

## CHAPTER I

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## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 OLD AGE

Gerontology (The study of the aged and their problems) is a recent subject. In many civilized countries gerontocracy (rule by the old) was prevalent for a long time. But the thought that old age is a critical phase of life as much as childhood or adolescence, and hence requires special consideration, is of fairly recent origin. Even when interest was first stirred up in the problem, at the outset it was from the point of view of medical care. The physiological changes that take place during old age were well recognized. The psychological aspect of old age adjustment is coming to the fore only recently.

Late periods of life are chiefly marked by a decline in most constituents and traits of the person. The outset and rate of deterioration varies, however, from person to person and from culture to culture. As stated by Pikunas and Albrecht, "Each individual has his own rate and pattern of aging, largely similar to many others yet always distinct in some traits and features"<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Pikunas, J. and Albrecht, E.J., Psychology of Human Development (McGraw Hill, New York, 1961), p. 292.

It has been observed that the sequence depends upon many factors, especially the hereditary endowments and specific past experiences, such as illnesses and injuries. The process of aging is closely related to personal and social adjustment during the years of adulthood. Under all circumstances, however, it is a period of marked changes.

## 1.2 PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES

According to John Anderson<sup>1</sup> main changes are the anatomical and the physiological, which are quite obvious. The body loses some of its erectness and resiliency. The skin becomes roughened and coarsened. The hair disappears gradually and turns grey. The mid-section thickens. In some persons difficulties in the limbs and joints make them walk stiffly and awkwardly instead of with the powerful grace that characterised the young person.

Paralleling these visible physical changes there are changes in internal bodily functions. Many of these result from the changes in the tissues of which body is composed. As a result, there are changes in the arteries, bones, circulatory system, blood pressure, digestion etc. They give rise to several health problems. Due to the

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, John E. The Psychology of Development and Personal Adjustment (Henry Holt & Co., 1951; New York) Pp. 514-16.

changes in the glandular balance, striking changes associating with sex functioning can be observed. In women around 45 or 50 years there is the bodily change of menopause. Quite often it is accompanied by physical and mental difficulties, which sometimes continue for several years and often become a source of great concern and inconvenience to the relatives. In man there seems to be a comparable period of change with some decline in the sex functioning though the major decline does not seem to come until the sixties.

Side by side there are changes in the sensory and motor activities. They appear to be sudden, however, actually they are continuous and slight, but cumulative. The sensory changes in vision and hearing are obvious. Generally the individual adjusts to the small changes every day and does not become aware of them until the changes are so great that compensation or adjustment to them is no longer possible. Not so much is known about the changes in the functions of the sense organs other than the eyes and ears. Although anatomists have found that taste buds and olfactory nerves atrophy with age they have actually not been able to link these facts to lack of taste and olfactory perception in older people. Nor have researchers been able to prove that the aged are less sensitive to pain than younger people, in spite of the fact that some studies have sought to establish

this correlation. Nevertheless, observations on very old people indicate some reduction in their sensitivity to heat, cold, pain, taste and smell according to Anderson.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, strength, speed and motor skill have often been reported to decrease with age. With deterioration of the body tissue, strength is bound to decrease. For the decrease in speed, changes in the reaction time may be held responsible. As it is a very important factor at the basis of motor and intellectual performances, it plays a major role in adapting to the environment. Hence, this reduction with age affects many types of responses. Although the motor skills show manifest changes quite late in life, they too play some role in the adjustment of the old.

### 1.3 CHANGES IN INTELLECTUAL ABILITIES

Intellectual capacities as measured by our standard intelligence tests, also change as one grows older. Studies by a number of investigators<sup>2</sup> have shown that rapid gains in intelligence are made during adolescence, reaching a peak around the age of 20. Then a continuous, gradual decline sets in. Intelligence test results, however, actually are composite scores that are derived

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, John E., Op.cit.

<sup>2</sup> Lehner, George F.J. and Kube Ella. The Dynamics of Personal Adjustment (Prentice Hall Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1957), p.366.

by testing a number of different abilities and then averaging the results. One can understand the nature of the changes better by studying the scores of particular abilities measured. Such studies reveal that older people do poorly on test items that call for speed of performance and relatively new adjustments. A person's ability to recall digits, work mathematical problems and reproduce block designs also declines with age. On the other hand, older people do quite well on tests dealing with information, comprehension and vocabulary. In these, the accumulative knowledge that comes with age is a definite asset.

An individual's ability to learn new material also varies with age. In a series of studies, Ruch<sup>1</sup> has shown that the decline in learning ability that accompanies increasing age varies for different types of material and is most pronounced when the new material to be learned conflicts or interferes with material previously learned. If the subjects merely had to learn a new habit, verbal or motor, the young (12-17 years) and the middle aged (34-59 years) groups performed about the same; the older group (60-82 years) needed 20 per cent more time. But when learning a new habit meant that old

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<sup>1</sup> Ruch, F.L. "The Differential Decline of Learning Ability in the Aged as a Possible Explanation of Their Conservatism". Journal of Social Psychology, Vol. 5, (1934) Pp. 329-337.

habits had to be broken down then the older group required 50 per cent more time.

To depend blindly, however, upon the test results may prove to be a little misleading as many factors other than abilities alone tend to influence the test scores. Motivation is an important factor in all testing and one cannot assume that both the younger and the older persons are equally motivated. On the whole, the younger person tends to be more responsive to testing situations, the older person more resistant.

Similarly selecting the sample also presents difficulties in such comparative researches. Large groups of young people, representative of the cross section are readily available for testing. When it comes to the aged the groups naturally tend to be more selective. Large ready-made groups of old cannot be found as of the young at schools and colleges, except perhaps, in some old age homes, which would be, however, a selective sample.

According to Miles,<sup>1</sup> on the whole, functions that depend essentially on physical or physiological factors show an earlier decline than those abilities that are

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<sup>1</sup> Miles, W.R. "Psychological Aspects of Aging" in E.V. Cowdry, ed., Problems of Aging, 2nd ed. (Baltimore; Williams and Wilkins, 1942) Chapter 28.

primarily mental. When inquiry is made in the subjective awareness of aging the older people are found to mention physical characteristics more often than mental ones as symptoms of their growing old. Those who are more highly educated, however, are more likely to mention mental symptoms than those who have had less education.<sup>1</sup>

Harvey C. Lehman<sup>2</sup> has compiled some well documented evidence showing the relationship between age and achievement. As one of the criteria of achievement, Lehman has taken the ages at which outstanding figures have most frequently made their finest creative contributions. In almost all fields studied - and these include, science, mathematics, philosophy, literature, music and painting - the maximum average rate of highly superior production was found to occur in the thirties.

However, the total range for best production extends over several decades. Some of the great philosophers were still writing and having their works published after they had turned 90. Many notable creative works are produced in the late maturity. From these facts Lehman points out that any stereotyped conception of old age as unproductive is quite false. He further

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<sup>1</sup> Jones, L.W. "Personality and Age", Nature, Vol.136, (1935) Pp. 779-782.

<sup>2</sup> Lehman, H.C., Age and Achievement (Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1953).



tries to attribute the apparent decline to "Certain physiological social and psychological factors like decline in the physical vigour and sensory capacity, illness and glandular changes, as well as things like unhappy marriage and sex adjustment, bereavement, preoccupation with practical concern, less favourable conditions for concentrated work, contentment with early recognition, apathy because of non-recognition and destructive criticism, increasing inflexibility, decrease in motivation leading to weaker intellectual interest and curiosity, a less stimulating social and cultural environment, psychoses, and the cumulative effects of various kinds of dissipation."<sup>1</sup> Many others like R.J. Havighurst<sup>2</sup> and David Riesman<sup>3</sup> believe that the changes in the intellectual functioning are not so marked as those in their other adjustments and that whenever they appear so, they are actually the results of the marked changes in other areas.

#### 1.4 THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES

Aging, although a time old phenomenon, is being viewed in a broader perspective in recent years. As a result, many complex variables involved in the process

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<sup>1</sup> Lehman, H.C., Op.cit.

<sup>2</sup> Havighurst, R.J. and Albrecht, Ruth, Older People (Longmans Green and Company, 1953)

<sup>3</sup> Riesman, D. "Some Clinical and Cultural Aspects of Aging". American Journal of Sociology, Vol.49, (1954)

have come to the fore. It has been recognized, now, that it is not only physiological but also psycho-social in nature. The psychological and social correlates are numerous and many recent researches make it evident that their importance is not totally neglected. On the contrary there is sufficient evidence that they are frequently weighed and balanced and compared one with the other.

In a research by George L. Maddox<sup>1</sup>, it is shown that certain common complaints of health associated with old age can be attributed to the lowering of status (social etc.) or to the factors like anxiety and insecurity than to the actual or objective physiological reasons.

The research is concerned with the investigation of selected correlates of differences in self-assessment of health among 251 non-institutionalized elderly subjects. Although the objective state of health of the elderly person was quite an important determinant of his self assessment of his health status, the pessimism about one's general health status as reflected in over-estimation of poor health is associated with a general anxiety about health and poor adjustment to environment. Optimism about one's health, on the other hand, is

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<sup>1</sup> Maddox, G.L. "Some Correlates of Differences in Self-Assessment of Health Status Among the Elderly". Journal of Gerontology, (1962) Vol.17, Pp. 180-185.

associated with the absence of these two characteristics. At the same time placement in the social structure is also related to the optimism and pessimism about health. Older subjects and those with higher status were seen to be, more likely than others, to be optimistic about their health. Social factors seem to contribute to the deviant self-assessments of health more among subjects medically assessed to be in good health than those medically assessed to be in poor health.

#### 1.5 THEORIES OF GERONTOLOGY

The social and psychological factors that can affect the adjustment of the aged and their consequent security feeling are numerous. At the same time if emphasis is laid on aging itself, the socio-cultural components of aging will be seen to be of a complex nature. Despite numerous researches in the field of aging, little is known, as yet, about how the presumed physiological changes in the human organism which are associated with advancing years, actually affect the psychological and social life of the aging individual. Observed instances of social withdrawal and increased inactivity in some are paralleled by instances of active participation in social, political or occupational life among others. It is no wonder that the two major theories formulated in the field of gerontology depend to a great extent on

which of the two phenomena the researchers emphasize in their studies.

These two theories have been summarized by Havighurst<sup>1</sup> in a paper as the "Activity Theory" and the 'Disengagement Theory'. The first, favoured by most of the practical workers in the field of gerontology, seems to express the pragmatic point of view of the practitioners manifested in such words as "successful aging" or the belief that "people should maintain the activities and attitudes of middle age as long as possible". For the adherents of this theory, people who "disengage" do so as passive victims of "withdrawal by society from the aging person against the will and desire of the person."

On the other hand, the proponents of the "Disengagement Theory" view aging as "a mutual withdrawal or disengagement which takes place **between** the aging person and others in the social system to which he belongs." In other words, the individual's withdrawal is seen as voluntary and complementary to the rejecting attitudes of the society. Of course, in such a theory of aging, the phenomenon of active social participation, despite advanced years, must be seen as atypical of the aging process.

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<sup>1</sup> Havighurst, R.J. "Successful Aging". Gerontologist, (1961), Vol. 1, Pp. 8-13.

Thus both the theories accept the direction of the socio-cultural forces which are adverse to the active participation of the elderly individual, but differ as to the interpretation of the response of the aging individual; one views him as a victim, the other as a co-operative actor. The first theory approves of the individual who maintains as long as possible the activities of middle age by defining his behaviours as "successful aging" and by claiming that all aging people "should" do so despite the adverse attitude of society; the second theory implies an approval of the disengagement process as complementary to society's wishes.

Many studies show clearly that aging implies a number of social-psychological changes. These changes are as dramatic as the changes during adolescence. At the same time, there is one more point of comparison between the two developmental phases. We admit now, because of the researches (anthropological like Margaret Mead's work in Samoa) that the physiological processes fail to explain adequately the new experiences of the individual during adolescence. Cultural and social factors play a role of major importance. In the same way the modern researches in gerontology have come to the agreement that aging is not a purely physiological process. It is directly influenced by certain cultural

and social patterns - as well as by the various demands made upon the individual during his life time.

In an article by Mark Zborowski,<sup>1</sup> "Aging and Recreation", the author says that contrary to, "disengagement theory" there is little evidence (from his own data) supporting the concept of a voluntary withdrawal of the older person. The road which the aging individual chooses in his later years, seems to him, as dependent to a major extent upon his total life experience. If the pattern of life has been oriented towards activity and social participation, older people will tend to maintain it despite chronological age and the attitude of society. On the contrary if their preferences were oriented towards solitary modes of living (which was observed to be true for a large number of his respondents) they may welcome the opportunity for "disengagement" which retirement and social attitudes suggest for the "senior citizen".

Referring to the concept of "successful aging" which is emphasized by the "activity theory" the author believes that it can be defined as the opportunity and ability for maintaining one's preferred pattern of living, which is different for large groups of

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<sup>1</sup> Zborowski, M. "Aging and Recreation". Journal of Gerontology, (1962) 17, 302-309.

individuals and which is probably based upon their cultural and subcultural backgrounds as well as their individual personality.

This preservation of the habitual and preferred pattern of living might be, for some individuals, associated with conflicts with adverse attitudes of society. Some of them might manifest amazing flexibility and ability to exploit every social and cultural opportunity in order to maintain their pattern of living. Others might be defeated and forced to accept the imposed "disengagement" with its implications of isolation, frustration, bitterness, anxiety, illness and eventually death.

This process of struggling against giving up the preferred pattern of living has been well expressed by the following words of one of the same author's subjects - a woman over 70 - "I am holding on to life with both hands, but I feel that as life goes on, society pries loose one finger after another".

In another article by the same author, in collaboration with Lorraine D. Eyde<sup>1</sup> it is seen that in spite of the various marked changes during old age, the aged

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<sup>1</sup> Zborowski, M. and Lorraine, D.E. "Aging and Social Participation". Journal of Gerontology (1962) V. 17. Pp. 424-430.

do maintain their previous patterns of adjustment, especially in their social participation. The 204 men and women who were interviewed with regard to their experiences and attitudes in the area of social participation did not suggest many changes as they grew older and did not offer evidence in the direction of a voluntary withdrawal from society. On the whole the sample of the older people expressed a desire to continue their contacts on the same level of intensity as in the past.

• Some research studies have dealt with similar topics and have interpreted their findings in the light of a "Disengagement Theory". Kutner, Fanshel, Togo and Langner<sup>1</sup> studied the older segment of the population of the Kips Bay - Yorkville section in New York City. Blan<sup>2</sup> conducted a similar study in Emira, New York. The work of Cumming and Henry<sup>3</sup> is also on similar lines.

All these studies show that there are a number of changes in the social life of the aged. The extent of social participation decreases with age. But this decrease is mainly attributed by the above authors to the changing attitudes of the aged. Whereas, Zborowski and

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<sup>1</sup> Kutner, B., Fanshel, D., Togo, M. and Langner, T.S. Five Hundred Over Sixty; A Community Survey on Aging. (New York : Russel Sage Foundation, 1956).

<sup>2</sup> Blan, Z. "Structural Constraints on Friendship in Old Age". American Sociological Review (1961), V.26, Pp. 429-439.

<sup>3</sup> Cumming, E. and Henry, W.E. Growing Old; The Process of Disengagement (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1961).



Lorraine maintain that the changes are quite often not statistically significant, and when they are seen to be so, they can be explained by reasons other than the changing attitudes of the old, The changing attitude of society is equally important.

The individual differences in the adjustment of the older people are marked. Many have interests that make their lives stimulating and productive. Some may enjoy visiting children and grand-children. Others may have cultivated a wide circle of friends. Still others may have thrown themselves wholeheartedly into religious or civic affairs. Many, recognizing their limited physical capacity will turn to less strenuous pursuits and enjoy a more leisurely way of life. Some will find retirement an ideal time in which to do many of the things they always wanted to do but never could find time for. And some, insufficiently motivated to seek out new interests or to indulge old dreams, will spend their time reminiscing about the "good old days."

David Riesman<sup>1</sup> has made an attempt to classify the adjustment of the aged that is similar to the classification of Havighurst already referred to. But the difference lies in that the criteria selected by

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<sup>1</sup> Riesman, D. "Some Clinical and Cultural Aspects of Aging." American Journal of Sociology. Vol.49, January (1954), Pp. 379-383.

Havighurst have a reference to the amount of social participation and the activities of the aged whereas Riesman is mainly concerned with their level of the personal adjustment. He distinguishes three kinds of reactions to aging - the autonomous, the adjusted and the anomic - and he characterizes these as follows. Some bear within themselves psychological sources of self-renewal; aging brings them accretion of wisdom with no loss of spontaneity and ability to enjoy life, and they are relatively independent of the strictures and penalties imposed on the aged by the culture. Others, possibly the majority, have no such resources within them but are the beneficiaries of a cultural preservative (derived from work, power, position and so on) which sustain them, although only so long as the cultural conditions remain stable and protective. A third group, protected neither from within nor from without, simply decays.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1.6 ROLE PLAYED BY CULTURE

A variable that has a close bearing on the problem of the aged and his adjustment is the background of a specific culture.

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<sup>1</sup> Riesman, D. Ibid.

The western culture as well as the modern Indian culture emphasizes youth. Youth is seen as a gay, exciting, dynamic period of life. The young person is full of energy, ready to accept all challenges, bold, confident, courageous, pioneering. The world is wide open for him. Aging on the other hand is considered to be sad and painful. Elderly and beyond-middle-age people are considered to be relatively useless and burdensome. This emphasis is quite different from the Japanese tendency. To stress the advantages of old age, Embree<sup>1</sup> reports that in some Japanese villages men and women hold a party when they reach the age of 61, a privileged age that, once attained, henceforth entitles the person to respect and special privileges in recognition of his wisdom.

In China, old age is looked upon with great deference.<sup>2</sup>

Going through some of the American investigations concerning old age and its treatment by the younger it seems that there are no clearly established norms concerning the obligation of children to support aged and needy parents. Even if children accept this

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<sup>1</sup> Embree, J.F. Suye Mura : A Japanese Village. (Chicago University Press, 1949), P. 214.

<sup>2</sup> Visher, V.L. Old Age - Its Compensation and Rewards. (George Allen and Unwin Ltd. London, 1947), P. 128.

responsibility they may do so unwillingly and in the process make the parent feel quite unwanted. In a study of the attitudes of Protestant and Catholic children toward giving an aged parent a home, Dinkel<sup>1</sup> reported that many more students of both faiths accepted than rejected the obligation when the situation presented no special difficulties. But the percentage of those willing to accept the responsibility decreased rapidly as the hardships or inconveniences connected with such care became more severe. There were pronounced differences between the attitudes of the Protestant and Catholic students, the obligation of children to support their parents in old age being more firmly established among the Catholic than among the Protestants. But the Catholics by no means accepted the responsibility unconditionally.

Although the present subject does not directly deal with the attitudes of the children towards the old parents, the child parent relationship is likely to prop up more frequently than not, throughout the further investigation as it is through this relationship alone that the younger group will come more in contact with the older people. Their perception of the old as such is bound to be primarily influenced by this relationship. Similarly

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<sup>1</sup> Dinkel, R.M. "Attitudes of Children Toward Supporting Aged Parents". American Sociological Review. (1949), Vol. 9, Pp. 370-379.

this study points out the influence of the religious norms or tendencies in the matter - How they influence the attitudes toward the old...

If a similar study were conducted at Embree's 'Suye Mura', the Japanese village (Op.cit), the results might have been quite different.

To see how age is derided and youth is prized the reports from various industries may be of great help. Business and industry place a premium on the young worker, and although most employers seem willing to keep on an older worker who has been with the company for a long time, they do not, as a general rule, hire older employees. Reports indicate that, on the whole, workers rarely look forward to their retirement. Surveys<sup>1</sup> made by Social Security Board of persons receiving old age benefit show that only 5 per cent have retired while still in good health. By far the largest group has been laid off by their employers, and the rest have retired because of failing health. Although attitudes toward retirement vary among different socio-economic groups, in many cases the retirement is not voluntary. It is often resisted and many older people arrive at retirement age to realize the fact that they are now regarded as

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<sup>1</sup> Tuckman, J. and Lorge, I. Retirement and the Industrial Worker. (New York : Columbia University Teacher's College, Bureau of Publications, 1953), P.31.

surplus, that their hands that have so far always been busy and productive must now lie idle.

### 1.7 INDIAN CULTURE

To turn specifically to the Indian culture, in spite of the fact that Indians too have accepted similar practices in their business and industry, from the cultural point of view, this evaluation of the older people seems to be comparatively of a recent origin. Celebrations on reaching the age of 61 are common in many Indian communities (Hindu). Of course, many believe that the ceremony has a religious origin. They are not the type of parties described by Embree to enjoy the arrival at a specially privileged age. But they are celebrated by the younger relatives, mainly adult children, to pacify the evil forces (Grahās) specially active at that age and to wish the older person a longer life. The very fact that the younger people desire longer life to their older relatives seems significant. They may be accepting these old as not surplus. Such celebrations are not uncommon even to date.

The Vedic period gives still more clear-cut norms for the evaluation of the older. Like the sample of Embree's study, old age was considered to be a privileged age. The aged have been held in great esteem and even in veneration in ancient societies. As seen from "Manu Smṛiti",

वित्तं, बन्धु, वयः कर्मः विद्या भवन्ति पंचमी।  
एतानि मान्य स्थानानि गरीयान् यद्यदुत्तरम्॥<sup>1</sup>

(Wealth, brothers, age, work and education; these are the criteria for prestige in a respective order).

Similar ideas are expressed in "Gautam Dharma Sutram".

वित्तबन्धु कर्मजाति विद्या वयांसि मान्यानि परबलीयांसि।<sup>2</sup>

(Wealth, brothers, work, caste and age are the respected things in an ascending order). Old age was regarded as a time of wisdom and spiritual power. Gerontocracy (rule by the aged) was a common practice. Even a Sudra (lowest caste), if aged, deserved a salute from a young Brahmin. Thus a clear-cut favourable attitude towards the old can be seen. Of course, the question will ever remain as to how far this attitude had a really substantial psychological content as against the culturally and religiously obligatory content.

However, in ancient times (also in the city-states of Greece and Rome) age was always respected for its wisdom and experience. In those days (especially in India) learning was acquired by a lengthy and laborious process of learning by memory and by experience. Thus as a person advanced in years, he learnt more and more

<sup>1</sup> "Manu Smriti" (Sanskrit) Verse, No.136, Adhyaya II.

<sup>2</sup> "Gautam Dharma Sutram", Prathamprashna, Adhyaya VII.

about the world and got wiser. The youth could be guided by the hard earned wisdom of the old people and therefore they deserved respect. This veneration for old age that had its roots in religion, mysticism and practical guidance, disappeared when these, in turn, lost importance in the modern age of science and technology.

#### 1.8 RECENT TRENDS AFFECTING THE STATUS OF THE AGED

##### (a) System of Joint Family

The traditional Hindu joint family was larger than the conjugal or the biological family. The unit is not the husband, wife and children, but the larger family group. It is at once a corporate, economic, religious and social unit. In a joint family when sons grow up to manhood and marry, they do not leave the parental household and set up their own separate houses, but occupy different rooms in the parental, rather ancestral, residence along with their children. Correspondingly, the womenfolk also, the mother, the daughters-in-law, unmarried daughters and grand-daughters live under the same roof.

As described by S. Chandrasekhar<sup>1</sup>, "The father and mother have their places of honour in these joint families."

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<sup>1</sup> Chandrasekhar, S. "The Family in India" - Human Development. Selected Readings - (Ed. Haimowitz and Haimowitz - Thomas Y. Cornwell Comp. New York. 1964.) Pp. 97-98.



(Hence the absence of state-supported homes for old people in India; it is difficult to say whether there is no need for such homes today though the number of old people is small). The father, being the oldest and most experienced is nominally the head of the family. Under ordinary circumstances, it is he who controls, guides and directs the whole family, unless he is very old or disabled, in which case the eldest son or the eldest member of the nearest line of male descent-maternal or paternal uncle - takes his place. The mother always has her say. Though grown up sons live in the family with their wives, the respect and consideration shown by all members of the family to the old mother is very great. And it may be safely asserted that no important measure of domestic concern will be approved or carried out without the final, if formal, sanction of the mother".

The old persons had an important place in the management of household in the joint family with advancing years. They were looked upon as persons with more experience and practice and hence with increased efficiency. Even when they handed over the charge of the younger persons, by their nature, wisdom and experience they could train, direct and advise the younger recruits in running the house.

At the same time, certain social customs like child marriage helped to solidify the elderly woman's position

of authority and respect. The daughter-in-law that entered the family during adolescence was initiated into the craft of house-keeping by the mother-in-law. Thus, even when the actual charge was handed over to the daughter, the status of the mother-in-law did not suffer much. The aged woman also had a fund of experience about child-care, nursing, household administration and the culinary arts, which was useful to the young daughter-in-law who had no other source of information. The aged were a sort of a walking encyclopaedia on the family customs, social traditions, festivals and religious rituals.

The new epoch of industrialization has heralded a number of changes. Amongst them, the change in the family pattern is perhaps, the most significant in affecting the status of the aged. The joint family that was a prominent feature of the agricultural society is gradually breaking up. Agriculture alone could not maintain the joint family. So more and more people migrated to the city in search of work. Those who thus left the joint family and got work in cities, established themselves there. Such families had an inelastic income and limited accommodation due to over-crowding in the cities. Those who were not members of the natural family had no place in such a family unit. In the old joint families, the distant relatives with no direct claim on the family made a place for themselves by taking over

some duties in the elaborate and wider household. Such duties lacked in the unitary families.

(b) Technological Developments

In modern times, with the modern methods of teaching through books, radio and films, learning has become a comparatively quicker process. Age can no longer be necessarily associated with knowledge and wisdom. This is quite a substantial reason why the prestige that old age enjoyed is rapidly decreasing.

There are several other reasons too to be found in the rapid industrialization and ~~x~~ fast changing family patterns of modern India. Of course, similar changes were prominent in the western society a century back as has been pointed out by Lawrence Guy Brown.<sup>1</sup> "There was a place in agriculture and handi-crafts for persons of all ages beyond early childhood. There was plenty of food and older persons were useful for a much longer period. He (the old person) had a definite place in the social and economic order, as had his wife in household activities". The position was still better in India. The joint family system was prevalent for a very long time here. Even today, it has not completely disappeared although its hold is gradually loosening.

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<sup>1</sup> Brown, L.G. Social Pathology : Personal and Social Disorganization (Appleton Century Crofts, 1942) P. 116.

A number of other social changes like marriage at an advanced age added to the decreasing status of the aged. Man and woman are grown up at the time of marriage with their own ideas of managing their home. Modern resources for medical aid and books for providing information rendered the help of the older persons outmoded and unreliable. As a result, the new unitary family founded by the couple, became a self-contained unit in which the older relatives are surfluous and so not welcome. This is very likely to cause the aged experience a situation of embarrassment that, perhaps they ever had least expected. None depends upon them, none wants their guidance and they may feel that they are staying in a vacuum with no positive goal to pursue. Sometimes, they no longer have a home of their own but are forced to stay as dependents with one of the above referred unitary families. This situation is very likely to be received by the aged in India today as more embarrassing than in other civilized countries because for Indians, this is a transitional period of these social changes. As in their own youth, the family patterns and social values were of a radically different origin they might have least expected that such a situation is waiting for them at the final stage of their life. Hence they will have to face it completely unprepared, as a bitter surprise, at times causing an emotional shock.

The former norms in society concerning the obligation of children to support aged and needy parents as well as other close relatives are seen to be blurred in the present times, due to the changing social conditions and values. At the same time, the financial tensions that are so common these days may add to the difficulties of the youth, eventually making them look upon their aged parents or relatives as an unwanted burden. Under such conditions, even when the young people accept the responsibility of the aged due to the perpetual social expectations they may make the aged sense the stigma of the situation causing them feel completely isolated.

(c) Trends in Population

Another explanation of the modern emphasis on the present topic is the recent advances in the preventive medicines and the control of infectious diseases together with the progress in antibiotics and surgery which have increased the general life span. In America, not only the median age of the population has consistently increased, but also the older age groups have exhibited remarkable growth. "Where the total number of persons in the United States approximately doubled between 1900 and 1950, the number of individuals sixty-five years and older almost quadrupled. This group constituted only 4.1 per cent of the total population in 1900. In 1950, it accounted for 8.1 per cent of the population. Moreover, government

census projections are that this age group will steadily increase from the 14,127,000 persons found in it in 1955 to 20,655,000 persons in 1975"<sup>1</sup>.

Comparing census data in India such striking figures for showing a dramatic increase in the rate of the older people cannot be found. On the contrary, comparing the number in percentages between 1951 and 1961 data, a slight decrease is seen in the number of persons above 60 years, (Refer Table No.2, Appendix III), though the total number of old persons has increased, along with the increase in the total population. (Refer Table No. 1, Appendix III).

However, there is every reason to expect a dramatic change in the proportions of the aged in India in the near future, along the lines experienced at United States during recent years. The real benefits of the scientific progress are being experienced by India only after her Independence. That is why after a sterile time, a period is very likely to come when due to the new scientific advances, the life span along with the number of old persons may increase immensely. Taking this consideration in view, there stands a possibility that the aged who have fallen down from the pedestal are doomed to endure the critical stage for a considerably long time.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States : 1956 (77th ed.), 1956.

A study that investigates into the position of the aged, especially from the point of view of the youth may help a good deal for society to decide what urgent steps are essential in way of preparation for that stage. There are traditionally no institutions meant for the care of the aged in India. The aged are solely entrusted to the younger people in the family. Much depends upon the attitudes of the younger people as to what type of treatment and facilities will be received by these dependents. A major share of the adjustment by the elderly persons directly goes to this treatment and indirectly to the attitudes.

The examination of the census data gave another idea about the position of the aged. When the age group above 60 years is compared to other younger age groups, the aged form a conspicuous minority. As such, the attitudes towards the aged are likely to display the main characteristics of the attitude towards a social minority. The minority and the attitude toward it is a pressing problem for the social psychologist. But the social psychologist looks at it from the point of view of race, caste, religion or community. Without introducing a discriminative criterion of such levels, there is some sense in viewing our aged as an ineffective minority group. A part - and a major part - of the adjustment of the minority is closely connected with the attitude of the majority. The youth forms a social and cultural majority, and their

attitude towards the aged (minority) is a potent variable for old age adjustment.

#### 1.9 SUMMARY

Old age has been observed as a developmental phase with its typical problems of adjustment. These problems are likely to influence the behaviour of the old, marking it off from the behaviour of the young persons. Eventually, the young have their stereotypes of the aged. They perceive the old through these and the attitudes of the young are coloured by them. Moreover, the old form a minority group of the total population which is seen to increase during the recent years as a result of the advancement in the medical science and a consequential increase in the life span. Thus the problem of attitudes toward a minority group applies to old people. This attitude is seen to be related to the cultural background. In some cultures it is favourable whereas in some others it does not exhibit that trend.

Gerontocracy was prevalent in India till recently. But a number of social, cultural and technological changes have taken place in the present day. These changes have affected the long preserved status of the old. As a result, gerontology has replaced gerontocracy. Under these circumstances, and especially in the absence of traditionally established institutions for the care



of the aged, their position is bound to be critical. A study to investigate their position would help the matter. Such a study, especially, from the point of view of the youth would be beneficial for society to decide what urgent steps are essential in way of preparation for that state of the aged.