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In this issue we offer readers the third and final installment of an insightful series about the mother-in-law, written by Nandini Garud. Nandini earned her Master's degree in English at the University of Poona. A mother of two children (ages 10 and 5), she lives in San Jose, California. She has written articles on children and money, raising religious kids and Rameshbhai Oza. She is looking forward to being a mother-in-law one day.

It is important to say that all mothers-in-law of the world - and every daughter may eventually be one - have their own insecurities in giving sons and daughters over to a spouse they don't know deeply. Social security and pension plans are relatively new and only exist in certain parts of the world. In the absence of these, worries about the future naturally arise. Every society has evolved solutions to the in-law issue, but in today's world it is more difficult. Young people need to be aware of elders' needs, feelings and insecurities and have compassion when insecurity shows itself. When people - mothers or fathers - are overly dominant, proud and unrelenting, these are signs of insecurity.

In America there is a sad saying, "Old and gray and in the way." The solution is to put the bothersome elder in nursing homes, rest homes or "Paradise retreats." The major problem that Nandini describes is the authority of the mother-in-law and her occasional abuses. But consider also that in modern cultures the authority of elders is usurped by both the son and the daughter-in-law who then wield the power and make life - and death decisions about their parents. The tables are turned. This is an even greater instability. One has to ask which is the preferable culture - to allow

parents to remain in charge of their lives and have a strong say and respect in the family or to helplessness and dependence, which is what happens all too frequently in the West, where we can say we have a daughter-in-law, son-in-law problem to replace the so-called mother-in-law problem.

A strong mother-in-law will see that divorce does not happen for her son. A strong mother-in-law will see that an untrained wife becomes trained in various household skills and the human arts of nurturing and education. A strong mother-in-law will care for the children and give freedom to the young bride. There is one solution I recommend when the going gets tough. This is for the son to suggest that he get an apartment for himself, his wife and child next door, after the first baby is born, no further away than a three-minute walk from the family home. He should not move across town.

I would like to see a condominium with all members of the extended family having their own apartment. This happens in many parts of the world where ancestral compounds provide closeness, but also separateness. Within this independence enjoyed by each family, and yet dependence on the family as a support in marriage, crisis, births, deaths, let the elderly mother reign supreme. Honor her, respect her and realize that each in turn will be a mother-in-law or father-in-law one day. Thus we set the karmic pattern for a happy elderly experience among Hindus. With this in mind, shall our motto now be "Old and gray and here to stay"?

Thank you, Nandini, for the sensitive observations on a difficult subject that few people are willing to delve into or have the wisdom to do so.

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