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Chapter I

Introduction

Old age is the last stage of human life span, accompanied with decreasing energy and body resources. Socially, this stage was considered as the sum total of one’s lived experiences. Hence, the society offered a space of respect to the old. In such a society, the aged were the repositories, transmitters, and sole authorities of wisdom and knowledge. All these provided a ‘golden age’ concept to this stage, old age. But the present society does not perceive old age with such golden age conceptions. There are many measures that determine the social conceptions of old age. There are many means to provide knowledge and wisdom. Old is not the mere and necessary component for the transmission of knowledge. Besides, many fear old age and consider it as a matter to be handled with care and attention. In a developing country like India, especially the state Kerala, old age has become a serious social issue nowadays. The change in conception of old age is the theme of the present study.

Statement of the Problem

Old age is not a new phenomenon; it is as old as human society. The term ‘age’ means the length of time for which a person has existed and if that existence is for a long time, the society considers him as ‘aged’. The
aged is defined in various ways. According to internationally accepted definition; an aged is one who is sixty five year of age or above. In India, however, all persons who are sixty years or above are included among the aged.¹ This study refers the Indian definition and included those who are sixty years or above at the time of the survey as aged. Ageing is the biological process of getting old. It is the terminal stage of one’s life cycle, accompanied with decreasing energy and body resources with infirmities due to the decaying and weakening of one’s bodily organs. According to the human growth and developmental chart, old age starts from sixty years till death.² But being sixty years old today is different from what it was being sixty years old a century back. In earlier times, ageing as a social problem did not preoccupy the society. The few who lived over sixty years were considered as the repositories of wisdom and sole authorities to the family and the community. The notions of vānapṛasta and sanyāsa were the social mechanisms that encouraged the aged to move away from the management of everyday concerns. The joint family easily accommodated the old and the disabled. The economy that was organized around agriculture provided the role differentiation in the community, which offered a respectful space for the older generation. This situation changed by the intervention of modern institutions in the everyday affairs of human life.

The benefit of western medicine and the advancement of science and technology created tremendous changes in social living. Increase in life expectancy resulted in an increase of greying population making it a social issue to the present society. Commercialized agriculture and market oriented economy provided fewer roles to the aged. The break-up of joint family into nuclear family made it incapable to accommodate the old due to the pressures created by the demands of a modern urban and industrialized lifestyle. Accommodating and providing greater recognition for the distinctive interests and needs of the old was difficult in this situation. Emergence of old age homes thus became an alternate arrangement for the care of the elderly. And the availability of the home nurses was of increasing importance in this situation. By 2030, when the last of the baby boomers--the generation born between 1946 and 1964—will become the senior citizens, people over 55 will constitute one third of the population\(^3\), and the issue of old age will turn out to be a crucial one for the society.

By considering these changes, it can be said that the ‘shift in social conception of old age’ lies somewhere in between the two systems of living--traditional and modern--where the values and world views of the systems are different in some ways from each other. A widely accepted

\(^3\) International Encyclopaedia of Sociology, vol.1, New Delhi, S Chand and Company Ltd, 2000, p. 35.
thesis of Stearns⁴ says that in preindustrial societies the aged were generally better provided for, and given a more central and active role in family and community life. As one moves from this type of society through the transitional stages of modernization, a consistent decline will occur in their social well-being. The social, economic, cultural and political aspects of tradition and modernity created impacts on the social conception of old age. In both the situations, old age is a socially constructed reality, which can be justified by the fact of their social relativity to specific social context. The sociology of knowledge is concerned with the relationship between human thought and the social context within which it arises⁵. In order to understand the concept of old age in each of the system of living, various aspects such as social, economic, cultural and political of the respective contexts need to be studied in detail.

**Scholastic Area of the Study**

The theme ageing is as old as human life span. Old age was a theme in stories, myths and cultures of societies. Plato argued that the wisest men should serve as guardians of societies, since education would not bring its ‘full harvest’ until the age of fifty.⁶ Aristotle⁷ also discussed the subject of

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⁷ *idem.*
age; it was a theme in Shakespeare’s sonnets as well. According to Hindu mythology, the Lord Krishna advised *The Gīta* to Arjuna at the age of 125 years. The Bible says that Adam lived for 930 years and Noah for 950 years. Moses could see well, even at the age of 120 years. Between the sixteenth century and the third quarter of the twentieth century, western ideas about ageing underwent a fundamental transformation spurred by the development of modern society. Ancient understandings of ageing as a mysterious part of the eternal order of things gradually gave way to the secular, scientific and individualistic tendencies of modernity. Old age was redefined as a problem to be solved by science and medicine. This scientific attitude to the theme proclaims it as a twentieth century phenomenon. The British Society of Gerontology provided a multidisciplinary forum for the researchers in the field of ageing. Gerontology was the scientific approach to all aspects of ageing; and geriatrics was the branch of gerontology and medicine concerned with the health of the elderly in all its aspects preventive, remedial and rehabilitative. According to Nathan W. Shock,

“Gerontology is a scientific study of the phenomenon of aging. By aging, we mean the progressive changes which take place in cell, tissue, and organ system, a total organism, or a group of organisms with the passage of time. All living

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things change with time in both structure and function, and the changes which follow the general trend constitute aging".  

Gerontology is a multi disciplinary field of investigation, which has three core components: the biological, the psychological and the social. The biological seeks the impact of physiological systems, psychological about mental function and the social covers the social aspects of ageing. The study of social dimensions of ageing is usually referred to as social gerontology, to which the present study belongs.

Three distinct approaches to the study of social aspects of ageing (social gerontology) are discussed by Ward. The first one examines ageing as an individual experience by investigating such topics as changes in perceived age identity as the individual progresses through the life course. The second approach examines the social context that defines ageing and seeks to understand the position of the elderly within society. The third one is the examination of societal consequences of ageing.

The present study belongs to the second approach which says that ageing occurs within a social context that ranges from the micro scale of the family to the macro scale of the society. It considers ageing as a social phenomenon taking place within a social context and exerts various

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constraints upon the individual. And the social context that defines ageing allocates the position of the elderly in a particular society. It would be the result of the interaction between the individual and the society where he/she exists and what the conception of old age in that society was. The study does not neglect the other approaches of social gerontology, for example, it considers societal consequences like demographic transition as factors for the changed concepts of old age.

Social gerontology does not possess an extensive theoretical frame work in its own right. This failure to formulate a systematic theory of social ageing is explained by Christina R. Victor. According to her, social gerontology has not been immune from the broader sociological paradigms such as social interactionism, exchange theory and functionalism.\(^\text{11}\) While not a specific theory as such, the consideration of old age as a social problem was first carried out in Britain.\(^\text{12}\) The reason behind this consideration is explained in terms of three interrelated factors: old age as a contributing factor to poverty, economic difficulties and changes in methods of production combined to drive many older workers into retirement, and concentration of the elderly in rural location by the migration of younger


\(^{12}\) The elderly, as a group for which specific social policies were required, did not emerge in Britain until the 1890s. In 1909, Majority Report of the Royal Commission on the poor Law observed “the practices of considering the aged as a class by themselves for the purpose of poor relief is one of modern growth” .Christina R. Victor, *Old Age in Modern Society...*, *Op.cit.*, p. 30.
people.¹³ In short, sociologists say that old age as a social problem or a prejudice against the old did arise as a result of societal changes due to the modern growth.

Hence, the ‘theories of socialisation’¹⁴ are carried out by the social gerontology. In order to locate the theoretical position of the present study, a brief description of such theories is given in the following text.

Disengagement Theory

One of the earliest theoretical perspectives used by gerontologists was disengagement, which was originally formulated by Cumming and Harry. In the simplest form, this perspective states that independent of other factors such as poor health or poverty, ageing involves a gradual but inevitable withdrawal from interaction between the individuals and their social context. Here the individuals prepare themselves for death; the society also prepares them for the later phases of life, by withdrawing the pressure to interact. The end result is that the elderly person plays fewer social roles and experiences deterioration in relationships. Central to this theory is the assumption that the disengagement of elderly is a necessary condition for both successful ageing and the orderly continuation of the modern society.

¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 34-44.
Activity Theory

Opposed to the notion of disengagement is activity theory developed by Havighurst. It says, normal and successful ageing involves preserving, for as long as possible, the attitudes and activities of middle age. To compensate for the activities surrendered with ageing, substitutes should be found. Central assumptions of activity theory are: life satisfaction, which is related to social integration, and role losses such as retirement which are inversely co-related with life satisfaction.

Development Theory

Developmental theorists argued that rights of the aged are not with disengagement or activity theories. Rather, a diversity of approaches and adaptations to the problem of ageing will be displayed, depending upon the history of the older person. Central assumption to this theory is that old age is the time of summing up of one’s life: what he/she achieved and not achieved during his/her life. So for a successful ageing, current life style must be in terms of earlier history.

Continuity Theory

This theory does not assert that one must disengage, or become active, in order to cope with ageing. Rather, the decision regarding which roles are to be disregarded and which are to be maintained will be determined by the individual’s past and preferred life style. Those who
prefer to be active will do so and those desire lower levels of interaction may do so.

These theories appear to be prescriptive recommendations about how to live old age in a modern society. Besides them, the theories like symbolic interactionism, labelling theory, exchange theory and age stratification approaches are for viewing ageing by more positive attitudes and overcome the negative stereotypes of old age.

Later, Cowgill and Holmes stated modernization theory\textsuperscript{15} in 1972, in order to explain that there is a tendency for the status of the aged to decline when a society’s degree of modernization increases. As the societies become more complex and technically sophisticated, the status of the elderly declines. In 1974 Cow Gill\textsuperscript{16} began an inquiry into the factors that cause such a phenomenon. His theory asserts that certain aspects of modernisation are more important than others to place elderly at a disadvantage. These factors are: (a) the development of modern health technology, (b) modern economic technology, (c) urbanization, and (d) education.\textsuperscript{17} So the influence of an increasing degree of modernization on the status of the elderly can be known by assessing such factors of the particular social context. This is what the present study is aiming for. While considering the traits of modernization,

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{idem}
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{idem}.
India is a fast developing country. One of its smallest states, Kerala is ahead of the rest of the country in fertility transition by 25 years. The modernization theory is applicable to this situation in such a way that, as the society of Kerala becomes more complex and technically sophisticated, there is likelihood for the status of the elderly to decline. This is the hypothesis that the present study holds as the reason behind the changed conception of old age in Kerala today.

**Review of Literature**

As more people grow into old age, the field of gerontology become an area of inquiry of increasing importance. The British Society of Gerontology established in the year 1973, provided a multi disciplinary forum for researchers in the field of ageing. Since then, there is no dearth of articles and books on gerontology, which covers the contributions of biological, psychological and social perspectives of ageing. As the present study belongs to the social aspects of ageing, the literature on social gerontology is of particular interest here. Most of those literatures are about the western society and is reviewed here.

India is a developing country where the degree of modernization, specifically the number of old people is increasing day by day with better health, medical facilities and reduction in death rates. This increasing trend imposes the need for studies and surveys about this particular group. The
review of literature, which belongs to social gerontology from Indian context, is also important for this study. It is projected that by the year 2025, one in every five persons would be a senior citizen in Kerala. But it has only been a short time since the issue of old age has become a major topic of discussion; and hence, the studies are less in number. However the available writings are reviewed here.

**Literature of Western Context**

The study of the social dimensions of ageing is incorporated with three distinct approaches: ageing as an individual experience, ageing within the social context, and the societal consequences of ageing. The literature from the western social context has either covered all the three approaches in one study or in separate studies. However, the field is advanced with a good number of studies in the social aspects of ageing. The studies that examine ageing as an individual experience are investigating them from a life course perspective. Some of them relate the psychological impact on an individual to the social aspects of ageing. The literature survey is arranged here in such a way that the first portion is covered by the literature on individual approaches of social ageing, then the societal consequences of ageing and lastly to the social aspects of ageing.
Sheila M. Peace\textsuperscript{18} in \textit{Researching Social Gerontology (Concepts, Methods, and Issues)} says about the dependency, support and construction of ageing in its social aspects. The relationship of chronological age and definition of social and biological age is described here. One of the different concepts of age explained is ‘social age’, which means that the age of an individual must be something that can be measured at a point in time. Social age may increase from stage to stage as time goes by whereas other social measures may fluctuate. The distinction between quality of life and standards of living suggests that quality of life is a multidimensional concept, which cannot be defined in a single way. Peace highlighted the complexity of the concept that both are constructed and perceived, and the importance of considering both subjective and objective forms of measurement.

Irene M. Hulicka\textsuperscript{19} conducted an empirical study in the \textit{Psychology and Sociology of Aging}. It is purely a quantitative analysis, which clearly analyzes demography, intellectual functioning, perceptual functioning, learning, memory, problem-solving and creativity, life satisfaction and adjustment to ageing, work and retirement. This book discusses how the process of ageing and behaviour of older people are connected. There are surveys, which showed the impact of environment on old people. The


influence of improved physical and social environment appeared not only in the increased satisfaction of residents with their living situation but also in more favourable attitudes about themselves and towards others, in more active and social patterns of life, and in signs of improved physical and mental health. About the attitudes of the aged towards euthanasia, Irene pointed out that their religious faith is an important consideration.

The need of casework with the ageing is emphasized by Edna Wasser\textsuperscript{20} in \textit{Creative Approaches in Case Work with the Aging}. It views ageing as part of the continuum of life-long, interconnected experiences. Most elders are coping with and adapting to the changes of advanced years within the range of their capacities and resources while many do not. This creates the need of a caseworker. The concepts of the individual life cycle, individual development, developmental tasks and the interrelatedness of the various stages offer a substantial framework for the caseworker in understanding and relating to the ageing person. The role of the family agency is to specify the need of elders to give proper guidance. The services rendered by the volunteers, homemakers and supplementary services are also well defined. Marriage counselling for the aged client and the treatment of marital conflict are fruitful. The central concept used here is to prepare them to have a marital balance, which can be disrupted by

many factors such as retirement and lowered income, inevitable organic, sexual and psychological changes of old age. Group approaches are also found useful if it can be done by a trained social worker. The client who is suffering due to various reasons can be empowered to strengthen his capacity to cope with his environment and regain his sense of control and mastery.

The affirmative approach to old age is the theme, which runs throughout in *Aging and Mental Health: Positive Psycho-Social Approaches* written by Butler and Lewis\(^{21}\). Here, the elderly give three messages to the society. The first one is that they want to take their own decisions about their lives, the second is that they want to continue to be involved in life, and thirdly, they want to be treated with dignity. Old people need freedom, encouragement to move in new directions, autonomy and independence, and they treat these as precious commodities for them. The authors conclude the book by saying that the physical, cultural, social and economic aspects of old people’s lives will be considered as intricately woven into their mental conditions.

The book, *Becoming and Being Old-Sociological Approaches to Later Life* by Bytheway\(^{22}\) and others set the study in three approaches:

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becoming old, being old, and old age. It is to promote the study of the aged which relates to both ‘the realities’ and ‘the ideologies’ of ageing experience. The title, ‘Becoming and Being Old’ means that in the course of life, people become old and thereafter remain old. The process of becoming and the status of being old is described in the book. It analyzes how the people who are approaching pensionable age handle the process of ageing and face the transition from work to retirement. The book also discusses how they cope with the negative connotations of retirement and part leisure in their response. Relating different life styles in old age in different social classes concerns the process of being old. Defining concept of old age is another aim of the study, and the concept is placed in the complex interplay between institutions, belief and personal experience.

In his book, *The Aging Experience- An Introduction to Social Gerontology*\(^\text{23}\), Russell A. Ward says that though human behaviour is multifaceted, a multidisciplinary approach can only satisfy the gerontological studies. Growing old is not and cannot be the same experience in different societies, or even in the same society. There are many factors that shape happiness and unhappiness in old age. Two major ideas conveyed in the book are: first, all societies can be characterized by their age stratification systems, which result in age-differentiated

expectations, sanctions, and rewards. Second, ageing person interprets the experience according to the symbolic meanings available to him or her. Jay\textsuperscript{24} considers ‘sociality’ as a major component to the meaning of good old age, which consists of five themes- social connectedness, state of mind, leisure, confidence and enjoying life, which are socially positive.

The book *Gender and Later Life-A Sociological Analysis of Resources and Constraints* by Sara Arber and Jay Ginn\textsuperscript{25} aims to provide a better understanding of gender differences among the aged. The high proportion of elderly women who live alone is a historically unprecedented situation. The book examines the position of elderly women and the cultural stereotypes, which affects older women where the ‘compassionate ageism’ gives way to ‘conflictual ageism’. The resources preventing dependencies are analyzed at four levels: resources possessed by the individual elderly person, elderly person’s household, available from the community (family members, friends, neighbours etc.), provided by the state in response to need. Comparisons are drawn between U.K. and U.S. for differences in their personal income in terms of their earlier roles in production and the labour market. Gender differences in life expectancy, health, disability and institutional care are also examined.

Rosemary Bleisner and Victoria Hilkevitch Bedford in *Aging and the Family* \(^{26}\) analyze both traditional topics such as marriages, parent-child bond, and sibling relationship and newer topics such as feminist analysis of family relationships, nonmarital partnerships and the interface between the family and long-term care institutions. It also points out that family relations in old age are shaped by the intersecting influences of individual life experiences, historical events and social and economic conditions. The nature and timing of life transitions (marriage and retirement) affect relationships within and between generations may also vary across time. Family development theory, family stress theory, and critical theory are used as fruitful approaches to studies of ageing. Bedford has analyzed the theme of life course continuity, as it is echoed with special reference to sibling relationships.

Julia Johnson and Robert Slater in *Aging and Later Life* \(^{27}\) consider themselves as the part of an ageing society. According to Britain’s census report, elders will cover 18 per cent of the population in 2031. Not a matter of statistics, but the experience of ageing and old life is highlighted in the book through a collection of personal accounts. They included first hand account of older people, because those who are younger have not had the same experience of age. How the images are created and how far the


behaviour in later life influenced by the labelling and stereotype is included under the heading ‘Images and Identity’. The authors have also dealt with topics such as ill health and well-being, intervention and therapy policy and politics etc. They formulate a concept of ageism and the essential feature of it is the contrast between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The quality of life and life satisfaction is also well described. They documented some of the many changes currently affecting the lives of older people: the privatization of welfare, the development of markets and changing patterns of retirement. It is a multidisciplinary work and covers many aspects which are not common, but relevant to practice.

Ingrid Arnet Connidis, in *Family Ties and Aging* has attempted to weave the vast range of information about the many facts of family relationships and ageing into a critical, comprehensive and integrated whole. The life experience of any age group are so closely tied to the family that the examining of such ties can lead to a better understanding of later life. Most relationships in old age are a continuation of those begun in earlier life; however, changes also occur in response to other changes associated with ageing. Connidis made five theoretical assumptions to explain the family ties in later life. First, the family ties of later life are best understood in the life course perspectives; they represent both continuity and change. Second, understanding the family ties of older persons require

examining relationships, not only families, but also both older and younger persons to give and receive in their familial relationships. Third, family membership should be defined broadly and not restricted to a traditional notion of what constitutes family. Fourth is the arrangement of social life. The fact behind this search is the importance of individual persons who have the ability to act on their own behalf and the influence on one’s position within the social structure. Fifth, the meaning of family at both the cultural and individual level is an important facet of understanding how ties are both negotiated and evaluated by family members and by others\textsuperscript{29}. The impact of divorce and remarriage on intergenerational relations is also well treated by Connidis. The study about sibling ties in middle and later life shows that it has significance ties for women, especially those who are not married and the childless. Among divorced adults, the absence of a spouse may lead to re-establishing sibling bonds earlier than usual. Connidis also recommended a need for greater recognition of the obligations of family members caring for older persons.

Jon Hendricks, in \textit{The Ties of Later Life}\textsuperscript{30}, says that having ties with children or grand children are important sources of support and affirmation. It pronounces that families are responsible for the needs of the elderly. In reality the responsibility falls on the shoulders of the family’s female

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members. With longer lives come more extensive kinship networks, and more grand children know their grand parents while all those in the middle try to balance obligations to both generations. In later years, there is need for mutual accommodation. The interaction between grand parents and grand children is a significant source of emotional satisfaction for both generations. But three types of styles and strategies of grand parenting that have been noted are: detached, passive and active. The interaction between step grand parents and step grand children may need to be dealt with counselling or educational settings which include role clarity, relationship quality, behavioural expectations and contact.

In the book, *Family Care Of the Elderly-Social and Cultural Changes*, Jordan\(^{31}\) refers to Cowgill and Holmes\(^{32}\) in order to show that the dependence of the aged has shifted from the family to the State in modern societies. This dependence covers other areas of life such as housing, transportation, nutrition, health care and so on. According to Jordan, we are moving toward a ‘world community’ and so no country is immune to the impact of other countries, however close or far away. So the study about the family care of the elderly in sixteen countries is a great revelation as a means of adaptation.


Ellen Rhoads Holmes and Lowell D. Holmes\textsuperscript{33}, the authors of the book, \textit{Other Cultures, Elder Years} are anthropologists who are interested in gerontology say that it is a discipline that must take all people and all cultural traditions into consideration if we are to contribute to an understanding of the process of human ageing. The authors concerned the modernization influences in developing countries and its effect on the status and role of the elderly. Because change is an ongoing process in all societies, the impact of cultural change on the elderly is clearly noted. The book explains how the cultural tradition shapes the needs and roles of seniors. The other concern is with change, especially modernization and accompanying demographic change, and its effect on the status and well-being of the elderly.

James A. Thorson, in \textit{Aging in a Changing Society}\textsuperscript{34} tries to figure out the massive population shift, which the world is experiencing, as a revolution unprecedented in human history. Until the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, the worldwide pattern showed women bearing many children, a few of whom lived adulthood, and fewer lived up to old age. Not only the number of older people has been increasing, but the ways in which different generations see the world have been changing as well. The physical as well


\textsuperscript{34} James A. Thorson, \textit{Aging in a Changing Society}, U.S., Brunner/Mazel, a Member of the Taylor and Francis Group, 2000.
as the psychological process of ageing and the health care system is well explained in the book. The topics are more applied than theoretical.

*Old age in Modern Society* by Christina R. Victor\(^ {35} \) presents ageing in modern society as a richly diverse experience. This book covers the social aspects of ageing by incorporating three distinct aspects of ageing. Ageing is considered as an individual experience, by investigating such topics as change in perceived identity as the individual progresses through life. The second aspect is the social context that defines ageing and seeks to understand the position of the elderly within the society. Third, the author examines the societal consequences of ageing. So the book finds the factors such as age, sex and social class contribute to make the elderly a heterogeneous segment within the total population. The author suggests that the main goal for an ageing society must be to replace notions of independence and dependence with a social framework, which emphasizes interdependence between generations.

Gail Wilson, *Understanding Old Age-Critical and Global Perspectives*\(^ {36} \) aims to look more critically at knowledge of old age and to consciously correct some biases, which inform current discourses on ageing. This book provides a comprehensive overview of ageing as seen

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from a global perspective. The elders themselves see health as the main determinant of the quality of their lives. The present situation considers older men and women as consumers and providers of services. This book takes a critical look at ageing, which often portrays older people as an ever-growing burden that will bring down the health service, wreck the pension system and overwhelm families and social services. The forces of globalization and economic changes trigger the movement of older men and women across countries and continents. Age discrimination exists in society and the author proposes an increase in equality in ageist society. Exposing the ageist and sexist assumptions lying mainstream demography and economics, the author presents a more balanced view of ageing of world population. Wilson also explains how a shrinking world in terms of communication has changed the lives of older migrants. There are different forms of migration in later life as a challenge to dominant discourses--the conservative, passive and unadaptable.

**Indian Literature**

India is a fast developing country where the degree of modernization and rapid economic growth affect the status of the elderly. India has the second largest number of old people in the world as the elderly are the fastest growing age group and their population will reach
179 million by 2026. Recent books and articles are evidence of this. The main focus of Indian literature consists of suggestions to cope with the ageing scenario. Some of them are creative approaches towards understanding problems of the aged and planning for their rehabilitation. The review of Indian literature is provided here to check what the main agenda from the area of social gerontology.

Most Indian writings are on the population explosion of the greying generation, which is also a global issue of the present century. In Aging in Indian Perspective—International Conference on Aging in India, Vinod Kumar compiled different sessions of the seminar on epidemiology, demography, and ecology of ageing. It gives an overview of conditions prevailing in different parts of India, both urban and rural and highlights important geographic differences. Methods and provision of care and services for elderly from different parts of India also have been mentioned. The influence of socio-economic status on various type of morbidity is clearly mentioned. Different coping mechanisms and resources are described as that may help the individual in various settings. The book has emphasizes the need to consider the age-old traditional wisdom, while making patterns of leisure and recreational activities as the new approaches towards coping with problem of the elderly. The problems of aged women,

38 Vinod Kumar, ed. Aging in Indian Perspective—International Conference on Aging in India, held from 14 to 16 November, New Delhi, AIIMS, 1994.
who are currently regarded as a vulnerable group, are well described. Section on biological gerontology includes papers on mechanism of ageing and development and the biological basis of anti-ageing agents as investigated inside well-equipped laboratories. This publication may be regarded as a rare collection of numerous multidisciplinary observations from different parts of India and from other countries like U.S., U.K, Sweden, Zimbabwe, Egypt, and Romania etc.

Srivastava\textsuperscript{39} in his book, \textit{The Aged and the Society} compiled the outcome of a socio-economic study conducted in some selected areas of Delhi, covering a wide socio-economic spectrum. The study was carried out in order to identify programmes, services and assistance needed for utilizing the skills and experience of the aged so that they become more useful to society. Much has indeed been written on the humanitarian aspects of the elderly, such as Medicare, old age homes, counselling and community centres.

In \textit{The Rural and Urban Aged}, Maninder Singh Randhawa\textsuperscript{40} has attempted to scientifically investigate the various sociological aspects of ageing in both the rural and urban areas. In the rural communities of India, the joint family system is still prevailing to a large extent and such families


do not throw the aged to the mercy of the society. There the aged participate in productive activities as much as they can. So the elders in rural communities still enjoy a high status and play a major role in decision making. According to Singh, the aged in the urban area also enjoy a fairly high status in their families and the so-called problems are only a trend. The major problems arise due to the abrupt retirement from an occupation, which is considered as a normal phenomenon of modern industrial society. He quotes Burgess\textsuperscript{41}, who points out that the increasing problems of ageing in an urbanized society are: difficulty in finding satisfying and substitute activities, economic security, loss of status, decreasing social participation in organization, greater unhappiness and maladjustment, loss of health and illness. Singh concludes that the aged with higher education and economic status enjoy a leadership position in their families in both rural and urban areas.

Pati and Jena\textsuperscript{42} in \textit{Aged in India}, have attempted a multidisciplinary approach towards understanding of the problems the aged and planning for their rehabilitation. The social concepts include transition in social positions,

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\bibitem{42} R.N. Pati, and B Jena, \textit{Aged in India}, New Delhi, Ashish Publishing House, 1989 It is a collection on the reflections of doctors, demographers, social scientists, psychologists and social workers working on various issues of the elderly population of the country at the National Seminar on social security policies, programs and research on aged: Need for perspective development plan by 2000.A.D, 21-22 Aug. 1989 organized by council for tribal and rural development, Bhuvaneswar.
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roles, status and characteristics of person. Mohanty\textsuperscript{43} says, to know how to grow old is the masterwork of wisdom and one of the most difficult chapters in the great art of living. Jamuna\textsuperscript{44} likes to make use of the rural elderly women as resource persons to the communities around and consider them as assets rather than liability. Counselling is also an important measure to the older individual to minimize ruptures with children or younger members and to keep their social relationships in constant repair. The book gives guidelines to planners and social workers for developing action programmes for the cause and care of the elderly population both in rural and urban areas of the country.

*Aging in India* is research conducted by Kirpal Singh Soodan\textsuperscript{45} pertaining to the aged in the city of Lucknow. His demographic analysis shows gradual increase in number of aged. He compares the educational level, the age of migration to the city and their economic dependence. He found that the majority of the aged spend their free time doing odd jobs connected with household work, looking after children and ‘doing nothing’. Free time pursuit of men was solitary in nature, while women spent free time in interpersonal activities. Information about the available welfare services was also a major concern of this study.

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Shrinivas Tilak in his study *Religion and Aging in the Indian Tradition* has emphasized the traditional Indian views on ageing and collected the rich reflections of human experiences. He has analyzed this through the dialectical relation of Vedic religion, Buddhism and Hinduism and the concerns of various genres of texts.

*India’s Elderly- Burden or Challenge?* by Rajan et al. explores the widespread feeling that the elderly are becoming a burden in Indian society. It is a demographic survey that cautions us about the implications of increasing elderly population in a developing country like India. The statistics of social conditions, economic conditions and the available social policies are meticulously presented in the book. For the authors, the situation in general is worse for the female elderly compared to their male counterparts. This is substantiated by several case studies and group studies in this direction. The book will enlighten policy makers and researchers about the needs of the elderly.

*A Study of Some Related Factors Related to Adjustment of Urban Aged Men*, a doctoral dissertation by Ramamurti studies the impact of socio-economic status on the adjustment of elderly. It reveals that the
higher income group people are better adjusted than the lower income group people. *Family jointness, family and social integration among the elderly* by Venkoba Rao\(^{49}\) studied psychiatric illness of the aged in the context of different living arrangements. It concludes that living within the family does not ensure a healthy integration.

In *No Aging in India- Modernity, Senility and the Family*, Lawrence Cohen puts forward a post modern approach. It is an ethnographic study, which freely draws upon post modern social theory and helps one to understand how social theory brings to bear on how field work is conducted. It offers views on current debates on old age in India. By adding ‘No’ to the title ‘Aging in India’, Cohen suggests certain differences in approach towards old age. The reason behind such a title is to inform that the aged too can cause radical transformations and can articulate collectivities and polities in society. Dependent person also possesses power in a particular space, or silence too speaks. By presenting this type of argument the book says there is no ageing in India, aged too have power in their own space, a post-modern argument.

*Understanding graying people of India* by Arun P.Bali\(^{50}\) is the edited work of many articles on social aspects of ageing. Among them, the study by K.D Gangarade deals with the emerging conception of ageing in


\(^{50}\) Arun P.Bali, ed. *Understanding Graying People of India*, New Delhi, Inter India Publications, 1999.
India. It is a micro study that deals about the historical shift of Indian tradition towards modernization. The study analyses the social factors of tradition and modern settings. It is an effort to find out the conceptions of ageing in respective contexts. It explains the importance of traditional Indian value system, which can support the authority of elders and sanctity of tradition. There the individual life span was encircled by the concentric zones of family, caste, village community and the social control being exercised by religion. Indian society has been undergoing rapid transformations under the impact of several forces like industrialization, urbanization, education etc. This situation encourages the nature of rationality and the right of individual conscience. It encourages the task of national insurance, guaranteeing the basic subsistence to all: the orphans, the disabled, the aged, and the widows as well as temporarily unemployed. This study is very similar to the present study because it tries to define the concepts of ageing from the social context.

**Literature from the Context of Kerala**

Even though, one of the smallest states of the country, Kerala is ahead in the awareness about old age as a serious social problem. Ever since development planning was initiated in independent India, the state has recognized older persons as a priority target group for social welfare action. Here the literature on gerontology is mainly about guidelines to face old age graciously. It does not examine the social context which defines
ageing as a social problem today. Most of the available literature in Kerala covers the societal consequences of ageing, and is reviewed here.

A survey of the old age homes in Kerala by Irudaya Rajan\(^51\) considers population ageing as the ultimate consequence of demographic transition. It assesses the ageing scenario in Kerala by districts and the profile of existing old--age homes in Kerala. *Needs and Problems of the aged: A Study in Kerala* by Nayar\(^52\) studies the problem faced by the aged parents in Kerala. It states that the isolated parents due to the migration of younger generation are the present social problem here. The articles in *Kerala Sociologist* by Jacob John Kattakayam, S.Saraswathy, Pushpa Mary Rani, Merlin J.N and Abraham Vijayan\(^53\) studied the various aspects of elderly population in Kerala, mainly the impact of modernization, institutional care, elderly abuse, health aspects and the challenges of ageing in the twenty-first century. Another study about the *Pattern of Living Arrangement of Elderly Women in Kerala* by Kattakayam has compared the anticipatory socialization of elderly women between those institutionalized and those living in families. It argues that the elderly of today do a lot of mental exercises on various patterns of living.

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arrangements and choose the best according to their socio-economic conditions. But it has been done only by a section of the society. *Adjustment and Its Correlates in Old Age: A Study in Relation to Living Arrangement*, a doctoral Dissertation by Cherian\(^{54}\), is the study on adjustment and its correlates in old age, it provides information regarding the differences in adjustment of the elderly living in varied (home) living arrangements.

*Vṛuddhasadanam*, a novel in Malayalam, by T.V.Kochubava\(^{55}\) provides good evidence about the development of old-age homes in the social context of Kerala. It says, the *Vṛuddhasadanam*(old-age homes) were the immediate need of the society then. In the novel, society is pictured in such a way that the ‘old’ has no role in the family or in the society. They get marginalised, and are becoming a burden to the rest of the society. The novel says, the old age homes for the old are not the idea of old, but of the rest of society who take decision for the old. It gives the impression that the modern world is not for the ‘old’.\(^{56}\) But when we re-read the novel with a reflexive mind, it gives certain post modern concepts of uncertainty towards the reality.


\(^{56}\) *Karunam* and *Ammakkilikkodu* are the two movies in Malayalam conveying similar thought.
Dynamics of Migration in Kerala: Dimensions, Differentials and Consequences by Zachariah, Mathew and Irudaya Rajan\(^{57}\) is a book about the relatively new development in Kerala: the migration that began to take place mostly since the 1960s. After independence of India, out-migration increasingly became a way of life for the educated youth of Kerala. Hence, an emerging problem is the care of the elderly in families from which the youth and the middle-aged have migrated, leaving their parents alone to take care of themselves. The year 1999 was the year of the elderly, and since then the problem of the elderly received considerable attention in the Government circles and by the academicians. The section of the book ‘Migration and the Elderly’ is about the elderly population of Kerala. It provides information about the impact of migration on the elderly.

Relevance and Justification of the Study

The literature survey indicates that the scientific study of social aspects of ageing (social gerontology) is a twentieth century phenomenon. Many macro as well as micro level studies have been made by the western researchers. They cover all the aspects of social gerontology. Most of them can be considered as the responses to the increasing awareness about old age as a serious social problem. Age-specific theories and policies have emerged as a result of such studies. But the literature on the subject in

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India, especially that in the context of Kerala is mainly about the societal consequences of ageing: increasing trend of greying population, problems faced by the elderly, challenges of ageing in the twenty-first century, directions towards productive ageing, information regarding the available policies for the elderly, and the details about the old-age home facilities. It is not very concerned about how the social context defines ageing or what are the social factors--economic, social and political-- that define the concept ageing. On the contrary, *Dynamics of Migration in Kerala: Dimensions, Differentials and Consequences* analyses the impacts of migration, a recently developed societal factor, on the elderly. But a historical explanation is necessary to know how ageing is defined by the society. All the societal factors, social, economic and political, are important in the knowing of concepts of old age in society. This study seeks to show how societal factors mould the conception of old age. In order to know the changes in the conception of old age, it examines the position of the elderly in both traditional and modern Kerala.

The historical narration is important for this study, because the social context of the earlier society is not the same as that of the modern society. Each defines ageing differently. When the economy was organized around agriculture, the aged were situated in the socio-cultural context of the joint family system. The society provided certain age-specific roles and status to the elderly. But the modern society considers the aged as burden to
the society. Modern social theories provide certain tips such as disengagement theory, activity theory and so on to lead a happy aged life. The reasons underlying this problematic consideration of old age today is an important matter. Knowledge of the reasons may minimise the burdensome feeling too. For that purpose, the present study analyzes the social contexts of both the earlier and modern society separately. Economic, social, political, familial, and religious factors are studied in detail.

The literature survey shows that none of the sociological literature of Kerala are examining the social context to gain an understanding of the meanings attributed to the phenomenon, ‘old age as a social problem’. Rather, they are based on statistical logic and looked on for comparison of group or a relationship between variables and worked on preordained hypotheses. Those analyses are based on numerical data that are used to quantify relationships between phenomena. But such an analysis is not enough to bring forth a qualitative result for a study that needs to know the impact of social context to the definition of ageing as a social problem. It is the social reality that is profoundly buried and a socially constructed one. It is inseparable from its contexts like family, friends, social, cultural, political, economic and historic circumstances that circumscribe one’s life. Peter L.Berger and Thomas Luckmann says, “The reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the process
in which this occurs”.\textsuperscript{58} A qualitative analysis of the context is necessary to bring forth a sociological knowledge of old age, which is a social issue in a particular context. So the tool that we use must be an appropriate one to highlight the profound realities of relationships between the old and the society. For this reason, the study uses the qualitative approach, which “is grounded in a concern with people’s everyday realities, seeking to understand how people experience and make sense of their lives”.\textsuperscript{59} This study based on qualitative analysis, which is highly relevant today as it can explain how ageing becomes a social issue.

Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann are of the opinion that the ‘the sociological understanding of “reality” and “knowledge” falls somewhere in the middle between that of men in the street and that of the philosopher’.\textsuperscript{60} So a qualitative analysis substantiated by the theoretical explanations can easily explain the phenomenon. Tim May says\textsuperscript{61} that theory is a ‘life jacket’ which provides buoyancy and provides its wearer with the confidence to continue on the journey. The analysis by the use of theories makes it a reflexive one, which produces knowledge. Ideas of human action and consciousness are also the scope of the present study.

At the same time the study does not neglect the relevance of empirical inquiry. It takes a small sample for case studies from the particular setting of the district Pathanamthitta. The sample was taken from the middle-income group. The reason is that ‘the change in conception of old age’ is largely affected by the middle income group. For the lower income group, the problem of old age has not changed much from tradition to modernity. In most cases, both male and female among the poor undertake work till they are physically capable of doing for their own subsistence and to support their family. The higher income group, normally lead a successful life with considerable bank balance and social position; for them, the old age may not be a problem as such in both the traditional and modern settings. They may be respected by their children (at least for the inheritance) or they can employ servants to retain their previous life style. But those who are newly rich or the middle income group are affected by the changed conceptions of old age. They are the beneficiaries of social changes either by the economic prosperity due to the children’s endeavours, or by the position or job acquired by them. For them, the problem of old age is different from traditional society to modern.

In this analysis of respective social contexts, neither is there any adherence to a particular discipline nor to a particular theory. An attempt is made to use different perspectives. For that purpose, this researcher has used an interdisciplinary approach. It enables her to construct reality of
ageing not from a single discipline, but from different disciplines, social, economic or political, and this could be a point of view that may not belong to any existing discipline.

The state Kerala has recognized older persons as a priority target group for social welfare interventions and policies such as old age pension scheme and shelter for the old. Help Age India functions as a voluntary charity organization for the care of the aged\(^62\). With the mushrooming tendency of ‘old-age homes’\(^63\) the present study with the title ‘shift in social conception of old age’ is particularly relevant. The methodology that is used to understand the factors of the social context that defines ageing is extremely important. It helps to know the epistemological foundations or causes of the conceptual shift to the theme, changed conceptions of old age.

**Methodology**

“Guesswork, intuition and common sense, all have an important part to play in sociological research, but they cannot produce reliable evidence on their own. Only using reliable research methodology can produce reliable evidence. A methodology is a system of rules, principles and

\(^{62}\) Help Age India has 23 centres in all over India. *Seminar 488 APRIL 2000, -A Symposium on the Graying of Our Society*, New Delhi, Romeshraj Trust, p. 47.

\(^{63}\) The directory compiled in 1982 by the Centre for the Welfare of the Aged (CEWA) listed 379 agencies, but a decade later in 1992, it reported 665 organizations of which a large number is in Kerala. *Seminar 488,... Op.cit.*, pp. 44-45.
procedures that guides scientific investigation”. A sociologist is interested in discovering what happens in the social world and why it happens. “Research methodology provides guidelines for collecting evidence about what takes place, for explaining why it takes place and for doing so in such a way that other researchers can check the findings”. The task of unravelling research problems becomes easier when we examine it with the techniques, tools and procedures developed by the social scientists. It has been rightly observed, “there is no short cut to truth, no way to gain knowledge of universe except through the gateway of scientific methods”. Hence, methodology is primarily the science of construction of knowledge. It is only through the scientific method that the profoundly buried truth or knowledge can be extracted from the social universe. Therefore, for the sake of scientific construction of knowledge, certain tools and techniques have been carefully utilized for the data collection and analysis.

Since the study considers that the statistical approach is not enough to understand, describe, interpret and present the reasons underlying the issue of ‘old age as a social problem’, it relies mainly on qualitative approach. Qualitative research is pluralistic, comprising a variety of approaches that reflects both philosophical and epistemological positions.

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65 *idem.*
and the demands of the specific research context.\textsuperscript{67} Fundamental to qualitative methodology, there is a concern to describe and understand how people make sense of their lives through an exploration of their perspectives and everyday realities. This gives credence to people’s beliefs, value systems and the meanings with which they make sense of their lives and experiences. In it, the people are inseparable from their contexts, whether social, cultural, economic, political or historical. Recognizing this co-operative and interactive nature of qualitative inquiry, the present study uses this as the appropriate method. The qualitative methodology is adequate to the questions that pertain to values, beliefs, motivations, person, environment, interactions, human behaviours and meanings. Due to these reasons, qualitative methodology is appropriate to the present study.

The methods of heuristic and hermeneutic are equally important in the production of knowledge in any study. The heuristic method is the method of data collection. Generally this can be done by two ways: primary method and secondary method. Hermeneutic says that the techniques of data collection are worked out on the insight of theories. Both the data and theory are essential and each thrives on the other in the construction of knowledge. Hermeneutic method of theoretical explanations is important in the analysis of accumulated data. The

hermeneutics is concerned here with the problems of understanding and the interpretation of data. Various social theories of ageing are used here for providing such explanations.

**Setting of the Study**

Setting represents the place, the region or area from which primary data are secured through field investigation. Selection of a setting is important for an empirical work and the qualitative inquiry always preferred for a natural setting rather than a laboratory. Due to the following reasons the district, Pathanamthitta is chosen as the setting of the study of this research.

The number of the elderly in Kerala is estimated to be about 3.4 million in 1998 constituting about eleven percent of the total population. When we look into the district-wise distribution; it is Pathanamthitta, which has the highest proportion of the elderly, 15.5 per cent. There are many other peculiarities that make Pathanamthitta a microcosm of modern Kerala where old age is an important social issue. It is one of the most advanced districts in the state with respect to demographic transition; and the district has the highest migration rate in the state. Modern achievements such as high literacy rate, highly educated population, higher number of female migrants, good number of old age homes etc. show the potential of the setting to be chosen for a study, which seeks how old age is being affected by modernization.

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The Sample

The sample is the foundation of any empirical research. It is a small number of individuals drawn from the larger population. It is a miniature picture of a section of the entire group. When a large number of things are to be investigated, the investigator finds it difficult and so a relatively small number is taken as a character of the universe. The qualitative methodology is appropriate when the sample is small.

For this particular study, the investigator used the method of purposive sampling, because the investigator had knowledge, about the nature and other statistical information about that area. By this method, the researcher with the help of local leaders of various communities purposively selected the sample.

The size of the sample should be adequate to represent empirical investigation. Keeping this in view, it was decided to draw a sizeable sample from the universe (people belonging to the age group of sixty and above in Pathanamthitta). Since case study method is chosen as the major tool of field investigation, a small sample of forty two cases was selected--six respondents each from seven communities of the area constituted the small sample of forty two cases. The communities from which the sample was taken through purposive sampling are: the Marthomite, the Orthodox, and Catholic, all belonging to Syrian Christians, (percentage distribution of
Syrian Christians in the district is 48.8), the Nairs (percentage distribution of Nairs in the district is 11), the Ezhavas (percentage distribution of Ezhavas in the district is 13.5) and SC/ST (percentage distribution of SC/ST in the district is 8.6) and the Muslims (percentage distribution of Muslims in the district is 1.3). The sample was from the middle income group, the beneficiaries of modernization in one way or the other. Equal representation to the male-female classification is strictly followed.

**The Role of the Researcher**

The researcher is recognized as being an integral part of the research process, shaping the collection of data and interpreting, explaining or describing human behaviour from the perspectives of those participating in the study. Engaging in an intellectual process through which the knowledge and experience of those under study is juxtaposed with the knowledge, sensitizing concepts and experience of the researcher, the outcome of the research is clearly a joint construction. Reflexivity of the researcher is important in the production of knowledge in qualitative study.

**Tools and Techniques**

Certain tools and techniques have been used to generate primary data from the field. The following are the major ones:

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Open-ended Interview Schedule

The sample of the study composed of the aged persons of Pathanamthitta district consists of both men and women from seven communities. Keeping in view the nature of study and the sample mentioned above, it was considered proper to make use of an interview schedule to collect data on the various facets of the subject under investigation. It was framed keeping the central theme of the study in mind. To elicit the idea of change in conception of old age, various approaches of direct and indirect questions were included in the schedule. Since it was framed with the intention to elicit reasons behind the changed conceptions of old age, it contains numerous questions geared to achieve the same end. For example, the first part was formulated to acquire personal identification such as name, age, sex, address, marital status, caste/community, profession, type of family unit and status in community. To make the interviewee comfortable, the second part starts with three general questions to elicit the idea of change in conception of old age. It seeks respondents’ idea about the conception of old age in their parents’ or grandparents’ time. The third part of the interview schedule was an indirect approach to find out the reasons for the changes today. While framing questions, the interviewer assumed that the answers to questions of second part will be mostly in the area of socio-psychological problems. That is, she would direct the interviewee in the third part to a more historical-comparative
mode of thought covering selected political, economic, sociological, cultural, and religious reasons for this change. These topics were introduced in Malayalam and consequently simplified and/or expanded in the interview. The third part included ten questions. The fourth part was the enquiry about how people handle these changes about the conception of old age today. Five questions regarding the people’s and society’s participation to the handling of old age issue are taken care of here.

**Case Study**

For this study, case study method by using the open-ended interview schedule was the major device of data collection. A case study brings out the narrative description that enables the researcher to arrive at the actual human experience and attitudes, which constitute the full, live and actual social reality. The open-ended interview schedule made the study more authentic and valuable, because it helped in directing the conversation to the central theme of the study. The case study took at least six months (mainly from January to June of the year 2003) to furnish data collection from the selected sample. The survey of the old-age homes and the visits to the organizations and worship places of the seven selected communities were done during the year 2002.

**Interview**

Interview is one of the most reliable and commonly used devices for obtaining information. An interview assists in finding out how people feel,
what they experience and what they remember and what their motives and emotions are like. It is the method adopted to conduct case study and collect data from the sample. It was also feasible to establish a good rapport with the respondents through repeated visits and long sittings. Since the sample of the study belongs to the aged category, they enjoyed the interview as a part of their leisure time. Gathering of personal and sensitive facts would not have been possible without long interviews.

Besides the respondents from the selected sample, the leaders of the communities, officials of various organizations, priests of the seven selected communities, village spokesmen, wardens of old-age homes and their inmates were interviewed extensively. The unstructured interactions gave valuable facts of high authenticity.

**Observation**

The data and facts gathered by means of interviews virtually form the major basis for the study. However, at the same time it cannot be denied that the researcher also gains knowledge through observation during the investigation. Since most of the interviews were conducted in the household settings or institutions (like old-age homes), it was possible to observe and gauge various facts related to, for example, the behaviour of other family members to the aged respondents, or the working personnel to the inmates of the old age homes. All the observations and perceptions
gathered were in a non-participatory mode without which the study would have been incomplete.

**Extended Debates**

Group discussions and debates provide essential atmosphere for the expression of arguments and counter arguments. This method generates new ideas and perceptions about the theme that was introduced. The positive and negative opinions help to accelerate the thinking process and reflexivity of the participants and the researcher. For this study, the extended debates among the senior citizens of the several churches, organizations (senior citizen forum, Alzheimer’s meeting etc.), and inmates of old age homes were helpful in providing new insights and societal responses. The extensive field visits (visits to the old-age homes and other care giving organizations to the aged) and the case studies are undertaken during the years 2002-2003.

**Secondary Data Collection**

Secondary data collection is the method of an indirect approach, but is equally important as the primary method for an investigation. The sources of data are articles, essays, journals, periodicals, newspapers, research papers and the books published by the earlier researchers. For this study, secondary method was vital, because the historical shift from traditional society to the modern society brings forth the reasons
underlying the changed conceptions of old age. It relied mainly on the historical records and books of history of Kerala. Reports and records of various community organizations also helped in the collection of data. Materials were also obtained from the Internet.

**Analysis of Data**

Since the study considers qualitative methodology important in the production of knowledge from a social universe where the truth is a profoundly buried one, the method of hermeneutics is equally important in its analysis. The data are analyzed based on the insight of social theories and theories of ageing. The explanations substantiated by the theories are the peculiarities of hermeneutic method of qualitative analysis. Analysis of the data is often inductive and interpretive, that is, reasoning from specific incidences and recurrent patterns within data is linked to general conclusions or principles.

**The Chapter Scheme**

First Chapter is the Introduction which covers the statement of the topic, a review of some of the available literature, the scope and significance of the study, the methodology employed and finally the chapter lay out.

The second chapter is the social conception of old age in premodern Kerala. It traces the transition of traditional social configuration from the first century till the British period. The chapter deals with the position of the old in the tribal society and the status of the aged in stratified societies. A caste-wise
and community-wise discussion of the condition of the aged in the overall historical context of agrarian social system and caste-hierarchy is the major content of this chapter. The discussion covers the status of the aged women in each caste. Patriarchal joint families and matrilineal joint families were adequate to accommodate the old in premodern Kerala.

The main concern of third chapter is to describe how modernization brought changes about the conception about old age. Colonial modernity was a causal factor for this changed conception in Kerala situation. The reform movements and the British domination changed the caste domination of its traditional set-up, followed by the formation of civil society. The initiation of individuation process through education and the emergence of modern institutions are the impact of colonial modernity. They constitute new ‘subjects’ through the exercise of power and brought about changes in the traditional concept of old as the power given ‘subjects’. The role of the elderly in modern political, economic, social, cultural and religious fields is described in the chapter so as to analyse the concept of old age today.

Chapter four serves as the empirical illustration to the historical concepts enumerated in chapter three. This empirical chapter describes how the district Pathanamthitta has become a microcosm of modern Kerala and the social changes make it as an appropriate setting for a study about the changed conceptions of old age. Major points such as why Pathanamthitta was chosen as
the area of study, the socio-economic profile of the area, and the details about the organisations of communities are included in this chapter.

Chapter five discusses the changing social conception of old age. The major findings of case studies are dealt with. The findings are categorised into five major heads: political, economic, social, cultural/educational, religious and institutional. They are recorded systematically on community basis. The analysis on the basis of community explains how the respondents from each community and the community itself have undergone the process of subjectivization.

Chapter six is the concluding analysis to the title shift in social conception of old age in the light of social theory. It explains how the discursive practices of premodern and modern Kerala constitute the human beings into ‘subjects’ so as to produce certain concepts. The impact of modern apparatuses in the production of concepts is analysed here. Also it helps to explain why the Syrian Christians are more aware of this changed concept of old age. It can be regarded as the individuation process of Syrian Christians that they attained through education and migration.