

Growing Old Age Population: A Catastrophe That Longs Preparations

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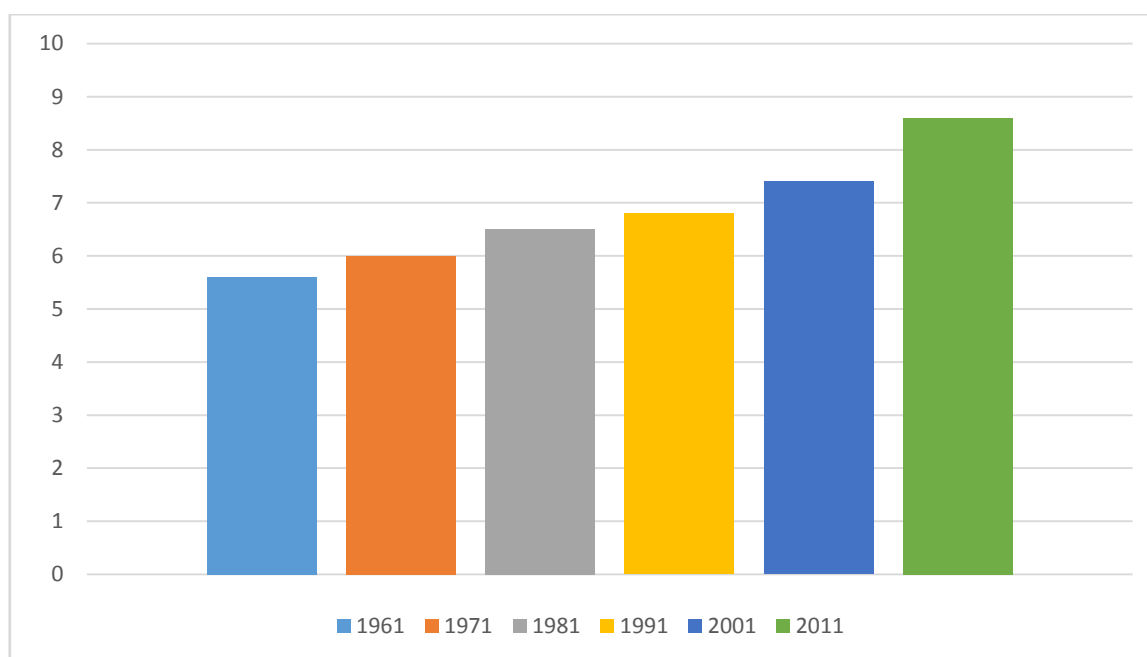
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Life is vicious cycle which starts from innocence and dependency passes from responsibilities & running towards targets and ultimately reaches to loneliness and dependency. Ageing is a natural phenomenon that affects all human beings. Nothing can stop or resist it. No matter what you are, what you have, what you desire, everyone has to face this stage of life. According to World Health Organization (WHO), old age denotes the decrease in an individual's environmental compliance ability out of her/his control and chronologically defines individuals aged 65 years and older. According to census 2011, India has 104 million older people (60 years+); 53 million females and 50 million males, constituting 8.6% of total population. A report released by United Nations Population Fund and HelpAge India suggests that the number of elderly persons is expected to grow to 173 million by 2026.



Percentage share of elderly population in total population of India

Source: Population Censuses (1961-2011), New Delhi, Published by Government of India

The present data show that percentage share of elderly persons in the population of India is ever increasing since 1961. In 1961 the percentage was 5.6% of the total population which has become 8.6% in census 2011.

According to report of Technical Group Projections for India and states 2011-2036 state-wise data on elderly population of 21 major states that Kerala has maximum proportion of elderly people in its population (16.5%) followed by Tamil Nadu (13.6%). On the contrary, proportion is the least in the state of Bihar (7.7%)

followed by Uttar Pradesh (8.1%). With the rapid changes in demographic factors over the last few decades, it is sure that India will move from being a 'Young country' to an 'Old Country' over the next few decades.

India's social fabric was well woven and due respect was given to elders. They were considered the pillars of the family. They were considered custodians of tradition, values & virtues, sanskaar and wisdom. The young generation used to learn the important values of life from their grandparents. However, the ongoing developments like urbanization, industrialization, migration & erosion in value system brought changes in structure families. According to WHO report, 'about 1 in 6 people (60 years and older) experienced some form of abuse in community settings during the last past year. Rates of abuse are higher during covid-19 pandemic'.

While addressing the gathering after presenting Vayoshreshtha Samman Awards 2018 on the International Day of Elderly Persons, the ex- Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu had stressed on the need to respect and seek guidance of the elderly people. Calling them the conscious keepers of our society, he said that adequate steps must be taken to provide facilities to them. The Vice President called on authorities and all the people working for the welfare of senior citizens to avoid the use of the word 'Old' and replace it with 'Senior'. He further said that there should be no 'Old age Homes' in India, there should only be 'Homes for the Elderly and Senior Citizens'. The word 'Old' invokes a prejudice and does not do justice to the energy and youth of our veterans, he added.

Reasons for growing Old Age Homes in India

Old age homes in India may be both public and private. There are several social reasons which led to this situation in India and some of them have been summed up in the following:

1. Wishful or forceful displacement

According to the United Nations the world is moving towards the town, as it said in 2009 which was reinforced by the International Organization for Migration in 2015, both estimated that around 3 million people are moving to cities every week.

Approximately 54% of people worldwide now live in cities, up from 30% in 1950. (reported in graylinegroup.com). This displacement most of the time is wishfully pursued as the urban style of living is more alluring which frames itself through various modes like film, television, newspapers, and mouth appraisal which directly attract the optics of the youth. Forceful displacement also comprised greater number which takes place because of bad farming condition like extreme weather, over whelming lone amount, lack of reach of governmental facilities like lone waiver and subsidize schemes. Whether it is a forceful or wishful displacement, it results in loneliness and solitude of the old people of the concern household which often results in the displacement of these senior citizens to the old home facilities.

2. Working Couples

In the major cities, towns and even in the smaller settlements it is found that both husband and wife works together in their own respective fields, even children's spends the half of their day in the school, so the old people at home not only feels deserted but also neglected, and such family often experience clashes, as neither the male nor the female earning members are ready enough to listen to their problem. This causes stress and anxiety, which lead to the deterioration and worsening of their health, as there is no one to look after them, this lead to either to their death or their displacement to old home facilities. One of the recount of an old women about her experience, as she said that "I was not given food for two straight days, and when a child threw peel of a watermelon in to a garbage, I washed it and ate it".

3. Causes of loneliness

Families abandoning their elders are to an extent is acceptable to the senior citizens, but when they are abandoned by their own spouse because of their death, living becomes a painful task, and if the female partner passes away it is generally seen that life becomes extremely vulnerable for the male counterpart, and because there is no one at home to depend upon, so as a result they pass away, or are sent wishfully or painfully in the old age facilities. Even in the case of single senior citizens, old age home becomes the final destination for them to spend their life.

4. Poverty

Based on 2019's PPPs International Comparison Program, according to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) program, 80 million people out of 1.2 billion Indians, roughly equal to 6.7% of India's population, lived below the poverty line. (published in Poverty in India – Wikipedia)

Following this trend, it can be said that out of 13800000 senior citizens living India, 7% lives under extreme poverty line which equates more than two crores, or more than 20 million senior citizens. So poverty which has increased threefold during the pandemic, old age home has become go to place for all most all senior citizens.

Genesis of Old Age Homes

As India is still a developing stage, the current unemployment rate is 8.3% in August 2022 according to the report of CMIE. More alarming fact is that employment rate fell from 37.6% to 37.3%. The situation in rural areas is more pathetic. The unemployment rate in rural areas of India rose to 7.7% in August 2022 according to

the report of CMIE. Our educated youth has no choice but to move other places for better job opportunities. It is considered the responsibility of the children to look after their parents in old age but when they will move on to far off places for better material benefits then who will take care of old parents? Some parents migrate with their children while some prefer to stay with their roots. Thus, Old age homes born specially to relieve the NRIs from this tension. They send money to meet the expenses of their old parents and in return they get the satisfaction that people are there to take of their parents. Now-a-days OAHs have become a lucrative business as the wealthy children are ready to spend money to relieve them from the tension. Some OAHs are really providing good service while many cases are reported showing the ill-treatment with old age people in OAHs.

Role of OAHs in the wellbeing of aged people

It was in this context, that the need was felt to understand the role of old age homes which can be played in the wellbeing of elderly in India. According to a report, in the year 2016, the number of old age homes was around 500 (approximately) but thanks to the concept of nuclear families, record-breaking unemployment rate, and many other determinants, the numbers have now risen to 728 as per a news on 10-May-2021 published in thesparrow.news. These old age home presents a fraction of the condition of our senior citizens in the country, because out of the four thousand cities and township (published in NRIOL), India only has 728 old age home or old age care centers, that account for 0.1812 old age home in each of the city or town. This clearly means that cities and towns of India are not even having one old age for their senior citizens, which also indicates that the current old age homes running in India are over loaded. If we compare the old age home of India to that USA, the picture will be more clear and lucid, as in India, out of the population of 13800000 people age over sixty (reported by NSO, 06/08/2021) there are only 728 old age home, which means that for every one crore old age people there are nearly 50 old age home, where as in America out of the population of 54000000 senior citizens (reported in U.S. Census Bureau,), there are 2,000 senior housing projects (reported in economicetimes.com) which means that for every one crore senior citizens there are all most 400 old age home facilities. This clearly states that the old age homes of India are seriously dealing with crisis of quality living, and to reveal the problems of old age homes and the senior citizens who are living there, research activities in the form of project, assignment, and doctoral thesis are highly recommended.

Most of the old age people living old age homes belong to the middle class families while there are some whose families do not take the financial burden to them. Most of them suffered from health issues like high Blood Pressure, diabetes, asthma, poor eye sight, gastric, constipation (Neeraj 2019). Some of them suffered from severe diseases. Moreover, they also suffered from adjustment problem, death anxiety and depression. In this case who will take the responsibility of senior citizens of the country? This paper wants to get the attraction and attention of the government in this serious problem which is growing day by day.

India and the world

Countries like USA has released 1.4 billion dollars to support the health of older Americans. The government of Canada works hard to help seniors to live a better life. Canada's retirement income system's three pillars—the Old Age Security (OAS) program, the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and personal pensions or investments—help ensure Canadians maintain a basic standard of living in retirement. According to report published by CEOWORLD magazine, Finland stood best place for old age people to live in while Denmark and Netherlands recognized as second and third respectively in list. The rankings were based on seven categories: average life expectancy (the higher the better), health care index (the higher the better), safety index (the lower the better), happiness index (the higher the better), cost of living (the lower the better), property prices (the higher the better), and pension start age (the lower the better). Surprisingly, India a country which is considered as a land of values, respect for elders is deeply rooted here, the 2020 ranking placed India on 59th position out of 105 countries. Meanwhile, Iraq has been reported as worst country of the world for older people. A total of 20,532 cases of IPC crimes reported against senior citizens of India during 2015. These numbers are quite surprising to believe as India is the only country where children used to bow down and touch the feet of elders in respect.

Government Schemes for Senior citizens of India

The government of India launched various schemes time to time for the benefit of elderly people. Like Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojna, Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS), National Program for the Health Care of Elderly (NPHCE), Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojna and others. It is important to discuss here that under IGNOAPS, central assistance of rupees 200 per month to persons above 60 years and rupees 500 per month to persons above 80 years. It is quite hard to imagine that how a person can survive for whole month with 200 rupees in pocket when the prices of essential commodities are touching the heights to sky. We all are aware of the fact that how difficult in India is get money from any government schemes. Earlier concession in the fare was provided by the railways for elderly people travelling across the country. But unfortunately the central government refused to give railway concession to senior citizens and cites the reason of recurring losses.

The government already stopped the old age pension scheme to its employees which was a financial support to the people at the stage of loneliness.

The life expectancy of Indians at the time of independence was 30-35 years, now it has increased to 70 years as reported by World Bank in the year 2020. It is also known that women live longer than men. So it should be understood here that person needs to plan savings or investment for 10-15 years for himself and 15-20 years for his wife post retirement to live economically independent bearing all the food and medical expenses. Now an obvious question arises here how their expenses will meet if there is no planning to deal with it?

Old age –a responsibility of everyone

To meet the challenges of growing old age population that India will confront after some years, needs preparation. We all need to prepare for the coming situation. Preparations from the side of governments, community, society and people themselves should take necessary steps. Like before sending the child to schools, the concept of pre-school has been developed. Society has developed several institutions for the development and care of future citizens of the country, then why we don't develop such institutions for the care of our senior citizens who irrigate the path of country's growth and development with their sweat. It is onus of central and state government both to provide facilities and medical benefits to the elderly. The pension scheme should give sufficient amount to live and fulfill their necessities. Currently there are 728 old age homes in India. The government should provide good number of old age homes in all parts of the country with all facilities they need. As per the reports of Longitudinal Ageing Survey of India 2020, there are 18 million homeless elderly people in India.

This statistic is nothing but a matter shame for the country which saw a son like "Shravan Kumar" who carried his blind parents on his shoulder on their pilgrimage. Today's generation need to understand the importance of parents in their life. They are not at all our liabilities. They are one who sacrificed their everything for our sake. We are young today, may be busy, may be ambitious, needs to achieve a lot in life. But we should not forget or ignore the fact that without the blessings of parents we are nothing. Unfortunately, we belong to that generation who leave their children in crèche and old parents in old age homes, so that we can faster and faster to achieve our targets.

It is a wrong notion that at old age, one should only spend time in reading newspapers, doing religious activities, sleeping & resting, rather it is the time to do what one really desire. One can find so many examples and inspirations around us. India's 87 years old, Chandro Tomar and Prakash Tomar (6 years) were country's oldest sharpshooter who won dozens of championship and trained the young generation their legacy. A person spent his golden days of youth in running towards success, fulfilling the needs of the family, meeting the targets to achieve- after 60 years a person cannot become unproductive. Retirement after 60 years is wrong thinking, it should be rewired. They should devote their time in doing something useful for themselves and everyone. Government and NGOs should develop some productive and recreational clubs or organizations where the old people again live their life with happiness, health and most important dignity.

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