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Breaking the Barriers: Erosion of Living Values in Intergenerational Contexts

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the erosion of respect and collaboration within extended families, focusing on the intergenerational relationships between adults, youth, and the elderly. Using narrative inquiry and a qualitative research design, the research investigates how these core values are diminishing over time due to unmet societal expectations, cultural shifts, and technological advancements. The theoretical framework integrates Maslow's Need Theory, Durkheim's Social Integration Theory, and Hybridization Theory to provide insights into the evolving dynamics of values in relation to social needs, collective awareness, and cultural exchange. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and on-site observations of six extended families in Bardibas, Mahottari. The findings reveal a shift from group satisfaction to individualism in cooperation, while respect is transitioning from traditional religious practices to more secular forms. These changes reflect a broader cultural shift, where conventional norms are being redefined to accommodate modern circumstances. The study underscores the importance of understanding the factors driving value erosion and highlights the need for adaptive strategies to preserve essential societal values.

Keywords: living values, respect, cooperation, intergenerational dynamics, value erosion, cultural shifts, narrative inquiry

Introduction

The term "Living values" was introduced as part of an international initiative by Brahma Kumaris in 1995 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations and promote values for a better world (Tillman, 2000a). Values are derived from examples, behaviors, actions, and everyday affairs, and they are intrinsically linked to the interests we prioritize, whether in physical, material, or mental states (Chander, 2000a). Values reflect what is considered right or wrong, desirable or undesirable, and, along with traditions, laws, and customs, they define a culture (Dahlke, 1958). The nature of values is not static; it evolves based on individual preferences and societal contexts.

For instance, Althen (2009) observes that behaviors such as kissing in public may be accepted in Western cultures but are not as widely accepted in Eastern cultures, demonstrating that values are relative. What is considered desirable or right in one context may not hold the same meaning in another. The importance of values lies in their role in guiding human conduct, helping determine what is right and fostering the pursuit of goodness both inwardly and outwardly.

However, the rising prevalence of selfishness, greed, aggression, and violence is concerning, as these negative trends hinder progress and human flourishing (Chander, 2000b). Kozul (1995) asserts

that the principles underlying values are universal, transcending differences in nationality, caste, and language. Living values are integral to human civilization, ensuring a harmonious and civilized life by providing guidance for what is right and necessary in the face of life's complexities.

Problem Statement

The statement of the problem pertains to identifying the destination before embarking on a journey. It involves understanding the current state of values, particularly how they are changing and eroding. As Kumar (1999) suggests, determining the proper route to reach a destination requires understanding the gaps and challenges that need to be addressed. This study aims to explore how values, specifically respect and cooperation, are being eroded over time, and why certain values, although essential, seem to be disappearing, while others, once undesirable, are gaining prominence.

A key issue is why younger generations are less inclined to learn from older individuals, whose life experiences could provide valuable insights. The study reflects on the significance of these experiences, suggesting that even younger individuals may possess wisdom gained through their interactions with older generations. This research seeks to understand these dynamics and the implications of value erosion.

Research Objective

To investigate the eroding activities and behaviors related to the living values of respect and cooperation within communities, examine the factors contributing to their diminishing, and identify strategies to preserve and promote these essential values in the face of societal changes, with a particular focus on their impact on social cohesion and intergenerational relationships.
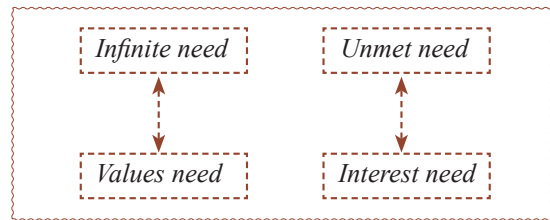
Literature Review

Major Theories to Understand Living Values

Theories help set the position of the living values for navigating the study (Kumar, 1999). The theories used for this study are the need theory of Abraham Maslow, social integrative theory of Emile Durkheim and the hybridization theory.

Figure 1

Living Values in Need Theory

The need theory was developed by American Psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908- 1970).

This theory says that when basic needs are fulfilled people opt for higher level of needs to achieve (Gratton, 1980). The hierarchical order of need as Maslow stated were physical needs, safety needs, belongingness and love, esteem needs and self-actualization 00/(Maslow, 2003).

Living Values in Social Integrative Theory

Emile Durkheim (1858-1817) was the French philosopher who set the foundation to the concept relating religion and morality showing the direct relation in both the natural and social world (Christians, 2005). It is flourishing in the position of the demand of societal linkage rather than the abstract notion (Ibid).

Figure 2

Living Values in Social Integrative Theory
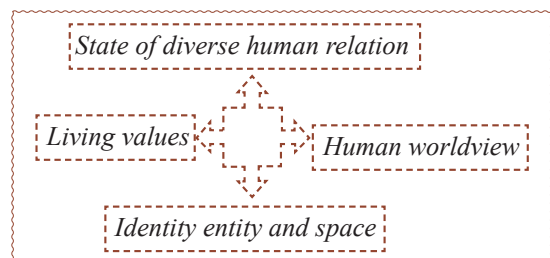
Having saying so for him society is the living stamina which encompasses its parts and parcels of making what are required to turn into the whole societal embodiment. In this connection, Chinmayananda (1980a) presents,

> *The analogy of river which flows from high land to low lands and therefore in the natural*

course, only the low land gets more water for irrigation but this is only a small portion of water that is available whereas the most of the water supplied by the river flows away into the sea and get wasted, but if one build a dam across the river, the level of the stored water rises and even the high level land can then be irrigated by supplying water through a system of canal. (p.447)

From the foregoing remark it can be realized that one should fix or navigate the destination to reach in the way how it can easily and properly be achieved with its desirable goal. Positively reflected thought process whereby one can design the destiny of values. In this regard,

Pathak (2009) states the continuous and steady successive step should be forwarded so as to uphold such values as the worldview can be perceived through norms, beliefs and values and which come up with the collective consciousness.

Living Values in Hybridization Theory

Living values can be an essential part of human life (Tillman, 2000a). It is understood differently in accordance with the perception and thereby influencing from it. Having made the balance from externally and internally as a conscience path is living values (Ghos, 2004).

For John Dewey (1859-1952) living values can be connected with liking not everything but only with those that judgments are approved (Dewey, 1960).

Approaching or supposing something good or desirable doesn't mean that these are actually the same until and unless they are undergone the concrete and empirical examining (Ibid). Living values requires lived and concrete methods to teach with what is essentially displayed in the practice (Chandres, 2011). It holds the knowledge that means and ends go together interrelating and interchanging each other rather than detaching one from another (Dewey, 1960).

Living Values in Construction Theory

Living values are always at the state of changing and a matter of shaping the habit and the desired destiny with the judgment (Lillie, 1955). It is seen that religion, Dharma or living values have been used interchangeably and here dharma practicing in the past and in this time can be exposed differently as cyclic process (Bista, 1991).

Living Values in Deconstruction Theory

Some values have been eroding and others are in the process of evolution. This means that there is the chance of living virtually in absence of deviating from what is right, contextual and apt to live (Chander, 2000b). This context of detaching from the values ultimately lead people to the position where he/she can't tell their own native land where he/she is grown up, name of the parent who gave the birth and so forth (Ibid).

Table 1

Essences of Theories and their Implication to Living Values

Theories	Essence of theory	Implication to living values
Need	Viewing unmet need in the community	Mutual understanding to each and every individual
Social integration	Collective consciousness is paramount	Social and communal harmony
Hybridization	Interconnection and exchange of the concept	Inclusive and forward looking civilization
Construction	Construction of desirable behavior	Values evolving with the pace of time and the context
Deconstruction	Leading to the right destiny with what to keep on.	Values are eroding with the pace of time and the context

Going through the table 1, texts and my reflection, I hold the idea that the living values can be taken as the leading concept where the harmonious coexistence is maintained (Chander, 2000a) with the right judgment from the core conscience (Lillie, 1955).

The research highlights the critical relationship between living values and intergenerational dynamics, emphasizing how these values evolve and sometimes erode over time. In his study "Implementation Status of Value Management in Project Management Practice in Nepal" (Mishra, 2019), he explores how the integration of value management principles can enhance project outcomes by aligning them with societal values. This alignment is particularly significant in the context of Nepal, where traditional values often clash with modern practices.Furthermore, Mishra's collaboration with Aithal (2023) in "Building Ethical Capital through Human Resource" underscores the importance of fostering ethical values within organizations to build a sustainable workforce. They argue that cultivating ethical capital is essential for maintaining integrity and accountability across generations, thereby reinforcing intergenerational values.In another study, Mishra and Aithal (2023) examine the relationship between demographic characteristics and ethical capital, suggesting that varying backgrounds influence how values are perceived and enacted within organizations.

Their findings indicate that understanding these differences is crucial for implementing effective value management strategies.Overall, Mishra's body of work illustrates the necessity of addressing the erosion of living values in intergenerational contexts by promoting ethical practices and value management in both personal and professional spheres. This approach not only preserves cultural heritage but also fosters a more cohesive society that adapts to changing circumstances while maintaining core values.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research design serves as a comprehensive plan that guides the researcher in addressing the research problem, including what to study, how to study it, and the procedures to follow (Kumar, 1999). This study adopts a qualitative research design utilizing a narrative inquiry process focused on a specific community.

Sample of the Population

Purposive sampling was employed to identify informants from households with extended families. Participants were categorized into three age groups: teenagers (13-19 years), adults (20-59 years), and older adults (60 years and above). The first and third groups were considered the dependent and passive populations, while the second group represented the independent and active population.

Table 2

Summarizes the Sample Population

Categories	Age	Male	Female	Total
Teen	13-19	4	2	6
Adult	20-59	3	3	6
Old	60+	3	3	6

This table provides an overview of the participants, highlighting the diversity across age groups to capture varied lived experiences regarding living values within extended households comprising at least three generations.

Study Site

The study was conducted in Bardibas 1, Mahottari, where extended families with three generations were identified. Six families were selected based on prior contact with members who

had substantial experience regarding living values. Research Tools

Research tools serve as instruments for effectively addressing the research problem (Joshi, 2010). The following tools were utilized:

In-depth Interviews. Conducted to gather detailed information from respondents about their experiences and perspectives.

Observation. Employed to collect primary data on behavioral patterns within the community (Kumar, 1999).

Self-Narrating. This tool allowed for personal reflection on daily experiences, providing insights into the cultural and contextual meanings of living values.

Philosophical Assumptions

The study is grounded in a subjective worldview, acknowledging that truth varies from person to person (Creswell, 2009). As Sarangi (1996) notes, philosophy provides a rationale for understanding human actions and judgments (Lillie, 1955). This philosophical approach enables a nuanced view of living values as integral to rational decision-making.Ontological Assumption

Recognizing that perceptions of truth can change over time, this research embraces multiple understandings of reality (Joshi, 2010). As a researcher, I accept diverse perspectives shaped by individual experiences and social contexts (Creswell, 2009).

Epistemological Assumption

This study acknowledges the relationship between the researcher (knower) and the subject (known), framing knowledge as subjective and context-dependent (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Understanding how context influences behavior is crucial for appropriate action within the research framework.

Axiological Assumption

The study values participants' belief systems and judgments as integral to understanding living values. Denzin & Lincoln (2005) emphasize that reverence for life underpins moral actions. Thus, prioritizing participants' value systems is essential for capturing their lived experiences authentically. In summary, this methodology outlines a qualitative approach that integrates various research tools and philosophical assumptions to explore living values within intergenerational contexts effectively. Table 3 includes different theories showing how I want to use them.

Table 3

Different Theories and their Link to the Study (Chandres, 2011; Dewey, 1960; Ghos, 2004; Lillie, 1955)

Theories (core)	What I want to Connect?	How they Support the Study
Need	Viewing unmet need in the community	Exploring the mutual understanding
Social integration	Collective consciousness is paramount	Social and communal harmony
Hybridization	Interconnection and exchange of the concept	Inclusive and forward looking civilization
Construction	Construction of desirable behavior	Values evolving with the pace of time and the context
Deconstruction	Observing things differently	Values are eroding with the pace of time and the context

With this context, I considered need theory, social integration theory, hybridization theory, construction theory and deconstruction theory as the main theories and these are accompanied by some others derivative theories like Kantian theory, theory of cultural relativism, utilitarian theory, moral subjectivism and ethical egoism. More precisely, it is supposed to see the intergenerational relation of living values with regard to its practices, challenges and existences in the community.

Data and Discussions

Values are born, expand, transfer, and erode as they pass through time. Table 4 is the indication of the extinct living values related to the respect and cooperation in the experience of my informants of different age groups.

Table 4

Experience of Eroded Living Values

Age	60 above		20-59		13-19	
Nature	**Respect**	**Cooperation**	**Respect**	**Cooperation**	**Respect**	**Cooperation**
Erosion	Negligence to senior''s ideas	Human replaced by machine	Compulsory	Unconditional	Real	Emotional
	No heartfelt respect	Interdependence	Fixed and formal	Co-existence	Oriental	Reciprocal
	Emotional	Physical	values (feet			
	touching)	Closed/ secret	Dhog,			
	Namaskar	Interdependence				
		Serving	Structural	Interdependence	Natural	Physical
	Prescribed(as a rule)	Unified	Interior	Natural	Religious	Cooperation in action
	Culture of acceptance	Localization	Satisfying ature	Physical	Emotive	Public welfare

The analysis of the information in the table 4 shows the experience of the elderly people that complies with different authors (Lillie, 1955, Dewey, 1960). Their understanding reflects the attraction to euro-culture, materialistic living, lack of knowledge, lack of realization, development and technology, personal matter, culture and context causing the erosion or extinction of the values.

Going through the information in the table above, I have mentioned the eroded living values related to respect and cooperation.

Respect, as a fundamental value, is increasingly subject to erosion in modern societies. Various factors contribute to its transformation, including cultural shifts and the influence of globalization. One prominent change is the shift from traditional oriental forms of respect to more westernized practices. As Green (1999) observes, traditional forms of respect, such as "dhog" (bowing), "namaskar" (greeting with folded hands), and foot-touching, are being replaced by simpler, more casual greetings like "hi" and "hello." This transition reflects the broader cultural influence of Western practices, particularly in urban settings, where exposure to globalized norms is more pronounced. Bhattarai (17 years old) expressed that respect, once deeply embedded in cultural and religious traditions, is gradually being replaced by secular forms of interaction. He lamented that practices such as wearing the sacred thread (janoi) are now only observed during religious ceremonies, rather than as an everyday practice.

This transformation aligns with the construction theory, which suggests that respect and other values are shaped by the cultural context in which individuals live. Bhattarai's experience, and that of others like Dhital, suggests that the erosion of respect is not merely an individual choice but a reflection of broader societal changes influenced by modernization and globalization.

Respect as a Shift from Religious to Secular Values

Another dimension of the erosion of respect is the shift from religious to secular frameworks. In traditional societies, respect was inherently tied to religious practices and spiritual values. However, as Acharya (2) observed, respect is increasingly perceived as a secular value, independent of religious context. Respect, once seen as a moral obligation rooted in religion, is now viewed as a more subjective concept, adaptable to individual circumstances. This shift mirrors the hybridization theory, where cultural elements from different traditions blend, creating new forms of behavior

that combine aspects of both Eastern and Western practices. Acharya's view reflects a pragmatic search for balance between tradition and modernity, where respect is less about adherence to specific religious customs and more about a general, secular principle of mutual recognition.

Cooperation as an Eroded Value

Like respect, cooperation is also undergoing significant transformation. Traditionally, cooperation was viewed as a collective effort aimed at mutual satisfaction and social harmony. However, it has increasingly become individualized, with a focus on personal gain rather than shared well-being. Acharya (2) defines cooperation as satisfaction, linking it to the fulfillment derived from working together for a common goal. In the past, such collaborative efforts were seen as sources of joy and community cohesion. Today, however, cooperation has been replaced by self-centered behaviors, including conflict, violence, and petty disputes, as individuals prioritize personal interests over communal ones.

This shift is in line with Maslow's Need Theory, where the basic needs of individuals are increasingly emphasized over collective or community-based goals. The erosion of cooperation reflects a broader societal trend toward individualism, which, as Naroll (1983) notes, has led to the decline of collaborative practices that once defined social interactions. Cooperation has thus shifted from being an action based on communal harmony to a more transactional and self-serving activity.

Cooperation as a Shift from Inter-relation to Intra-relation

Cooperation has also evolved from a collective, inter-relational activity to a more individualistic, intra-relational one. Thapa's observation underscores the growing tendency for people to focus on their own needs, leaving others to fend for themselves. In the past, people would naturally help one another, especially in times of conflict or distress. Today, this shared sense of responsibility has diminished, replaced by a more isolated approach to problem-solving. As Rama

(1988) suggests, cooperation, once viewed as a universal value, is now confined to a narrow circle of self-interest.

Cooperation and Modernization

The influence of modernization has further altered the practice of cooperation. Tsanoff (1955) and Maslow (2003) argue that while cooperation was once seen as a rigorous, communal effort, it is now largely symbolic or superficial, disconnected from its original purpose. Acharya (19) observed that cooperation, while still acknowledged in theory, is less evident in practice. The pace of modernization and technological advancement has shifted the focus of cooperation toward pragmatic, rather than emotional or cultural, interactions.

Findings and Inferences

The findings of this study indicate that modern communities are losing touch with the core living values of cooperation and respect, particularly in intergenerational relationships. Older generations (60 years and older) emphasize the erosion of respect due to the abandonment of traditional values and practices. They highlight the decline of genuine respect, replaced by formal gestures such as "hello" or "hi" rather than deeper cultural expressions like "dhog" or "namaskar." Meanwhile, younger generations (13–19 years old) are more influenced by superficial forms of respect, often driven by technology and social media, which prioritize surface-level interactions over meaningful, culturally grounded exchanges.

Similarly, cooperation has shifted from being a collective, satisfaction-oriented activity to a more individualistic, self-serving practice. The role of technology, globalization, and shifting cultural norms has contributed to the transformation of cooperation from a collective value to a transactional one. The analysis of these shifts can be understood through the lenses of Maslow's Need Theory, Durkheim's Social Integration Theory, and Hybridization Theory, which all help explain how values evolve and become less central over time.

Ultimately, this study reveals that the erosion of respect and cooperation, once central to social cohesion, reflects broader societal

changes, including the influence of Western culture, technological advancements, and shifting cultural norms. These changes necessitate a deeper understanding of the forces at play in order to preserve these essential values in the face of modernization and globalization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the erosion of living values such as cooperation and respect highlights a broader transformation in society, driven by cultural shifts, modernization, and the blending of traditions. The younger generation's growing preference for Westernized behaviors and ideas signals a departure from the traditional values that once served as the foundation for communal living. These intergenerational shifts reveal that respect, especially towards religion, and forms of cooperation are being replaced with individualistic and secular alternatives. In urban areas, traditional practices, like the religious acts of respect, are increasingly being supplanted by formalized or mechanical interactions, reflecting society's evolving dynamics.

This study underscores that while cooperation and respect remain important values, their forms and expressions have transformed over time. The younger generation's perceptions of these values are shaped by technological advancements and the increasing influence of Western culture, which has contributed to the decline of traditional practices. To preserve the relevance of these values, society must actively engage in reinvigorating and adapting them to meet the needs and realities of modern life. Efforts should focus on preserving the essence of respect and cooperation while finding ways to redefine them in a contemporary context that resonates with future generations.

Furthermore, the role of cultural hybridization presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, blending Eastern and Western traditions may offer a balanced approach to maintaining cultural identity while embracing modernity. On the other hand, when cultural integration is not carefully managed, it risks undermining traditional values even further. Therefore, it is essential to navigate this hybridization thoughtfully, ensuring that the core elements of respect and cooperation are preserved while fostering a culture that is both adaptable and rooted in its historical principles. This study ultimately calls for a more nuanced approach to value preservation, one that acknowledges the importance of tradition while embracing the changing demands of a globalized world.

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