SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON AGEING IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Individuals are inseparable with all the problems they faced during life time. The aging process among the senior citizens of today should not be viewed as of biological and medical concern alone but of social, economic, psychological and demographical importance as well in a coordinated manner, which is the main concern of the sociological perspective approach. Further financial problem seems to be urgent, but the social psychological adjustments also need to be looked into. The problems of the senior citizen are steadily increasing in their magnitude and are generally the outcome of physical, social, economic, cultural, and psychological factors, hence the right approach to handle the senior citizen problems is coordinated, integrated and a comprehensive base which is the unique feature of the all perspective approach to the aging problems in the present research study. Aging is an index of deteriorating health. It may be fast or slow depending on the state and physical health of the senior citizen. It becomes a problem in respect of certain senior citizens if it becomes fast. The reasons for slow and fast aging relate closely to the social scenario.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF AGEING

Old age has in fact been important area of sociological research that a whole new field of specialization called gerontology has come into existence. The aging process among the senior citizens of today should not be viewed as of biological and medical concern alone but of social, economic, psychological and demographical importance as well in a coordinated manner, which is the main concern of the sociological perspective approach. Durkheim's[2]

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[2]Émile Durkheim was a French sociologist who rose to prominence in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Along with Karl Marx and Max Weber, he is credited as being one of the principal founders of modern sociology. Chief among his claims is that society is a *sui generis* reality, or a reality unique to itself and irreducible to its composing parts. It is created when individual consciences interact and fuse together to create a synthetic reality that is completely new and greater than the sum of its parts. This reality can only be understood in sociological terms, and cannot be reduced to biological or psychological explanations. The fact that social life has this quality would form the foundation of another of Durkheim's claims, that human societies could be studied scientifically. For this purpose he developed a new methodology, which focuses on what Durkheim calls "social facts," or elements of collective life that exist independently of and are able to exert an influence on the individual.

concept of the 'Unison with the social bond'[3] furnishes the sociological perspective for the study of ageing problem among the different categories of senior citizens. This sociological perspective being comprehensive in nature combining, social, psychological, economical and cultural factors, can well explain the aging problems of the senior citizens. According to Durkheim's view point so long people of any class, age, gender and creed are closely knitted with social bond, they are hale and hearty and feel lesser the pinch of ageing in the case of senior citizens. The moment the senior citizens feel socially isolated and disintegrated from the social bond, they begin to experience fast ageing which becomes a problem. The retired persons experience fast ageing if they are deprived of the continuity to work. The senior citizens who remain actively involved in social interaction even after their retirement do not experience fast aging problems. One of the important bases of social bond in every society is religion. Those who have been all-through religious minded and maintain this tendency even after 60 years of age or retirement do not feel the problems of fast ageing. Further, those who emotionally feel the loss of social status and prestige or feel socially isolated and economically in secured after retirement or 60 years of age, they experience fast aging problems.[4]

However, there are some changes in the above values in the Indian family system. Changes always happen with the generation especially younger generations. Yet in total these values are still part and parcel of the Indian family system. From the very beginning of birth, the human children are tied down with their parents or grandparents intrinsically and remember forever their love and affection and their warmth of their mother breasts as a yardstick of their life. They experience it in a sustained internal state of mind that brings them up into the main sphere of their life. So, when they become adult, a social beings and a s responsible entity of the family of the society as a whole, they respect their elders, obey them and acknowledge their authority both at the household as well as at the wider level of the society. Deviance of the younger from this is not normally accepted by the Indian tradition either in simple or in complex societies.

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[3] The first and most important element of social bond theory is **attachment**, which refers not only to interpersonal relationships but also to social and cultural standards. For example, the earliest and most influential attachment that a person can form is with their parent or parents, who presumably help us to form an understanding of the world around us. Through this attachment, we learn what to expect from others in our culture and what is expected of us in return. Overtime, we come to internalize these cultural norms as a part of our individual and collective identities, which establishes a kind of shared understanding of social boundaries that keep us from focusing entirely on ourselves or whatever it is that we want at any given moment. A person that does not form strong attachments to others, however, may come to feel like an outsider and, therefore, will be less likely to internalize or recognize the importance of these social boundaries.

[4] D.P. Saxena" Sociology of Ageing", Concept publishing company, New Delhi., 2006. Pp. 4 -5.

When the case of the retired public servants belonging to the outskirts of urban centers are dealt with, even if they are financially better off they are financially better off than those who were dependent on agriculture, running petty business or employed in private sectors, their independence is most often snatched by the younger generation. They also face multi-dimensional problems. Some of such important problems may be mentioned as follows:

a) That in many cases their social status has suddenly declined in the family after retirement.

b) That the gratuity is immediately spent either for the development of the house or utilized for the employment or business propose of unemployed children or is utilized in unimportant sectors under the absolute authoritarian management of the younger generation;

c) That the monthly pension is either spent for the day-to-day household requirements under the imperative authority on the younger generation or in consultation with the pensioner or family-pension holder;

d) That disagreement of the pensioner or family-pension holders with younger generation on utilization of monthly pension according to the choice of the latter often create unfavorable situations in the family;

e) That in many cases the pensioner or the family-pension holder does not get their favorites

f) Food items or portentous diet for consumption even if they earn, it happens so more in case of those who have more grandchildren.

g) That they face many problems to come over to urban centers for drawing pension or family-pension.

h) That most of the middle class retired persons like to stay at their native villages, but their children do not like to live in village homes. As a result, they are forced to lead solitary life in the villages and adjust themselves with the challenging situations. In the later stage when they fall ill, they do not get adequate care from their children who stay in urban centers.

Hence, from the above discussion it can be said that the senior citizens of Indian society face various problems which are age and culture based. Their problems are also based on the fast changing social system to a great extent in post-independence period of modern India.

INDIAN PERSPECTIVE ON OLD AGE

With the advent of industrialization there has been a significant change in the family system. Joint families disintegrated and small nuclear families emerged where the young couple find no time to look after their old parents. In such families the position of the old has become a crucial factor. In such families the position of the old has become a crucial factor. The senior citizen themselves find it difficult to adjust with the modern ways of living of their young children. In such a situation how the senior citizen in the urban set up are being looked after by the family is worth enquiring. In the desire to be self-relevant. The clashes between generations, distress the old in the cities. Hence, many of the problems facing the urban elderly do not exist in the villages. In the contrast to the rural population the city elderly population is quite different. Many from this group have taken recourse to old Age Homes. Along with the lonely, the helplessness they have differences with their kith and kin perhaps the next generation, which force them to leave their own home and enter the premises of Old Age Homes. They enjoy relatively a contented life in these Homes though they often remember earlier life as 'Golden' past. Their new life in the public environment is no doubt problem free as fan as inter-relationship with family members are concerned, but after all it is an institutional life-certainly artificial being uprooted from one's familiar surroundings and implanted in a strange atmosphere which one has to accept and remain contented with. Recently in India, technological developments have caused tremendous changes in the lifestyles and values of the younger generation. Their respect for and dependence on the old is reduced. Housing shortage has made the pressure of city life unbearable for the young and even more so far the household old, who find their peace of mind threatened. Despite the cramped existence, the old feel lonely and deserted. They feel guilty about being old housebound. The increase in the employment of women outside the home means their help and presence is lost to the aged in the household. Poor health, economic dependence and inability to work, lead to a loss of self-esteem. The senior citizen lose everything including friends, spouses, jobs, status, power, influence, income, and health, none of which can be replaced. Thus they become short tempered, rigid in their attitudes, selfish and suspicious. Adjustments in the family or society become painful. This happens particularly when they come into conflict with the young who are exposed to an urban life style and it leads to isolation.

Finally, new standards of behaviour, new ways of spending time and money and the like provide specific grounds for conflict between the generations. The disagreements which would have remained suppressed in the past are now openly expressed. Unless the older generation remain silent, suppressing its feelings of disapproval before the young, it risks to verbal argument and contradictions, within their cultural framework, this constitutes the antithesis of appropriate modes of intergenerational communication.

CONCLUSION

Aging is inevitable. Hardly anybody is prepared for it. All elderly are not similar, because the young population is heterogeneous. While physical capabilities decline by aging, one gains knowledge and experience, thus gets wiser. One can enjoy old age if one is realistic in one's approach towards life. Change is inevitable. Physical care is to follow the principles of health and nutrition and regular physical activity. Socioeconomic status determines the general level of existence. The middle class, sometimes spend all their savings in trying to establish their children in life that they have no reserve for their own needs or medical care. The children, generally, find it difficult to accommodate old parents in their lives because the spouse and their own children take precedence! Therefore, the parents must reserve resources for their old age, while raising their family. Some parents hand over all their physical possessions including immovable property hoping that their children will look after them. In a large number of cases, they are proven wrong. Hence, one may will the property to the children but should remain in charge of one's own affairs till one is alive. Many, elderly like to live with their families and assume the role of advisors, which is resented by the younger generation. Vanprastha, according to the scriptures is the age to get involved with study and gather knowledge and disseminate knowledge. With these principles the details would differ with different individuals. Old age homes are very much the need of the hour. They may be luxury for those who can afford to pay, and semi paying or free supported by the philanthropists and the government. The aged, who are alone, would feel safer in the home for the aged. Those, living with families may also live here and visit the families, off and on. The old and disabled may need help and care from an attendant. That is what presents a real challenge, for which different solution have to be evolved. In a developing country like India, funds for care of the aged have to be arranged and long-term policies need to be evolved, so that a peaceful aging is assured. Every budget of the government should set aside a small percentage for the care of the aged, especially for those, who cannot look after themselves. It is not an impossible goal.