



## Research Paper

# Ageds in Society: Issues, Problems and Consequences - A Case Study among the *Oraons* of Barasat, North 24 Paraganas, West Bengal

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### ABSTRACT

Ageing, too, is a social construction. At any point in the lifespan ageing also a set of sociocultural constructs; defined by the norms and values specific to a given society at a specific point in history. Anthropologist and the aged a long standing allies. Ageing is a global phenomena with different social cultural issues attached to it. As per the Indian tradition; families have been described to provide social security to old age members of the family. Today changing family structure is caused increased problem of old age people.

The intensive ethnographic study on the aged *Oraons* selected purposively, has been conducted in a tribal has, namely Adivasi Para ; situated just behind the Barasat Municipality, North 24 Paraganas, West Bengal. The present researchers observed and interpreted the four major domains like dependence, individual adjustment, continuity and ageing within the social system of the community. The caring and sustainability of the ageds in the families were found along with certain pertinent domestic problems as well as hazards including health too. The study finally depicts some suggestive strategies as proposed by the present researchers for the betterment of the condition of ageds under study.

The objective of the study was to throw light on the social isolation; socio-economic problems; dependency; relation of elderly people with the family members and others. The study was primarily based on the data as collected through participant observation, intensive interviews and case studies. The secondary sources from administrative materials, books, journals and internet materials were also utilized.

**KEYWORDS:** Ageds, Society, Tribal Community, Dependency, Problems, Status and Role, Sustainability.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Ageing, however is a lifelong process - a biological sequence of events that begin at birth and end at death. Every society uses age categories to divide these ongoing processes into stages or segments of life. These life stages are socially constructed rather than inevitable.

The social construction perspective is based on two assumptions: (1) beliefs that we take for granted as fundamental truths vary in different cultures, periods of history and social contexts; and (2) the ways in which we understand the world are social artifacts fashioned through people's co-operative efforts; just as are many physical objects like beds, buildings and computers.

Ageing, simultaneously denotes not only a number and a mixture of physical characteristics but also a set of social constructs; defined by the norms specific to a given society at a specific point in history.

Throughout our lives; the social convoys provided by the family and friends provide important sources of support and affection. These convoys from our personal social networks; usually marked by feelings of positive regard; commitment and personal value. The people constituting our social networks are important as sources of both assistance and encouragements; helping us to maintain physical and emotional health.

The status of 'old' or 'elderly' as key; gerontologists used the concept of role to provide a frame for prediction of adjustment or mal-adjustment in later life. Adjustment is referred primarily to goodness of fit between the perceived needs of old people and the extent to which they were able to fulfill these needs.

Accordingly; while social isolation; declining health; poverty and retirement were common conditions of the old age; these difficulties could be overcome by the individual's efforts.

## **II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

1. Sarmah, C. (2004) views ageing as a social problem from two perspectives; viz. individual and social. She carries out an exploratory study of the elderly selecting from four categories. Declining health; loneliness; financial insecurity and security of life and property have been found to be the respective problems of the elderly.
2. Chakraborty, A. (2008) explores the physical, psychological and social problem faced by the elderly persons of Tripura in two groups with different socio-economic and educational background including the oldest old in Group-1 are economically, physically and psychologically self-sufficient; whereas the widows of Group-2 are dependent in all respects. Her study also reveals that psychological factors are more deeply analysed than socio-economic factors.
3. Kumar, Y., & Bhargava, A. (2014) have attempted to bring out the abusive behaviour towards old age people by their family members. Through the study, author have discussed on the type of abuse prevalent towards the oldest people and impact of abusive behaviour of family members. Authors have also study the day adequacy of social security measures to safeguard the position of the old age people in the families is common rich insights the depletion of human values among modern and new generations.
4. Singh, R. (2015) has given insight into socio-economic conditions of the old people along with social and health problems faced by old age people. Through the study, author has focused on the factors contributing to problems of old people including decrease in purchasing power; disintegration of social support system etc. Author has suggested that, there should be efforts to prevent the problems of elders and this can be carried out through awareness generation in families and social work intervention.
5. Amiri, M. (2018) has focused on the research on ageing India and provides an analysis in terms of social, financial, psychological, and physical and health aspects and elder abuse. In the opinion of author; the institution of family needs to be protected and standard and social work intervention or through welfare services including economical support; counseling of old people and their family members. He also suggested that not all aspects of ageing have been steady and majority of them are micro level studies. The present researchers try to study the socio-cultural issues of the aged in a holistic as well as anthropological perspective among the tribal peoples of an urban spots.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Present Study**

Issues, problems related to old people's care are in the spotlight of debate now days; when there is a rapid social and economic change in Indian society; face financial hardship. Therefore, it is important to focus on the various major social and economic problems faced by old age people; and factors like family care and support. It is also significant to know the perceptions of oldest people about the major causes of problems and their negative attitude towards life; so that may help in assessing the scope of social work in terms of healthcare, emotional support etc.

The followings are the objectives of the present study -

1. To focus on the major socio-economic issues and problems faced by the old age people of the studied population.
2. To know about the staying conditions and arrangements of the old age people.
3. To understand briefly about the chronic diseases existed in the old age people of the area.
4. To know the perceptions of the oldest people about the causes of problems and negative attitude towards life.

### **Area of Observation**

The present ethnographic study on the aged *Oraons* has been conducted in a tribal hamlet locally known as *Adivasi Para*. It is situated just behind the Barasat Municipality; North 24 Paraganas; Kolkata.

### **Methodology of the Present Study**

The contextual data has been collected through Participant Observation, Intensive interviews, Case Study and the some relevant secondary data have also been collected from the administrative materials, books, journals and internet resources.

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During investigation, it has been observed that ageing is the natural stage of *Oraons* life and it brings with it innumerable problems for the people who have grown old. The elderly are a heterogeneous group who are affected by both health and non-health factors, like economic, psychological, physiological, residential and elder abuse related.

#### 1. Economic Insecurity

Economic aspects play an important role in the lives of elderly affecting their health; social relationships; living arrangements; community activities and even political participation. This problem arises when elderly are unable to sustain themselves economically. As per the information provided by the information; they lose their independency due to increase in competition from young generation; sluggishness in physical and mental faculties; mindset of society; malnutrition and lack of awareness about the rights with changing times. After retirement, idleness is made to believe that they are not physically productive now. As per research, the sources of income are different for different people after retirement. Nearly half of the respondents depend on the pension amount. But other half supplement their income by other sources like house rent, agriculture, goat husbandry etc.

Extended life expectancy in elderly puts them at a risk of poverty. Financial pressures causes grief and anxiety to the elderly; and this is aggravated by inflation and rising healthcare costs. The decrease or loss of income that result in financial disability may result in the elderly delaying seeking healthcare to conserve their resources. It should be taken care of that elderly who are capable should be motivated and if necessary should be given a helping hand for engaging them in economically productive manner.

#### 2. Residential Problems

The term '*living arrangements*' explains the type of family in which the elderly live; the headship they enjoy; the place they stay in and the people they stay with; the kind of relationship they maintain with their kin; and on the whole; the extent to which they adjust to the changing environments

The aged *Oraons* prefer to live in their own homes. Housing at present is being rapidly developed throughout the country; but with nuclear family in mind. Housing for elderly should be suitable not only to living patterns; but also to conditions of health and illness. According to these respondents, the present housing condition is not suitable; as per current requirement. The sizeable population of the elderly have been facing problem of shortage of peaceful place to live in.

In most of the cases, isolation is imposed purposefully by the families or communities where old age people live in. Changing life styles and values; job culture; various means of distractions like internet, T.V, nuclear family structure and redefined priorities have led to increased neglect of the elderly by families; and with this isolation come in. The belief that children will take care of the parents in the old age is eroding where the family size has been cut down as a result of the demographic process. The situation in the urban areas shows a rejection of older people by the next generation and this is spreading to rural areas. With this isolation comes in there for the problem of housing or accommodation exists and it leads to the fremantle quality of life old age people.

#### 3. Psychological Problems

The common psychological problems that most of the old age people of the studied area are feeling of powerlessness; feeling of inferiority; depression; uselessness and isolation. With growing age, they experience various anatomical and psychological changes. Urbanization and westernization play a major role in the increasing migration of the younger generation leading to weakening of the social structure and joint family system. As a result, the older population is trapped in between eroding traditional system and lack of social security system. Due to the changes in social structure, older people have to undergo major changes in their lifestyle and inability to accept and adjust to these changes is one of the important causes of the increasing mental illness. Loss of loved ones; can lead to loneliness and isolation. Such significant losses are sometimes followed by major life changes like change of residence. Now a days, what we are observing is that the children are no willing to take care of their parents; they do not spend money on them; treat their parents like aliens and do not want to share an emotional bond with the parents.

#### 4. Health Problems

Health problems are supposed to be the major concerns of the society as elderly are more prone to suffer from ill health than younger age groups. The major health problems found among the respondents were cataract; back-ache; arthritis. Many respondents with arthritis also had backache; heart disease; blood pressure; diabetes. During the course of old age; metabolism process slows down. People become weak both physically and mentally.

Mental disorders are very much associated with old age. They no longer have trust in their own ability or judgments, but they still want to tighten their grip over younger ones. They want to get involved in all family matters, but due to generation gap, the young generation does not pay attention to their suggestion and advice. This may create a feeling of deprivation of their importance.

In addition to this, lack of information and knowledge in combination with high costs of disease management makes old age care beyond the reach of the older people; especially who are poor. Few diseases which are also common among respondents are obesity, lessened hearing, wrinkling of skin, slower reaction time, reduced ability to thinking, bone diseases, difficulty in recalling memories etc.

#### 5. **Social Problems**

Majority of people entered the age of elderly with very little or no awareness of what it is about to offer them. In modern society, improved education, rapid changes in social structure and new forms of organization have rendered the knowledge, experience and wisdom of elderly. Once they retire; elderly people find that their children are not taking advices from them. This realization often results in feeling loss of status, worthlessness and loneliness.

Besides, emotional support; social security is needed terribly. The problem of loneliness and isolation is the gift of modern society. According to some of the informants, they are alone with servants to take care of them. After sometime; the servants become familiar with everything in the household; they rob them and ran away. The news of such incidents are frequent in daily newspapers.

#### 6. **Domestic Problems**

Like the young parents, the aged parents also dream of the betterment of their children. They invest their money and efforts in the development and growth of their children. Present study reveals that many of them have even sacrifice their personal comforts and gratifications to provide education and better future to their children. That the children who look after the needs of their parents is taken by them as a normal duty of the sons just as the parents regard themselves responsible for the education and marriage of children even when they have been retired from jobs.

And after all of this, SomraOraon (65 years, Male) fondly remembers the days when he was in '*service*'. The best thing about those days; he feels; was that he '*was in control of his own life*'.

BaluOraon (70 years, Male) sells plastic good by the roadside and lives in miserable conditions to make ends meet for his wife and him. He is forced to hand over his entire pension to his son; who threatens to stop his diabetic wife's treatment.

Basically three types of elderly abuse found among the residents of the studied area.

**Social abuse** include keeping secret certain social occasions or not taking the aged out because they are slower in movement and hamper the younger generations momentum of life. The aged begin to do less work in home as young people replace them in the work and their health does not permit to take a strenuous physical work and next generation who is in charge of the family affair may wish to spare them from the responsibility.

**Economic abuse** is very common and found among the elderly who are dependent on their children and relatives economically. Economic abuse or financial abuse occurs when a person's sense of need, greed for the money is greater than their ability to remain honest in caring with a parent. Some economic abuse includes family members repeatedly pressure parent for money or borrow money, but never repays it. Many elderly are forced into signing or changing a contract or will. Sometimes a family member sells the house of parents and other property of elderly and uses the money for their own benefit.

**Religious abuse** is mostly found among widows. They are not allowed to attend religious ceremonies like *KaramParab*, *Kali Puja* etc. of their community. They are also forbidden to attend any marriage ceremony but they bear the price of gifts.

Generally, '*Property and inheritance disputes*' emerges as the main reason for abuse. But what is interesting to note, many of them feel that '*Attitudinal andrelationship issues*' is also an important reason. While financial reasons are most perceived factor causing elder abuse, the youth are stressing only behavioural solution for families to prevent abuse, with top measure being '*Family spending adequate timewith the elders*' followed by '*Elders opinions given due to importance*'.

Emotional/psychological, disrespect and neglect existed in the studied area and while one half of the elderly blamed it on Westernization of the society and lack of value system in the once traditional family system in India, there were others in the group who somehow seemed to be blamed the older parents for the actions by young generation.

Physical weakness due to age was also another reason why abuse existed and they could not fight it. Most of the aged people of the studied population felt ashamed of the fact that they are being ill-treated by the family members. They were also afraid of retaliation by the family members if the NGO agencies come to help.

A large majority of the elderly of the studied area also felt that the social agencies could hardly do anything to help them and the major fact was that it was emotionally satisfying to at least be able to 'see' their children.

### **Concluding Observations:**

Old age is an irreversible biological process. Old age is a stage of life that every human being ultimately reaches and it is inevitable. During field work, it has been observed that older persons are considered as most revered members of the society but treated otherwise when it comes to practical behaviour with older people. The problem of the old age has been considered as a main social problem all over the world. There are so many problems the aged are facing these days. They are social, psychological, economical and medical in nature. According to most of the informants, the attitude and behaviour of the younger generations have also been changing. Now a day, they are objecting to follow the traditional norms and values of the joint family. In this time people dread old age but what the youth should be aiming is to create a world where people do not fear old age which they considered an inescapable prison but look forward to it as a vacation where they can enjoy and have their loved ones to care them after decades of having worked so hard. Caring for the elderly will require careful planning if we want to ensure that our elderly enjoy a satisfactory quality of life, free from poverty, loneliness and abuse. Present study reveals that health promotions and preventive measures include good housing; adequate recreational activities; reduction of physical and mental stress; opportunities to work will play an important role directly and indirectly to keep disabilities low. So now we can say that, the real solutions are not new laws and provision; the real solution lies with the people themselves. If they start treating the elderly people as they deserve to be treated with respect and then this problem will cease to exist.

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