

Old Age Homes –The Need of Time



The cycle of birth and death keeps going on, in life. All the philosophers and social reformers have said that, ‘One who is born will die someday.’ Death is inevitable. Bhagvad Geeta says, ‘one who is born will have some ailments, one will become old and then one will die.’ This means old age is a stage in life. On birth, the baby, ignorant of everything, slowly develops through the surrounding nature, by observation and value education given by parents and grandparents. Body and intelligence start developing by gaining knowledge through school. The guidance of teachers and reading of books makes the child well-versed in different skills. The youth starts earning on the basis of the knowledge and strength, gets married, gets children and begins to work for the welfare of the family and society. Slowly becomes old, the strength becomes less. Memory becomes less at the end he/she dies. From birth to death man goes through such stages. The child in young age dreams of becoming a doctor or an engineer, being famous and tries to fulfil their ambitions by forgetting the old age and end of life.

In Mahabharata, ‘Yaksha’ – the supernatural being asked ‘Yudhishtir’ a question, ‘what does a man always forget?’ ‘Yudhishtir’ answered, ‘a man forgets his death.’ In fact, death, old age and diseases are inevitable. Wear and tear of the body, lessening of physical and mental strength is inevitable. It is natural that the number of old people in the society is large. With the advancement of the healthcare facilities the number of old people is going to increase sizably in times to come. The children have schools for their development. I feel that at the graduate level there should be a topic for study on “Planning for Old Age”. Their ability to think is less than the ability of the young people. Their thoughts are different. This is bound to happen because of the generation gap. A young man can walk fast on the road but an old man can’t. If there is any obstacle, the young man can jump and cross it. But the old man can’t do it without getting injury. This is mainly because due to old age his/her reflexes are weak. Youth and old age are two stages. Their actions – reactions are different, with old age, the physical and mental power reduces. This is attributed to the maturity he/she acquires. A young man’s diet is more. One can eat, twice daily. But the diet of old one is little, he/she cannot eat more than once. In short in old age, there is a change in conduct, diet, sleep etc. Hence, I feel that to face the old age, they should have a school called “old age home”.

Young and old are different from each other. When a person becomes old, diet behaviour doesn’t remain the same as the youth. The person, who is independent as young, becomes dependent in old age. This dependence may not be of money. Today people make financial provision for their old age through provident fund, pension, life-insurance and long-term deposits. Yet they have to depend on somebody for physical and mental support.

Today, life has become very dynamic and hectic. Today's generation has become practical. They think of their parents as burden, while fulfilling the family needs in hectic life. Many families in society, in today's busy life, find old people useless. We should not blame the young generation for this because they are tossed between two things, first their work-occupation; second the needs of the seniors.

The seniors are aware of the problems; their family has to face due to them. They also have a feeling of being a burden. This problem is prevalent in the society and we should do something to solve it. The old aged people should consciously develop adaptability to a new situation. Today, we are living in a nuclear family and the space is very limited in a flat system. In the joint-family system there were other family members to support which is missing now.

The solution lies in an old age home. The society should accept it, without thinking, 'the son is ungrateful. He doesn't care for his parents? If parents are put in old age home it is because of some domestic family problems.' In fact, it is the responsibility of the son, to educate their better half that she is also having old parents and how she will feel if they are meted out with the same treatment. Here it will be worth mentioning that in course of time she is also going to be old. This negative approach, to old age homes creates a guilt feeling. This is totally wrong. Old age homes should not be sad homes, but they should become happy homes. Merely housing the old aged parents in Old-Age Home is not the duty, but what the old people expect is to have regular periodical (weekly/fortnightly) visits to inquire about their health and to brief them about the developments that have taken place within the two visits.

If this thing happens, the old parents can also enjoy their stay at old-age homes. This is the necessity of time today.

In big cities like Mumbai and Pune, the atmosphere is not conducive, for old people. Once upon a time, Pune was known as the pensioners' paradise. In those days, Pune's population was not much like today. There were not many vehicles on the roads. Then trees were not cut to widen the roads and build houses. So, there were many trees in the city. The climate of the city, in three seasons was not extreme – no hot summer, no severe winter or rainfall. The weather was good for health. The city was quiet and clean. The atmosphere was fresh in the morning and evening. As many thinkers, artists, writers stayed in the city, the city had cultural life. People preferred to settle in Pune, after retirement and they came to stay in Pune. But today Pune is no more pensioners' city. As in other cities, the lives of old people have become very difficult in Pune.

In cities there are various means of transport like city buses, local railways etc. The means of fast transport like metro, monorail etc. are going to be started. The old people find it difficult to cope up with their speed. In Mumbai there are local trains full of people running. They stop at the stations, for less than thirty seconds. Old people cannot reach the train in the crowd. Even if they reach, they cannot board the coach. There is so much traffic on the roads, that they find it impossible to cross the roads. So, they can't travel in a city without anybody's help. Same thing is true in case of food. Fast food has got importance in today's fast life. People don't have time to cook, so when they are hungry, they go for *vada-pav*, *bhel-panipuri*. They bring parcel from the hotel or order pizza/ other food stuff. For old people, such junk food is not easy to digest. Hence,

they can't eat such food. The old people find it difficult to stay in cities due to air-pollution, water pollution and sound pollution on the roads. In this age, they suffer from old age problems; they need clean air, water, ample sunlight and peace. It is not possible to get all these in cities and even if it is possible, the old age homes in the cities may be costly. The best solution is that the old people should go to villages.

Every one longs for his native place. People leave their villages and come in cities for their livelihood. They become busy in their occupations. But they have their village and home in the mind. They wish to go back to their native place after retirement. Some people migrate from other states or even other countries; wish to go back to their native place. Of course, there are some, who have no house in their village or nobody to look after, even if they have one. There are some who are originally from the city but they wish to go and stay in a village for health and peace of mind. Old age homes should be built in small village, amidst nature. Those who have their homes and people to take their care of can stay in their homes. The others may stay in old age homes. As these people belong to the same age group, there would be no difference in their thoughts. Their likes and dislikes would be the same. They can enjoy their remaining life with one another and can have satisfaction. They can help and serve each other in their illness. They can fulfil their physical and mental needs.

What are the advantages of building old age homes and shifting the old there, to the society? One is money transaction in villages can increase, when the seniors will bring their money with them. Some may get pension, some may have invested money in deposits after retirement and getting interest on it, and some may get money, for

spending from their children. This money can be used to create employment in the villages. To take care of the old, preparing food for them, keeping the old age home clean, for security, the repair and maintenance of the vehicles if any, stitching and washing their clothes, repair of their foot wear etc. are a list of jobs that can be associated with old age homes. The young people, who don't have any means of livelihood, can get employment. People go to cities as they have no jobs in villages. But all don't go to cities. They wish to go but can't go, as they have no education or skill needed, for the jobs or there may be some other reasons. Such youths, adults and women in the village will get part time or full-time jobs. Especially women, who have a few opportunities, will get the jobs like, serving the old, cooking, cleaning, managing of the homes etc. They will also get money in turn to help the family. They can do some saving. They can do some provision for the future life of their children, to some extent. Thus, the economy of rural areas will improve.

The people living in the old age homes who have good physic can spend their time for the betterment of the villages. Those who live retired life have free time, which can be used for good purposes. They can teach the children in the villages share their experiences and show the right path to the young people. As they have a great experience of work in cities, the village people can get the advantage of this experience. They can give advice to the villagers on various problems. They can guide the villagers on the problems of water, electricity, agriculture etc. They can undertake tree plantation programmes. These old people can do small positive things, to pass their time. They can spend their energy, for the welfare of the village. They will get the joy of spending their time fruitfully. The old people living in the village can also get the benefits of the old age

homes. But there should be no condition that they must stay there. These old age homes can make arrangement of their meals at least once a day. In old age, man doesn't require a good heavy diet. Hence it can be convenient to all. Old people in the village can meet the people in the old age homes and can chat with them. Thus, all will have a good time.

In old age, a person requires less food. But he needs clean air, pure water and plenty of sunlight. Those living in flats, in cities don't get sunrays in the morning. In the cluster of buildings, it is difficult for them to get pure air. Nobody can assure them that they will get pure water. In cities, they have to live a congested life. They don't get the vitamins necessary for them like D-1, D-2 etc. They don't get minerals in enough quantity. Hence their bones can become brittle and they may suffer from different diseases of bones. Due to impure air, they may suffer from breathing and lungs problems, different stomach ailments due to impure water. Due to all this, their life expectancy may become less. In villages, they can get clean air, water and ample sunlight. They will have good health. If they have any ailments, with proper medical treatment, they can live a long healthy life.

A clinic can be started in the old age homes for the health of the old people. There should be a doctor's visit to the Old Age Home every day and he/she should be an On-Call doctor to attend to the emergencies. Medical experts from different branches can come and check the residents of the homes and treat them. These clinics will have the facility of medicines. Government as well as some generous people will help the old age homes for this cause. In this way, they will get good medical service. They can have an ambulance service, to shift a serious patient to a big

hospital in case of emergency. The means of first aid will be available in the old age homes. Similarly, they will should have full time trained staff like doctors, nurses, and ward boys etc. Due to such facilities the children of the old people don't have to worry for the health of their parents. This medical facility can be made available to all the people in the village; it may help them a lot. Availability of the ambulance will help in taking a serious patient to district hospital. Many lives in the village can be saved due to medical facilities, doctors, nurses and ambulance etc.

If an old person dies there, his funeral can be done in the village area. For this, they have to inform their relatives and the final rituals can be done in their presence. In cities, it has become difficult to collect four people for the funeral, because everybody is busy in something or the other. In the old age home, it is not like that. Other residents of the old age home will pray for the departed soul. The founder of *Tej Gyan foundation*, 'happy thoughts' Tejguru Sarshree in his book 'Life after death' says that your life after death depends on how many people pray for you, when you start your last journey. A man's life doesn't end even after his death. It continues after death. Those for whom prayers are done will get salvation.

The Government should take lead in establishing, such old age homes. It is the duty of the Government. But the Government should not build big old age homes at one or two places where many old people can stay because then people won't get the expected benefits of the old age homes. Then the old age homes will become like cages, where the life of the old people will become more difficult. Instead, there should be small old age homes that may accommodate fifteen or sixteen people at a time. Due to this, there will be decentralization of old age homes. Today

cities have to incur great losses due to centralization of all things. In one place there is too much of light and in all other places' darkness. Such difference is seen. It is necessary to have decentralization, to end the differences and to create balance.

We have seen how an old age home, can become a centre of creating employment in a small village.

As the old age homes are built in small villages, those who have migrated to cities from villages for employment, will return back to their villages in old age. Hence the burden of population on the cities can be reduced to some extent. Today, in the hectic city life, old people are being crushed like ants. They can't walk safely on the roads. While walking on the road a vehicle dashing an old man may call for hospitalisation. Every day, we read such news in the newspapers. A thief, on a running scooter snatches the chains of the old women. Someone stops an old woman on the road, pretends to provide uncalled for assistance and takes away her valuables like a gold ring or bangles. It is shame, that old and disabled are not protected. This is the consequence of urban society becoming self-cantered.

Dr. Vergese Kurian made a successful experiment in the field of milk and established dairy called 'Amul'. He gathered the farmers of Anand in Gujarat and established a co-operative society for milk. When many such teams were successful, they came under one roof called Amul. We know of this revolution in co-operative field. Dr. Kurian made veterinary service available to all the cattle instead of every farmer taking his animals to the vet-doctor. All the farmers were benefitted by this. These 161 concepts of 'common good' for the welfare of all can be worked out for

old age homes. Planning for the services, for old can be executed. A system will be made through which the benefits of the services can be given to others in the village. This concept can be seen as a result of decentralization. There will be decentralization of money and man. People in the village will get jobs. Their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter will be fulfilled. The burden on the cities will be reduced. We will be a step ahead in bringing balance between cities and villages. Looking at such benefits, old age home is a need of the time.

India's demographic position reveals that its elderly population (60 +) is growing three times faster than the population as a whole. The rising life expectancy is a major cause of this.

The Aged in Total Population (%)

Census year	Total Population (Mn)	Population of elderly (60 +) (Mn.)	% of Elderly population to total population
1951	361.1	19.8	5.48
1961	439.2	24.7	5.82
1971	547.3	32.7	5.97
1981	685.9	41.5	6.28
1991	846.3	56.7	6.70
2001	1027.0	77.0	7.50
2011	1210.0	104.0	8.60
2026*	NA	173.0	12.40

* Projected. Source: Decadal Census

“There is increasing awareness about the healthcare amongst the aged. At present, high health costs are due to rising drug prices and doctor fees.”

The Government of India has enacted the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens

Act, 2007, which makes maintenance of parents/senior citizens by children/relatives obligatory.

Providing a healthy environment, physical and social security for the elderly is the responsibility of one and all. Old age should not become a struggle for survival.

In 2016, the World Health Organization created a global campaign to focus attention on stereotypes about aging and designated October 1 as “International Day of Older Persons.”



Quotes

The greatest tragedy of old age is the tendency for the old to feel unneeded, unwanted, and of no use to anyone; the secret of happiness in the declining years is to remain interested in life, as active as possible, useful to others, busy, and forward looking.

- **Eleanor Roosevelt**

“Aging is not ‘lost youth’ but a new stage of opportunity and strength.”

- **Betty Friedan**

“There are six myths about old age: 1. That it’s a disease, a disaster. 2. That we are mindless. 3. That we are sexless. 4. That we are useless. 5. That we are powerless. 6. That we are all alike.”

—**Maggie Kuhn, founder of the Gray Panthers movement**

“We don’t stop playing because we grow old. We grow old because we stop playing.”

-**George Bernard Shaw**

“There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love. When you learn to tap this source, you will truly have defeated age.”

- **Sophia Loren**

