whether the aging process is easier for men or for women (Cool and McCabe 1983; Harrell 1981; Keith 1985; Rosow 1963). In industrial societies, people face mandatory retirement. Formal retirement aside, the male work role, whether it be cultivation with a plow, hunting, fishing or herding, generally is an activity which requires physical vigor. Old men eventually must relinquish these roles. Women keep their adult work roles for a much longer time. Since women's roles usually are amenable to simultaneous childcare, these activities can be slowed down and undertaken by women long past their prime. Besides the ability to continue in productive adult roles, there is the issue of coping with the loss of physical vigor and possible declining health. Both women and men can become incapacitated, but scholars are convinced that here, too, women cope better. They disagree, however, on whether women age better because they have to make fewer lifestyle changes, having always been mainly in the domestic realm, or because they have faced so many physical changes in their life cycle due to menstruation, pregnancy and lactation. Hence, a few more changes brought on by old age should be less traumatic for them than for men.

In a different vein from either of the above assertions, Gutmann (1977) avoids a qualitative assessment of life satisfaction, but posits a role cross over for men and women in old age. In patrilineal, patriarchal societies similar to Bangladesh, he describes old men as moving passively into the household and old women as moving aggressively out toward the community. I see little evidence of this process taking place in Bangladesh for either men or women. Old men maintain their public and private influence, and, except for cases of economic destitution, old women stay modestly at home. In addition, my thesis is that the aging process in Bangladesh remains kinder to men than it is to women in terms of welfare and prestige, and consequently, of psychological satisfaction.

CHILDHOOD, YOUTH AND MARRIAGE

Men have the advantage over women in this patrilineal, patrilocal and

patriarchal society throughout their lives. Very little changes for them in old age. Boys are prefered at birth, as they ideally will stay with the parents, help cultivate the land and support the parents in their old age. Girls are married at a very early age and primarily contribute to their husbands' families.[2] They may even impoverish their natal families because of the cost of their marriages.[3] Some girls may be married within their natal villages, but the majority move at marriage to other villages in the vicinity. My data show that girls from the higher status families are married at the greater distances, apparently because of the perceived need to find families of appropriate and equal prestige. As befits Muslim society, there were a few marriages between brothers' children, but not very many. When asked why this was, most people said that it was better to find new allies through marriage than to reinforce old ties with existing close kin.

Most young women at marriage move to new communities and initially live among strangers. The young bride is allowed to make a gradual transition during the first year by visiting her parental home fairly often. After that, a woman generally is allowed one visit per year to her parental home, though the woman's first child is usually born there where her own mother can assist her.

Marriages are arranged. Usually it is the relatives of a marriageable young man who initiate any inquiries. Theoretically, the parents of females whom no one approaches will be left with unmarried girls on their hands. This rarely happens.[4] The only never-married adult woman I ever met in the village was a badly mishapen dwarf in her fifties. On two occasions I went with the relatives of young men to visit the homes of prospective brides. On neither occasion did either parent of the boy, or the boy himself, accompany us, but other male relatives made up the party. Before one trip, the grandfather of the boy particularly admonished me to look for any handicaps in the girl. The girl's family was able to fool me, however, on this account. Whenever I asked the girl a question, her father's sister would repeat the question to the girl before she answered me. I assumed this prospective bride was only being appropriately shy in answering the questions of a stranger and foreigner. Actually she did not hear me. The boy's family found out through other sources that the girl was deaf, and negotiations went no further.

Attributes desired in a bride, besides that she be physically sound, are that she know the work of a farm household, be from a "good" family, be obedient with a pleasant nature, and be of fair complexion, approximately in that order. If a boy has been educated, a high school or university graduate, his parents will look for a girl with some, though rarely equivalent, education. Girls without all of the above attributes probably will have less desirable marriages into poorer families or to older, divorced or widowed men. It is actually more important for a bride to please her

mother-in-law than her husband as she will spend the bulk of her time with this older woman. The life of a boy changes little at marriage. Unlike a girl, a boy usually can refuse to marry at the age his parents want him to or refuse to marry a particular girl. Most boys, though they might protest briefly when the subject is broached, soon give in to the inevitability of marriage. Girls rarely make any protest and follow their parents' dictates in matters of marriage timing and choice of marriage partner.

A girl is at the lowest level of prestige and most difficult period in her life as a new bride. A new bride is not only among strangers for the first time, but must please an often critical mother-in-law and learn how a new household does things. If she is the first daughter-in-law in the household, much work comes her way. But even if her hushand has older married brothers in the household, hers is still not an easy lot — she gets the most menial and unpleasant tasks to do. I remember being amused by the grimaces and burlesqued hostile gestures of the wife of the youngest son in a family behind the backs of her mother-in-law and other sisters-in-law as she plastered the cow shed with mud, while they were busy at the more pleasant tasks of food preparation and child care.

ADULTHOOD

The highest level of prestige a woman is able to achieve is usually considered to occur when she has seen a number of sons grow to adulthood and marry. Then she can relax with daughters-in-law under her authority doing most of the work of the household. The problem with this is that the promised reward, being surrounded by cheerfully obedient young daughters-in-law, may not materialize, or if it does, not last for very long. Poverty, ill health and early death can get in the way of this goal.

To have any chance of reaching that goal, a woman must first bear sons who live to maturity. Actually, first a woman must produce children of either sex who survive infancy, or she probably will not remain married. Of the divorces recorded in the village in 1968/69, in seventy-eight percent of them (47 out of 60) the divorced woman had produced no surviving children by the marriage at the time of the divorce (Ellickson 1972: 45). It is generally accepted in the village that infertility is exclusively the fault of the woman.

Mothers certainly invest much of their time and energy in their children. The young mother, particularly one in a nuclear household without other women to help her, is a terribly busy person. She must prepare the food, cook and serve it, clean the dishes, sweep the house, air out the bed clothes, clean the cow shed and collect the manure, look after the chickens and goats, and bathe herself and the children. In addition, seasonally there is the processing of agricultural produce and the care of the kitchen

garden. It is no wonder that very small children are given into the care of only slightly older children. In any case, with all these responsibilities women still find the time to lavish special care on any sons. Little boys playing in the household compound, within the women's realm, can do no wrong as long as no adult men are in the vicinity to correct them. Boys receive the choicest morsels of food and immediate attention is paid to evidence of any illness. Boys also are allowed to continue to spend their time at play after girls their age have been pressed into the domestic work force.

Even for the woman who produces surviving sons, other factors may intervene. In the two villages I studied, one had fifteen percent lineal joint households (34 out of 225) and the other, sixteen percent (31 out of 199).[5] By lineal joint I mean that married sons live in the household jointly with their parents. A number of factors explain these low percentages in a society which values the extended family where sons stay and work side by side with their father (Ellickson 1972: 37—41). A fairly large proportion of the nuclear families do not have the possibility of being joint. For many, the father of the head of household is deceased and none of the sons are yet married. Men who do not marry until the age of twenty or twenty-five and are often dead by the age of forty or forty-five can be the heads of lineal joint households for a very short time, if at all.

There is usually an age gap between husband and wife of about five to fifteen years. Consequently, a large number of women outlive their husbands, though in general their life expectancy is slightly shorter than men's. Most women must prepare for at least a short period of widowhood in their lives. After the deaths of their husbands, all but the unlucky will be living in the homes of their married sons. Brown (1982: 148) argues that it is the bond between mothers and adult children which gives women prestige and authority in their old age. In a patrilineal, patrilocal society such as Bangladesh it would be the relation between women and their adult sons.

The fate of a Bangladeshi village woman, however, is only partially determined by her children. Certainly the village woman reaches the peak of her authority as the mother of married sons, but only as long as her husband survives. His death begins her descent to almost complete dependency. Aziz (1979: 52), Islam (1974: 68) and McCarthy (1967: 31) agree that with the death of her husband a wife loses rank, prestige and authority. As Aziz states, "as long as the father remains head of the family, the mother is given responsibility for domestic management." Once he is gone she loses that responsibility and the authority that accompanied the position.

Brown (1982: 148) argues that "the bond with adult offspring is reinforced by the mother's continuing right to dispense food within the household. The control of the larder symbolizes the mother's role as the

earliest love object and provider of food and nurturance." It is precisely this control that escapes the Bangladeshi village woman when her husband dies. The daughter-in-law, whom the older woman supervised as a young bride and wife, now takes over management of the household. If there is more than one married son, the household probably soon will be divided into separate economic units. Brothers rarely maintain joint households. Soon the sons will need to decide with whom the old woman will live, or whether she will be shuttled back and forth between the households for a month or two at each. The latter arrangement divides the financial responsibility for feeding her among the households.

It is a strong and oft-repeated norm that daughters-in-law must take good care of their mothers-in-law. Mistreatment of such old widows was never apparent to me within their sons' homes. A definite change in behavior, however, could be observed between the officious, vocal, wifely head of the domestic realm of a household, and an old widow, much quieter in voice and demeanor. After her husband's death, a woman's comfort and well being are at the sufferance of her daughter-in-law, the daughter-in-law over whom she previously exercised authority.

It is true that the woman who bears sons that survive to adulthood, marry and remain in joint enterprise with their father in the household receives the rewards of the system. At this point in her life she has authority over adults, her daughters-in-law, who do her bidding. Her activity and opinions, however, remain within the household. Unlike women in some other Muslim societies, she does not venture into the public realm as she ages. Her authority is limited to the domestic realm of the household and is based, at least partially, on herself as the model of a purdah-observing woman which she provides for the younger women. In conversation, it would be difficult to find a more conservative spokesperson supporting the traditions of the system. For example, from the wives of prosperous farmers with married sons one hears, on the subject of female education:

> "Too much education is not good for girls. It makes them hard to control."

and on the subject of limiting the number of children:

> "God gives us children. It is not right to try to interfere in that process."

Younger and older women, at different stages in their life course, are more likely to offer contrasting opinions.

It is the young married women and the old women without husbands who are in the most difficult situations. The wife of the youngest son in a joint household is at the bottom of the prestige ladder, though she has hope for the future. The old woman, especially the widow or divorcee, for whom the ideals of motherhood, head of a large domestic realm and grandmotherhood have never materialized, has lost all hope. These

women are likely to express anti-establishment views in a variety of ways. (Recall the earlier description of the young wife mimicking her mother-in-law.) As an example of an educated woman myself, I received expressions of approval particularly from young widows with immature children to support. They would nod toward their daughters as they endorsed female education.

Illness sometimes may be interpreted as a form of protest. One possible diagnosis of illness in Bangladesh, especially mental illness, is that the patient has been attacked by a *djin*.[6] Stories in the oral and written traditions depict young women as particularly susceptible to *djin* attack, especially young women trapped in unhappy marriages to older men. Nevertheless, in the course of my fieldwork, I observed no young women bothered by such beings. To the contrary, old women were much more often so afflicted.

One example was an older divorced woman of sixty-two whose symptoms were outlined for me by one of the local *mullahs* as he told about the curing he did in the village. The patient, a daughter of the most prestigious lineage in the village, had been divorced as a young woman and returned childless to her natal home. She had never remarried. The family was comparatively wealthy, and the woman seemed well cared for by her brothers. The *mullah*, who belonged to the same lineage, was related to the woman as FaBrSo. He said that whenever she started to use foul language and take off her clothes, he would be called to her house to exorcise the *djin* from her. The other village woman bothered by a *djin* had been abandoned by her husband about five years previously. She also was childless. Unlike the first woman, she did not have lucid periods, but talked on continuously to no one in particular. Certainly there were divorced and abandoned women never bothered by *djin*, and who went about their lives as best they could. Both of the mentally ill women, however, came from prestigious families, which may have made their positions especially untenable. One also occasionally heard the word crazy (*pagol* or *pagli*) used as an epithet against a woman who was merely outspoken.

There were examples to be seen in the countryside, as well, of mentally deranged men. Since none of them happened to live within the territory of my fieldwork, I cannot say how they fit into the social structure nor whether they had anomalous family situations. In contrast to the women, however, the men were said to have a kind of religious blessing. One man who lay by the side of a road intersection doing nothing but waving his knees back and forth was said to be "beloved of God." After all, "how could he survive, never doing anything for himself, if God were not taking care of him," a kind of lily of the field. One means of his survival, which could be observed, was the people bringing food to him when they came to ask favors and blessings. Another example was an old man who came

to Sufi prayer meetings and said absolutely nothing, but who smiled all the time. He was said to have "seen God." "Certainly seeing God is awesome enough to have deranged anyone's mind." It seemed that for deranged women there was perceived to be a need to exorcise the *djin.* For men, however, if the derangement was a result of God's blessing, further intervention was not required.

Males in Bangladesh start with the advantage of having been prefered by their parents and never seem to lose that advantage. Men become heads of households, either when their fathers die or, less often, when they separate from their fathers and set up nuclear households. They hold on to this position and rarely hand over land or wealth to their sons until their own deaths (Ellickson, forthcoming). Old age only brings increased prestige.

The primary adult role of village men is wet rice cultivation. They cultivate using wooden implements and two wooden-yoked oxen. The implements are heavy and the oxen can be unruly. The point is that strength and stamina are required for the task. Relatively old, white-haired men can be seen plowing the fields, but when they lose their health they have to relinquish the activity. This loss of the adult male role would be the event in Bangladesh that scholars argue begins the accompanying psychological decline of men into old age (Cool and McCabe 1983; Harrell 1981; Keith 1985; Rosow 1963).

This psychological decline does not seem to occur among the old peasant cultivators of Bangladesh. The reason may be that the labor associated with cultivation is not held in high regard. If at all possible, a man would rather hire others to do the actual cultivation than to do it himself. In a census of the village, most heads of households report their occupation as *grihasthi.* What *grihasthi* means is householder, not farmer. This is the consistent reply for any man with landholdings. If a man has no land and no specific occupation, such as shopkeeper or weaver, for example, then he will say, "day laborer." The word for cultivator is *chashi,* but no one in the village calls himself that. So when a man gets old and can no longer do the actual cultivation of his fields, this brings no stigma. The idea of a *grihasthi* is of a man who directs the affairs of the household, including the cultivation of land. If a man has mature sons, they cultivate the land, or he lets the land out for sharecropping or hires day laborers. As far as prestige is concerned, it doesn't seem to matter if a man has other people cultivate his fields because he can afford it or because he is too old to do it himself.

In general, it is the old men who run the affairs of the village, particularly keeping peace and settling disputes. When men or families are in dispute, or when someone breaks a rule and punishment needs to be imposed, a council (*bicar*) is called. This is not a standing council, but the people involved choose the men they would like to have help settle the

case. Men consistently called to sit on these councils can be considered village influentials (Ellickson 1972: 58—66). In eliciting characteristics people thought a man should have for this duty, the attribute mentioned most often was that "he speaks well." It was this personal characteristic which was given the most importance. These were not necessarily the wealthiest men in the village, but they had enough land to make them independent, rather than dependent on others for their livelihood or survival. Also, in general these were old men in their fifties, sixties and seventies. The only time a young man was observed sitting on one of these councils, his participation illustrated two other important values of the people: education and religion. He had recently returned to the village after having graduated from a *madrassah.* His family and most of the village were very proud of him. Men, and most of the time old men, are the primary authority figures in the family and almost completely monopolize authority in the public realm.

GRANDPARENTS

Grandparenthood is perhaps the role where old women and old men have the most in common. The norm is that they should be indulgent with their grandchildren, and reality approaches the norm. The intervening circumstances are again longevity and available leisure. Many people do not live long enough to see much of their grandchildren, and some never see them at all. In addition, in the rural areas people must work long hours to supply personal and family needs. Old women work only a little less than younger adult women. Consequently, paternal grandmothers can afford to spend only a little more time with their grandchildren than the children's mother can and be only a little more indulgent. This is assuming the grandparents live in the same joint household as their grandchildren in this patrilocal society. If not in the same household, the paternal grandparents will probably live nearby. Maternal grandparents usually are much further removed in another village, and probably see their daughter and her children only once or twice a year.

Although men live longer than women in Bangladesh (Lindenbaum, 1977: 143), they actually have no better chance than women of living to see their grandchildren. This is because men tend to marry women five to fifteen years younger than themselves. Hence, on average, wives outlive their husbands. What men do have is more leisure time, or at least, more control over how they spend their time. It is old men, rather than old women, who can generally be seen carrying a small grandchild around. In fact, a number of the photos I have of old men include a child with whom they chose to have their picture taken. One mental picture I retain is of a conservatively dressed old man in the village tea shop wearing his white

prayer cap and almost ankle length *kurta* (shirt) hanging over his lungyi. He had prepared a tiny bit of betel nut and pan leaf for the naked little granddaughter on his knee, and they both sat there solemnly chewing. Jay (1969: 160) describes a similar scene in another Muslim society, Indonesian Java, where "old men may often be seen about the village fondly carrying or towing along their little grandchildren and treating them upon demand in the local coffee shop."

Very few studies of grandparenthood have been done since Apple (1956) did her cross-cultural analysis of seventy-five societies. A number of authors still quote her work as the final statement on the topic (Fry and Keith 1982; Nahemow 1983). Her basic thesis suggests that an inverse relationship exists between friendly equality with grandchildren and general retention of authority in the family. The alternate generation alliance (grandparent/grandchild) is found only where grandparents have relinquished authority. She rejected Radcliffe-Brown's (1952: 96—97) explanation that the easy familiarity between grandparent and grandchild is relief; "a reaction to the tension caused between parents and children by parental authority." Instead she cites Nadel's (1951: 234—236) examples of finding affectionate grandparents correlating with nuclear families where grandparents have no authority, as compared to the authoritarian grandfathers of joint families in some societies where there is a lack of familiarity between alternate generations. She does not mention the third part of Nadel's "controlled comparison" where he found grandfathers who are the heads of joint families, but also affectionate with grandsons. In these societies the explanation is a belief that the grandchild's generation is a reincarnation of the grandparental generation — a kind of mystical unity.

For Bangladesh, we would need some other explanation for why grandfathers (essentially Radcliffe-Brown and Nadel are referring to grandfathers to the exclusion of grandmothers, as is Apple, though her title says grandparents) are affectionate toward grandchildren, that is, grandsons. As part of the general explanation, adjacent generations, father and sons, are seen as in conflict over the anticipated usurpation of the father's position by the son. But if, as in the case of Nadel's affectionate grandfathers in societies with nuclear families, the old men have already passed on authority, what is there left to contest? The old man in Bangladesh still has his authority as head of the household, but his affection can be lavished on the young unthreatening grandson while keeping the mature and vigorous son at bay. The reserve toward the "man in the middle", the father, is something that the grandfather and grandson have in common. Any male is expected to be circumspect in the presence of his father, and the father is appropriately reserved as well.

There definitely is avoidance between father and son in Bangladesh. As will be described in more detail later, where the grandfather is available, it is he who presides at his grandson's circumcision. The boy's father is

generally absent on this emotionally trying occasion. Crapanzano (1980: 50) relates a similar role of the grandfather and absence of the father at the circumcision remembered by his Moroccan informant. Another form this father-son avoidance takes in Bangladesh is sons not speaking in the presence of their fathers unless specifically addressed. This was brought home to me by the only college graduate in the village during my first fieldwork. There were other young men attending the university, but this young man was refered to as the B. Com. (Bachelor of Commerce). He had not yet found employment, but could usually be found somewhere in the village surrounded by a group of younger admirers. At least when I was around he was quite loud and boastful, showing off for his fans. Consequently, I was amazed when I finally got to his house to interview his father for my village census. Their guest house, where the interview was to take place, was filled as usual with men and children who wanted to see what was going on. The braggart with the bachelor's degree was there too, but remarkably and apparently uncharacteristically subdued. A couple of times when he seemed to want to say something, he whispered it to a friend who then asked me. In his father's presence, this young man was respectfully quiet.

Another example of a man's reserve in matters concerning his father involved a different kind of situation, one of apparent conflict. A young man in the village came home one day from pulling his rickshaw to find his wife and their few belongings in the middle of the compound where the young man's father had thrown them. The couple took refuge for a few days in a small shed in the compound with a broken roof, but this did not keep them dry from the rain. I never discovered why the father threw them out, and the young man swore to me that he didn't know either. What he did to solve his problem and get his father to take them back was to go to the village tea shop and sit there with his head in his hands. He protested vehemently to me, when I asked what he had said there, that he would never say anything against his father, but just sat there looking sad. As a result of this demonstration, a contingent of villagers came to his father to find out the problem and then convince the old man to take his son and daughter-in-law back into his small house.

In contrast, grandfathers are indulgent with grandchildren, who can be quite free with the old men. Certainly grandmothers are affectionate and indulgent toward their grandchildren as well, but as was previously reported, they do not have as much time to devote to the children. Particularly if her husband is still living, an old woman is the active head of the domestic realm, a job which can be very time consuming. Grandfathers, however, can be seen holding and even playing with both boys and girls as long as they are infants and toddlers. The division probably occurs because girls are expected to take up household chores at a much earlier age than are boys, and after that, are no longer so available for their

grandfathers' indulgences. At about four to five years old little girls start to get busy. Before that, however, they, like little boys, are carried around, fondled and given treats by their doting grandfathers.

These grandfathers are usually not men who have lost or handed over authority to their sons. In a few cases as described before, married sons have set up separate households while their fathers are still living, but in very few cases has the father divided the land prior to his own death. The separated sons may have non-cultivating jobs to support their families or rent land to cultivate. These indulgent old grandfathers still hold whatever wealth they have been able to acquire in their lifetimes, be it in some cases only the land on which their house sits. Even if generally indulgent with the grandson, the old man still guides the child's behavior and can discipline when necessary.

A vivid example of a grandson-grandfather relationship was provided by Amjad Ali and his oldest grandchild, Jainal, a twelve year old boy. Amjad Ali headed a lineal joint household which consisted of his wife, one son, the son's wife and four grandchildren. He also was head of the homestead consisting of his own and seven other households where the 43 members of his patrilineage (*gusthi*) lived. In others words, this self-reported seventy year old had authority over a large number of people. He cultivated his own land and managed a small village grocery store, while the son worked at a cloth printing job nearby in the village.

Amjad Ali and his twelve year old grandson, Jainal, were in constant and easy communication. There was none of the reserved silence one could observe between fathers and sons in the village. At Jainal's circumcision Amjad Ali hovered over the boy and directed the circumcisor (*hajjam*). He seemed to share Jainal's pride at the boy's not having cried during the operation. Unfortunately, there had been some mistake. It was decided that the operation had not been properly done and needed to be repeated. When a second *hajjam* came only one week later and cut again, Jainal cried and his grandfather was distraught. It wasn't until the second circumcision that I noticed the absence of the father. When asked where he was, the people said that he simply had to go to town — both days. Later when attending other circumcisions where there was no living grandfather, it was observed that males other than the father dealt with the *hajjam*, and the mother and other women of the household took the role of comforting the child.

The four grandchildren of Amjad Ali did not all receive equal attention. Jainal's seven year old sister was too busy helping her mother and grandmother in the kitchen and caring for her two younger siblings to have much time to be around her grandfather. Occasionally she came to her grandfather's shop with her little sister or brother. It was here that the babies would climb on their grandfather and receive his attention.

For all of Amjad Ali's indulgent good humor, however, he could be

pushed too far. One day my assistant and I were in the kitchen with Jainal's grandmother enjoying an afternoon snack when we heard some shouting and a loud whack. With her head lowered, grandmother said, as if to herself, "You hit a cow like that; you don't hit a boy like that." Just then we saw Jainal streak past the open door and seconds later Amjad Ali, with beard flying and board in his upraised hand, raced after him. My assistant whispered to me, "He hit the side of the house; he didn't hit Jainal with that board." On a number of occasions I observed threats to hit children with sticks backed up by hitting an inanimate object with a loud crack. People almost never actually hit children, but did a lot of threatening. I learned later that Amjad Ali was so angry because Jainal had talked back to him and refused to obey his direct order. One might compare a Bengali grandfather with the norm for American fatherhood; friendly and open with a child, but quite capable of inflicting discipline.

In other depictions of Bangladeshi family life, Islam (1974: 78), Aziz (1979: 110—111) and Nath (1981: 27) all describe a joking relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. Islam's picture seems to imply such a relationship occuring after the grandchildren are adults and married. He says that the grandfather "might refer to his granddaughter-in-law as his youngest wife. Similarly a grandmother may tease her granddaughter that the granddaughter's husband is her own new husband." Aziz relates, in the context of the grandchildren as quite young, a grandfather telling his grandson that he will marry the boy's sister. The little boy replies that he will "break the old man's leg or . . . drown him in water." The grandfather is also described as telling the granddaughter that she is looking sexy and he will marry her. She may tell her grandfather that he is "a lazy old fellow" and to stop annoying her. Aziz does not mention anything about grandmothers engaging in such ribaldry. In another context, however, Aziz (1979: 50) says grandmothers take the responsibility of providing children's sex education and preparing them for later marriage responsibilities. Nath only says that these alternate generations can tease each other, and that foul language is permissible. I have no examples from my fieldwork of such types of joking. In general, people did not relate sexual matters, joking or otherwise, to me. What I observed was a warm, caring attitude from the senior generation and an often playful attitude from the junior.

CONCLUSION

Both men and women in Bangladesh have rewards awaiting them as they grow older, as long as they have produced offspring and their families remain economically viable. The old man is the unquestioned head of a patrilocally extended family. As he has aged, his influence has usually

increased in the community as well as at home. The old woman hopefully has the love and attention of sons and the labor of daughters-in-law. And when she finds the time in a busy household, she can be a doting grandmother. The old man has more time to spend with his grandchildren than his wife has. At the time her husband dies, however, the woman loses her role as head of the domestic realm and spends her final years completely dependent on the goodwill of her sons and their wives.

Keith (1985: 236) has summarized the arguments in the cross-cultural literature on aging, concluding that women are fairly well prepared for the losses of old age by the repeated physical changes, or discontinuities, that have occurred in their lives. At the same time they do not face the disappointment that men supposedly meet when retiring from an active public life and moving from an achievement orientation in the world to the ascriptive atmosphere of the household. Women, on the other hand, were always recognized chiefly by their ascriptive roles of wife and mother. The conclusion is general (Cool and McCabe 1983; Harrell 1981; Rosow 1963), that men must value the active adult role and feel deprived when it can no longer be performed. Having lost this role, Gutmann (1974, 1977) even describes men as becoming passive and domestically focused in old age, in contrast to women's growing aggressiveness and community involvement.

The problem with this discussion for Bangladesh is that men are required to deal with very few losses or discontinuities, even in old age. Illness or severe incapacity may be exceptions, but as long as a man retains his mental facility, he need not retire from public or private life. Very old men who can still "speak well" are in demand for dispute settlement councils. In general, men's prestige and influence in the village increases with age, but even for those who have lost verbal acuity, there is still the community respect for the honored head of a household.

An old woman who spends time outside the home in rural Bangladesh does so because of poverty, and hence her influence is practically nil. What keeps most old women in the house is their husbands' authority. The wife obeys her husband in general, but as the man's authority in the village grows, it becomes even more important for her to emulate the qualities of a model wife. That is, she must not appear in public. For both men and women, the valued roles are those that do not involve labor. A family is respected if the women do not need to come out of the home to work, either in the fields or for other people. The women actually may work very hard without losing respect, so long as it is behind the walls of their own homesteads. The prestigeful work for the man is mental work, that of the household manager (*grihasthi*) who directs others: his sons, the women, younger members of the household, household servants and even other villagers.

The circumstances in Bangladesh are those of a stratified society in

which manual labor is to be avoided, if possible. Except for the wealthy and the well-educated, it is only the old man who achieves the valued role of the director of the household and village affairs. Finally at this point, he need no longer do the less respected manual work of cultivation. The wife of this old village influential is not relieved of social restrictions, but finds the bonds, if anything, tighter because of her husband's increased prestige. When the bonds might be released by her husband's death, she loses what influence she had within the household over her sons' wives and becomes their dependent instead.

NOTES

This paper was originally presented at the Association for Asian Studies Meetings in Boston, MA in April 1987. I would like to thank Shirley Lindenbaum, who chaired our panel, for her comments on recent changes in Bangladesh. I also acknowledge, with thanks, the Mid-west Universities Consortium for International Activities and the American Council of Learned Societies for the financial assistance which made my research trips to Bangladesh possible.

[1] The data for this paper were collected on fieldtrips to Bangladesh in 1968/69 and 1974/75. A village in the southeastern part of the country was studied in 1968/69. In 1974/75, another village in the northwestern part of the country was studied, but with a return of about two months to the original village for a recensus and an update of activities. Names of individuals used are pseudonyms.

[2] The young age at marriage, however, seems to be advancing. During my first fieldwork in 1968/69, only one never-married female in the village was reported to be as old as sixteen. She and her family were teased as being too old to ever marry at that age. By the time I returned in 1974/75 a different village had half a dozen sixteen year old never married young women. The youngest bride I observed was eight.

[3] Expenses seem to be shifting from the groom's family to the bride's. During my 1968/69 fieldwork the bulk of the expense fell to the family of the groom who had to provide many agreed upon gifts to the bride, especially gold ornaments, and to her kin. Only a very few wealthy fathers of girls gave gifts to the groom in order to procure an educated and, perhaps, service holding husband for their daughters. It is now reported that the financial burden is shifting more generally to the fathers of girls, who must provide a dowry for their daughters. Lindenbaum (1975) reports dowry as a change which has taken place. Abdullah and Zeidenstein (1982: 100) surmise that "the dowry system is not yet an issue for those who do not care about educated husbands or for those few families whose status is enough dowry." From my experience, the latter must be true for the vast majority of the less affluent people of rural Bangladesh. If the dowry system is becoming more prevalent in the country, it seems to have negative implications for the prestige of women.

[4] Current reports from Bangladesh, however, describe a change. Because of the growth of dowry and the accompanying expense of getting females married, more women are remaining unmarried. It is no longer unusual for a respectable middle class rural family to educate a daughter in lieu of arranging her marriage.

[5] Chaudhury (1982: 63), in his article on the aged in Bangladesh, argues that old people are in trouble because "the traditional joint family is breaking into nuclear units as a consequence of modernization and/or population pressure and poverty." To justify this he quotes the Bangladesh Fertility Survey that in 1975 seventy percent of the households were nuclear as compared to 1968 when the National Impact Survey shows only fifty-four

percent. Vatuk (1982: 84—85) refutes this assumption for India, stating that "the results of many studies of rural communities and surveys of urban and suburban samples populations have failed to support the hypothesis of a marked decline in the incidence of extended family households, and have instead documented the fact that the extended family system is alive and well." She goes on to state that census type data does not lend itself well to the assessment of household composition.

In my study of the village in 1968/69 (Ellickson, 1972: 32—42), I found 83% of the 225 households to be non-joint, that is, nuclear, supplemented nuclear and subnuclear. The definition of joint (after Kolenda 1968) was that two or more married couples lived together, so that a widowed mother or father would be considered part of a supplemented nuclear household. Even with such a low percentage as sixteen for extended/joint families, I argue that no trend toward the nuclear is apparent. In most cases, it was rather a matter of the father of the head of the household being deceased and the sons of that head not yet married.

[6] *Djin* are unseen beings, or spirits, mentioned in the Quran and described by villagers as being just like people only invisible. That is, they are male and female, good and bad, Muslim, Hindu and Christian, etc. A person may be affected by a *djin* because they are especially liked or especially disliked by the creature.

REFERENCES CITED

Abdullah T. A. and S. A. Zeidenstein 1982 Village Women of Bangladesh: Prospects for Change. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Apple, D. 1956 The Social Structure of Grandparenthood. American Anthropologist 58: 656—663.

Aziz, K. M. Ashraful 1979 Kinship in Bangladesh. Dacca: International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research.

Brown, J. 1982 Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Middle-Aged Women. Current Anthropology 23: 143—156.

Chaudhury, R. H. 1982 The Aged in Bangladesh. In Aging in South Asia. A. de Souza and W. Fernandez, eds. Pp. 62—83. Delihi: Indian Social Institute.

Cool, L. and J. McCabe 1983 The 'Scheming Hag' and the 'Dear Old Thing': The Anthropology of Aging Women. In Growing Old in Different Societies: Cross-Cultural Perspectives. J. Sokolovsky, ed. Pp. 56—68. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

Crapanzano, V. 1980 Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan. Chicago: University Press.

Ellickson, J. 1972 A Believer Among Believers: The Religious Beliefs, Practices and Meanings in a Village in Bangalesh. Unpublished dissertation, Michigan State University.

Ellickson, J. n.d. Age and Aging as Issues in Bangladesh. In Shaping Bengali World: Public and Private. T. K. Stewart, ed. 20th Bengal Studies Conference,William Bay, WI, May, 1986. East Lansing: Michigan State University (forthcoming).

Fry, C. and J. Keith 1982 Life Course as a Cultural Unit. In Aging From Birth to Death, Volume II, Sociotemporal Perspectives. M. W. Riley, R. P. Ables and M. S. Teitelbaum, eds. Pp. 51—70. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Goody, J. 1976 Production and Reproduction: A Comparative Study of the Domestic Domain. New York: University Press.

Gutmann, D. L. 1974 Alternatives to Disengagement: The Old Men of Highland Druze. In Culture and Personality. R. A. LeVine, ed. Pp. 232—245.

Gutmann, D. L. 1977 The Cross-Cultural Perspective: Notes Toward a Comparative

Psychology of Aging. In Handbook of the Psychology of Aging. J. E. Birren and K. W. Schaie, eds. Pp. 302—326. New York: Van Nostrand.
Harrell, S. 1981 Growing Old in Rural Taiwan. In Other Ways of Growing Old. P. Amoss and S. Harrell, eds. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
Islam, A. K. M. Aminul 1974 A Bangladesh Village: Conflict and Cohesion. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Company.
Jay, R. R. 1969 Javanese Villages: Social Relations in Rural Modjokuto. Cambridge: MIT Press.
Keith, J. 1985 Age in Anthropological Research. In Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences. E. Shanas, ed. Pp. 231—263. New York: Van Nostrand.
Kolenda, P. 1968 Region, Caste and Family Structure: A Comparative Study of the Indian 'Joint' Family. In Structure and Change in Indian Society. M. Singer and B. Cohn, eds. Pp. 339—396. Chicago: Aldine.
Lindenbaum, S. 1975 The Value of Women. In Bengal in the 19th and 20th Centuries. J. R. McLane, ed. Pp. 75—83. East Lansing: Michigan State University.
Lindenbaum, S. 1977 The 'Last Course': Nutrition and Anthropology in Asia. In Nutrition and Anthropology in Action. T. K. Fitzgerald, ed. Pp. 141—155. Assen/Amsterdam: Van Gorcum.
McCarthy, F. E. 1967 Bengali Village Women; Mediators Between Tradition and Development, M. A. Thesis, Michigan State University.
Nadel, S. F. 1951 The Foundations of Social Anthropology. New York: The Free Press.
Nahemow, N. 1983 Grandparenthood Among the Baganda: Role Option in Old Age. In Growing Old in Different Societies: Cross-Cultural Perspectives. J. Sokolovsky, ed. Pp. 104—115. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
Nath, J. 1981 Beliefs and Customs Observed by Muslim Rural Women During Their Life Cycle. In The Endless Day. T. S. Epstein and R. A. Watts, eds. Pp. 13—28. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
Radcliffe-Brown, A. R. 1952 Structure and Function in Primitive Society. London: Cohen and West.
Rosow, I. 1963 Adjustment of the Normal Aged. In Processes of Aging, Volume II. R. Williams, C. Tibbitts and W. Donahue, eds. Pp. 195—223. New York:Atherton Press.
Vatuk, S. 1982 Old Age in India. In Old Age in Pre-Industrial Society. P. N. Stearns, ed. Pp. 70—103. New York: Holmes & Meier.
Vatuk, S. 1985 South Asia, Cultural Conceptions of Sexuality. In In Her Prime: A New View of Middle-Aged Women. J. K. Brown and V. Kerns, eds. Pp. 137—152. South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey.
Zaidi, S. M. Hafeez 1970 The Village Culture in Transition: A Study of East Pakistan Rural Society. Honolulu: East-West Center Press.

Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
Western Illinois University,
Macomb, IL 61466, U.S.A.