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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Aging is a global phenomenon. There has been increasing interest in recent years in the problem of aging. 'Aging' and 'aged' have been subject of interest throughout history. Long before 'aging' aroused scientific interest, old age was a theme in the stories, myths, and culture of societies. The scientific study of aging is a twentieth century phenomenon.

The twentieth century is at its fag-end. We experienced great scientific advances in the form of two World wars as well as in the form of increasing quality of life for larger and larger populations on the global front. No part of the world has remained isolated or unknown from the rest. We are facing and feeling many problems in different cultural environments as common or at least comparable. Adoption of values and systems could be replicated and given trials. Nations having disorganizing effects within the present context. However, the global society does not have uniform standards of culture to judge human behaviour. Demographic Projections reveal the existence of the phenomena of aging in every country with their numbers and percentages. The number of old people in every society (1) is increasing.
The increased scientific concern for old age is a recent development and is a result of rapid increase in the population of elderly persons above 60. According to UNESCO estimate, the number of the aged above 60 is likely to go up from 350 million in 1975 to 590 million in 2005. About half of them live in developing countries. India alone has 43 million old people according to 1981 census. The analysis of census data of some past decades clearly revealed that the increase in the proportion of people above 60 was far higher than the rate of increase in general population. This trend is expected to continue in future also implying thereby increasing number of the aged at a much faster rate than ever before. The demographic shift in the aging population calls for systematic efforts for understanding the problem and meeting the special requirements of the growing number of the aged who are becoming increasingly vulnerable owing to the recent changes in society, economy and psychology of the people. (2)

Aging has emerged as an important area of study because it has come to be viewed as a social problem as well as because it is interesting. It is seen as a social problem because older people have become more visible as their numbers increased, because urbanization and industrialization have produced changes that undercut the traditional position of the older person in society, and because of the fast pace
of change in urban, industrial societies which has created obstacles to social adjustment in terms of accommodating an increased number and proportion of older people. It is a well known fact that problem of aging is assuming alarming situation in the developed countries.

Aging is a universal phenomenon. The word "Aging" has been defined variably by researchers in different contexts. Becker C. S. defines aging in the broadest sense, "as those changes occurring in an individual, as a result of the passage of time". According to Stiehlitz, "Aging is a part of living. It begins with conception and terminates with death. Aging change is rapid in youth and even more rapid pre-nataly in the period between conception and birth". Tibbits C., says "aging may best be defined as the survival of a growing number of people who have completed the traditional adult roles of making a living and childrearing". Burgess E. W. also defined the term aging. In his view, "Aging as the term implies, is a process. It begins even before birth and continues until death. As such, aging is synonymous with human development. Customarily, however, the term 'aging' is taken to mean the later stage or stages of the processes". Robert C. Atchley defined term aging clearly. In his view, "Aging is a general term used for various biological, Psychological and social processes whereby an individual acquires the socially defined characteristics of old age". Aging is a broad concept which
does not refer to only one process but to many; hence, it is difficult to define the term aging precisely.

Aging is a multidimensional process. As Birren J. E. et. al. have explained: "Aging is a process of changes involving all aspects of the organism. Its consequences range from altered structures and functions of the component tissues of the body to an altered relationship of the organism to its physical and social environment. The term "aging" is meant to denote determinate patterns of late life changes, changes eventually shown by all persons though varying in rate and degree. In this usage, aging lies close to concepts of growth and development in which most members of a species are regarded as showing a representative pattern of change. Aging is defined as a progression of adult changes characteristic of the species and which should occur in all individuals if they live long enough."

Primary scientific interest in aging until recently has focused on the time-related changes in the individual Organisms and personality. As the field has developed, four principal facets have emerged: biological changes, changes in psychological capacities and performance, alteration in the situation and position of the individual in society; and the manner in which the aging individual organizes his feelings, self-concepts, and behaviour in response to
internal changes and to the pressures and definitions of society. Therefore, the study of aging is a tremendously varied field. It is, of necessity, multidisciplinary, and this is both its strength and its weakness. The blending of many disciplines—sociology, Psychology, Economics, Biology and so on—reminds us that human behaviour is multifaceted. No single approach can lay claim to possession of "truth". Gerontology has long benefited from recognition of this fact. Yet the multiple "truths" of aging also make is an exceedingly complex topic, not easily grasped in its entirety. Though aging is a natural, inevitable and multidimensional process and it is not easy to determine when it starts, yet for the purpose of understanding it can be discussed at four levels: biological, sociological, Psychological and Socio-psychological. These are four related but separate aspects for the study of aging.

**ASPECTS OF AGING:**

As is already pointed out that the study of aging included all of the processes which are part of the aging experience, as well as those which intrude upon, and affect, that experience. Thus study of aging is truly a multidisciplinary field which includes the medical researcher studying the causes of arteriosclerosis, the experimental psychologist studying the effect of the age of rats on learning, the sociologist studying the impact of
modernization on the position of the aged, the economist studying social security systems, and the social worker studying the need for services.

Scientists have used four major aspects from which the problem of aging has been viewed, Biological, Sociological, Psychological, and Socio-psychological or behavioral aspects. Atchley R. C. describes these aspects of aging. "The biological aspect deals with physical aging -- the body's gradual loss of the ability to renew itself. The psychological aspect deals with the sensory processes, perceptions, motor skills, intelligence, problem-solving ability, understanding, learning processes, drives, and emotions of the aging individual. The biological and psychological changes that occur with advancing age are coupled with the social environment of the individual to produce a third aspect the behavioral. This aspect of aging deals with the aged person's attitudes, expectancies, motives, self-image, social roles, personality, and psychological adjustment to aging. Finally, sociological aspect of aging deals with the society in which aging occurs, the influence this society has on aging individuals, and the influence they have on society. Health, income, work, and leisure of older people are areas which relate to their families, friends, voluntary associations, and religious groups as well as to society in general, the economy, the
Government, and the community, are all part of the sociology of aging.

**CLARK TIBBITS** describes the sociological aspect of aging is concerned with changes in the circumstances or situations of the individual as a member of the family, the community, and society. The changes and events associated with time include age-grading and social attitudes and behaviour of society towards the aging individual, completion of parental and work roles, reduced income, restricted activity and mobility, loss of spouse and associated, large increments of free time and relative absence of clearly defined social expectations”.

The Psychological and Sociological aspect of aging briefly include income maintenance, employment, housing, use of medical services, social mobility, and intergenerational relationship arises because there is a gradual decline or loss of social roles as the individual advances from middle-age to old age. With the advance of age there is a corresponding decline in social activities which prove all the more excruciating after retirement. Biological aging refers to anatomical and physiological changes that occur with age. For example, changes in sensory-motor performance, muscle, strength, brittleness of the skeletal structure, visual acuity, reaction time and balance are examples of biological aging which may influence attitudes and behaviour.
Psycho-social or behavioural aspect of aging refers to systematic changes in personality, needs, expectations and behaviour, as well as changes in status and roles and changes in relation to other. These four aspects of aging - biological, psychological, sociological and behavioural, -- are all interrelated in the lives of Older people. Hence, study of aging has become a truly interdisciplinary field, encompassing biological, psychological and social concerns.

**CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON AGING:**

"While sociologists are likely to examine in great detail the older person's roles, status, functional utility and style of life in a particular culture at one point in time, anthropologists most often compare and contrast these variables and their interrelationships in a variety of different cultures. In comparing the relative position and status of older persons in different cultures, a number of patterns have emerged depending on the type of culture and the perceived role of older persons in these cultures". (14)

Cross-cultural studies on aging indicate that "aging is not the same experience in different societies or even in the same society at different times. The aged may be better or worse off, depending upon the structure of the society, the conditions of life (including the environment), attitudes toward aging, services provided to Older people, family structure, and so on". There are a number of
variables, often interrelated, which either separately or in some combination seem to relate to the status accorded older persons in various cultures. They include: family form, religion, knowledge base of culture, harshness of the environment, the means of production, and the speed of social changes. Therefore, we find a wide variety of patterns of human behavior regarding the treatment of the older members in different cultures, some being treated with a reverent respect and some being cruelly putting them to death.

It is frequently assumed that aging is a more positive experience in some cultures -- especially in traditional and nonindustrial societies such as those that are based on agriculture, rearing animals or hunting and gathering for food. On the other hand, it is often assumed that industrialization has led to a breakdown of traditional social supports so that older persons face critically sorry situation in highly developed societies. The situation is actually far more complex than what these assumptions suggest and over all, the elderly in today's modern society are probably well cared of. Of course, there are some cultures where it is better to grow old than others, and persons of higher socio-economic status generally are treated better than persons of lower socio-economic status in all societies.
Several cultures have extremely harsh or extremely reverent attitudes toward aging. Beauvoir (1972) described some of the cultures in which old people were killed or allowed to die when they were no longer productive, these events usually involved a ceremony of some kind, were sometimes viewed as a sacrifice for the well-being of the community. "Among the Hopi, the Creek and the Crow Indians, and the Bushmen of South Africa, it was customary to lead the aged person to a hut specially built for the purpose away from the village and there to abandon him, leaving a little food and water. The Eskimo, whose resources are meagre and most uncertain, persuade the old to go and lie in the snow and wait for death; or they forget them on an ice-floe when the tribe is out fishing; or they shut them into an igloo, where they die of cold".

"Simmons (1945) examined the records that had been complied on 71 different tribal societies, finding that violent killing of older people was fairly common in 11 tribes and neglect or abandonment of the elderly was common in 18 of them. He noted that abandonment was more common among nomadic people and hunters, while violent killing was more likely in tribes living in a severe climate, with impermanent residence and an irregular food supply. These practices were less common among tribes that cultivated grain or relied on other agricultural food supplies, which were
fairly constant so that they did not have to move frequently, and among those that had developed a concept of property rights, centralized authority, and codified laws. Thus harshness of the environment and necessity appeared to be the main factors that inclined some tribes to treat their aged harshly. Also, a few societies where the aged were especially powerful, because of magic or secret ceremonies, some times treated the aged harshly after their magic power had gone". On the other hand Beauvoir noted (1972) several other societies where high status was granted to the elderly -- These are the Navajo in North America, The Jivaro in South America, The Lile and Tiv in Africa, and the Mende (20) in Sierra Leone.

Between these two extremes, there is wide diversity in the status and treatment of the elderly. Beauvoir (1972) has noted, "that most societies have mixed feelings about the aged -- love, disgust, respect, fear. Certainly the magical and religious importance attributed to older people in many societies would suggest a mixture of respect and fear. It is still true that older people may be mocked in private but treated with public deference, or honored in words but (21) neglected in practice". Harlan (1964) also concluded "that the status of older people depends on a wide variety of factors, even within non-industrialized societies. He noted that special attention should be given to the level of
prestige granted to older persons based on their socio-economic status, that actual family and community power or authority may differ from the reported norms of the culture, and that many factors other than the degree of urbanization or industrialization may contribute to the difference in status of the elderly between urban industrialized countries and rural non-industrial societies". Palmore and Manton (1974) in a cross-cultural study of 31 countries, found "the relative status of the aged lower in more modernized societies, also showed some betterment of the position of older people. Such societies may begin to create new roles for the aged, as well as provide greater social and economic security". Cowgill and Holmes (1972) surveyed several less modernized nations, and found that "in all societies, older people are transferred to activities that are less strenuous and physically exacting -- to roles that are more advisory or supervisory. However, they also found that in the societies they surveyed, old people tended to retain power through control over land and the use of land. Older people also retained power as a result of religious beliefs which place elders in the strongest position to influence the supernatural".

Studies of aging in different cultural settings have revealed a number of observable characteristics. "There is great diversity around the world in the patterns of aging,
and there is no convincing evidence that aging was better for the typical old person in historical times or in preindustrial societies. In some societies, aging appears to be a very good life experience, especially if one has power, money, or some kind of magic, and the society values these things -- even if one is infirm or widowed. In other societies, the aged are treated harshly, usually when they are no longer productive or protected by a powerful spouse or family. There is considerable debate and no clear consensus about the factors that differentiate cultures to make them positive toward aging or negative toward it, but even these terms are too simplistic when the great diversity of cultures (25) and the complexity within a culture are recognized”. Thus, in relatively traditional, slowly changing societies of preindustrial world elders command respect and hold power because of their accumulated knowledge and experience. In rapidly changing industrialized modern societies on the other hand the experience of the aged becomes obsolete; they do not command new skills, traditions are less important because of emphasis on future orientation and consequently the elders do not hold much power, prestige or position of authority.
THEORIES OF AGING : THEMES AND ISSUES :

Accordingly, sociologists and psychologists have advanced a number of theories that describe changes in the elderly in terms of the changes in their social environment. Generally, scientists utilize an inter-disciplinary approach in explaining the lifestyles and behavior patterns of older people and have not yet produced any "grand" social theories of aging. Current approaches are still relatively modest. The most prominent earlier approaches are "disengagement theory" and "activity theory". The sociological study of aging centers around three major issues: firstly the engagement versus disengagement theory, secondly integration versus segregation theory and lastly the role theory.

1. ENGAGEMENT VERSUS DISENGAGEMENT THEORITICAL ORIENTATION :

The study of aging was demonstrated for a long time by a theory of engagement. Cavan (1949) assumed that old age does not differ much from middle age. He emphasized that most aging people resent the role-loss imposed on them by society and resist the shrinkage of their social world. According to him, the best way to avoid the adverse effects of aging is to continue to maintain the level of activities and the contacts with middle age-group as long as possible and to find suitable substitute when one is forced to relinquish the pre-aging patterns. The keys to optimal aging are activity, outgoingness and involvement in social life.
In the early 1960s Cumming E. and Henry W. E. (1961) formulated the disengagement theory, which views aging as a progressive process of physical, psychological and social withdrawal from the wider world. On the physical level, people slow down their activity and conserve their energy, whereas on the psychological level, they withdraw their concern from the wider world to focus on those aspects of life that immediately touch them. Simultaneously, they shift attention from the outer world to the inner world of their own feelings and thoughts. And on the social level, a mutual withdrawal is initiated, which results in decreased interaction between the aging and other members of society.

According to Cumming and Henry, the process is one of double withdrawal. The individual disengages from society, and society from the individual. Accordingly, they view disengagement as a gradual and mutually satisfying process by which society and the individual prepare in advance for the ultimate "disengagement" of incurable, incapacitating disease and death. They speak of the elderly as "wanting" to disengage, and as doing it by reducing the number of roles they play, severing many relationships, and weakening the intensity of the relationships that remain. Consequently, the elderly can face death peacefully, knowing that their social ties are minimal, that they have said all their goodbyes, and that nothing more remains for them to do.
So far as society is concerned it encourages disengagement because it can gradually transfer the functions previously performed by the aged to the young. In this manner, society minimizes the problems and disruption that otherwise might be associated with the increasing incompetence or inevitable death of the aged.

The disengagement theory has been widely attacked and widely defended. Scores of articles have presented evidence on one side or the other. Generally, cross-cultural studies have been used by both sides, and as discussed in the previous section, these studies tend to confuse generational differences with age differences. On the whole, however, the weight of the evidence seems to be generally against the major tenets of the theory, at least in the unqualified form stated above. Indeed, at least for those under seventy-five, aging seems to be accompanied by stability and by continuity in levels of participation in such voluntary associations as religious, civic, service, patriotic and fraternal or sororonal organizations. And one survey using a sample of those sixty-five and older residing in a midwestern community of 35,000 found no evidence of a sharp drop in such affiliations, not even for those eighty or over. However, the very elderly were less likely to hold multiple memberships and to be active participants in groups.
In sum, the disengagement theory exaggerates the isolation and separation of the elderly from significant aspects of their preretirement lives.

2. **INTEGRATION VERSUS SEGREGATION: THEORETICAL EXPLANATION**

   It is postulated that while the elderly used to be integrated into the family and society, they are now increasingly segregated. Classification of living arrangements of old people from the point of view of their opportunity for contact with members of other age-groups and with each other yields a continuum ranging between maximal residential integration to maximal residential segregation. Early sociological theory maintained that industrialization had disintegrating effect on rural communities. With shrinkage in the size of the family there was corresponding shrinkage in the function of the family. It led to the loss of many roles in the family which ultimately resulted in greater degree of isolation of the aged. With the increase in the number of aged population in 20th century, and gradual disappearance of extended families their replacement by nuclear or immediate families gave rise to the weakening of social ties and relatively more isolation of the aged.

   Talcott Parson’s (1964) concept of ‘isolated’ conjugal family consists only of a married couple and their dependent children which is the ‘normal’ house-hold unit of
American Society. Parson argued that, "Old people do not fit into such system: firstly, old age as such is not valued highly, on the contrary there is a romantic idealization of youth patterns, secondly, the older generation is structurally isolated from conjugal families of their married children. In a very large proportion of cases separation is considerable. After retirement from man's occupational role (34) old people tend to be 'left out of it'. But Rosow (1964) is of the opinion that "while old people lose some of the central relationships in family such as those with a spouse and with siblings, there is little or no evidence of a decline in contacts with children. Some relatives is occasionally hypothesised but it has not been successfully (35) demonstrated".

Shanas and her associates (1968) have posed many questions in this connection. Such as, "Do old people lose touch with their married children and lead an isolated life? Are the bonds of kinship of little or no consequence, especially in urban areas? And do the old mix predominantly with their peers rather than with the younger generation? Several studies disclose that a minority of the elderly population is in fact isolated from kin. Many of them have no children, but they are in contact with their friends and neighbours -- and have reasonably high morale and are not lonely". Further in their own study of 'old people in three
industrial societies', they looked at older people from a number of different viewpoints: health, income, retirement etc., and came to the conclusion that the people of sixty-five and over are much more closely involved in interactions in industrial societies than had previously been believed. Taking into consideration the general health of the aged, personal and household functions performed by them, the number of services rendered to them by their families and the contacts they have with society around them; it can be concluded that the aging population are securely knit into the social structure.

Simmons (1960) has opined that, in fact really good information about the family life of older people in the past is lacking. Whatever information is available about the family life of old people in general do not support the theories that suggest old people in their family life have been isolated as a result of industrialization. In attempts of previous they to account for the changes in the life of the aged in industrial as compared with pre-industrial societies two points of fundamental importance have not been dealt with. Firstly, old people tend to be rare in pre-industrial but not so in industrial societies, secondly, in both pre-industrial and industrial societies a differentiation is made between relatively active and relatively infirm old age which has apparently been ignored by family theorists.
3. ROLE : THEORETICAL ORIENTATION :

Sociologist Zena Smith Blau (1973) has formulated the role exit theory of aging. According to Blau, retirement and widowhood terminate the participation of the elderly in the principal institutional structures of society—job and the family. Accordingly, the opportunities open to the elderly for remaining socially useful are severely undermined. Blau regards the loss of occupational and marital status as particularly devastating, since these positions are master statuses or core roles—anchoring points for adult identity.

Sociologist, Irving Rosow (1974) takes somewhat similar position. He argues that in the United States people are not effectively socialized to old age. The social norms that define the behavioural expectations for old age are weak, limited, and ambiguous. Further, the elderly have little motivation to conform to an essentially "roleless role"—a socially devalued status. Thus, even if there were adequate norms for guiding behaviour in older age, Rosow concludes that few people would want to conform to a role that excludes them from equal opportunities for special participation and rewards. Hence role loss is said to be a stressful experience for the elderly. The loss of both primary roles—occupational and familial—is generally
recognized as a critical for the aged. However, there has not yet been expects elderly persons to perform. In addition, there are different interpretations regarding the effects of this loss on the status of the elderly and the implications for social policy making.

Critics Contend, however, that role exit theorists exaggerate the social losses felt by most other persons (40) (Patmore, 1976). The Duke Longitudinal studies and other research dealing with life satisfaction indicate the most older people perceive little or no overall social loss (41) (Shanas et.al. 1968). Many indicate that the loss of their work and parental roles is offset by the increased freedom and opportunity to do things that they had always wanted to do but had no time for.

4. OTHER THEORETICAL ISSUES :

(a) SOCIAL EXCHANGE THEORY :

Sociologists like J. J. Dowd (1975, 1980) have (42) applied the social exchange theory to the aging process. According to this theory, people enter into social relationships because they derive rewards from doing so -- economic sustenance, recognition, a sense of security, love, social approval, gratitude, and the like. In the process of seeking such rewards, however, they also incur costs -- they
have negative, unpleasant experiences (effort, fatigue, embarrassment, and so on) or they are forced to abandon positive, pleasant experiences in order to pursue the rewarding activity. Profit is total reward minus total cost. In interaction, people are viewed as engaging in a sort of mental book-keeping that evolves a ledger of rewards costs, and profits. A relationship tends to persist only so long as both parties receive profit from it (Homans, 1974).

As applied to old age, social exchange theory suggests that the elderly find themselves in a situation of increasing vulnerability because of the deterioration in their bargaining position. In industrial societies, the skills they once had become increasingly outmoded through technological change, and the skills they still have can often be provided more efficiently and with less cost by others. Further, so long as older workers remain on the job, they block the upward career paths of younger workers. As a consequence of the declining power available to the elderly, older workers exchange their position in the labour force for the promise of social security and Medicare, that is, they "retire". However, as their numbers and political resources grow, the elderly may mount social movements in the years ahead to extract from society a more favourable distribution for themselves of benefits and privileges (Dowd, 1980).
Social Exchange Theorists, Cowgill and Holmes, (1972) and Cowgill, (1975), claim that their conceptions are supported by the inverse relationship they found between modernization and the status of the aged. They assume that the position of the aged in pre-industrial traditional societies is high because the aged tend to accumulate knowledge and control through their years of experience. Social exchange theorists believe that industrialization, on the other hand, undermines the importance of traditional knowledge and control.

However, exceptions can be found to the social exchange theorist’s assumption that the aged are assigned low status in modern industrial societies. Japan is one exception, for the Japanese values of filial piety and ancestor worship have mediated the impact of economic factors on the treatment of the elderly. While social exchange theory is helpful in drawing attention to elements of exchange that influence the position of the elderly in a society, the theory falls short of providing a complete explanation.

(b) **Activity Theory**:

Sociologists R. J. Havighurst, B. L. Neugarten and Sheldon S. Tobin (1968: 161), among others, have proposed
the activity theory as an alternative to the disengagement theory of aging: Except for the inevitable changes in biology and in health, older people are the same as middle-aged people, with essentially the same psychological and social needs. In this view, the decreased social interaction that characterizes old age results from the withdrawal by society from the aging person; and the decrease in interaction proceeds against the desires of most aging men and women. The older person who ages optimally is the person who stays active and who manages to resist the shrinkage of his social world. He maintains the activities of middle age as long as possible and then finds substitutes for those activities he is forced to relinquish.

On the whole, activity theorists agree with disengagement theorists that disengagement tends to increase sometime after sixty or sixty-five. They also find, however, that as an elderly person’s level of activity declines, so do feelings of satisfaction, contentment, and happiness. Some research confirms this conclusion. Hence, activity theorists deny a basic premise of disengagement theory, namely, that disengagement represents a desirable or optimum course.

Activity theorists find that the majority of healthy older persons maintain fairly stable levels of
activity. The amount of engagement or disengagement that does occur among the elderly appears to be more a function of past life patterns, socio-economic status, and health than of any inherent or inevitable process. All of this should not be taken to mean that an abundance of social activities is necessarily associated with a more positive life adjustment among older people. Although some elderly persons find happiness in a crowd, others seek contentment in a more solitary existence with equally positive results. Consequently, any number of researchers emphasize that it is not so much social activities and roles that determine successful aging but rather the person's inner, subjective experience of personal adjustment.

All of these theories describe changes and adjustments that are central to the later years of life. Each points toward its own notion of how the successful person adopts to aging. Most research consider, high activity to be the best way for the older person to transcend the physical and cognitive declines and the role exits of old age. But high activity may not be the answer for all older people. There are as many different personality types in old age as there are in youth. Some people may be happier if they remain disengaged from the outside world, rather than participate actively in it. It should be clear that, no one perspective can explain all of the social aspects of aging.
OLD AGE: CONCEPT, PROBLEMS AND CONSEQUENCES:

Aging as a process is a natural biological growth, no one can stop it; which takes the form of the problem when it transforms itself from aging to aged in point of time, in terms of its products, and cultural attitudes. And then it does not remain merely confined to the biological field alone; it invades psychological, social, occupational and economic fields as well. To respond to the question "what is old?" Scientists draw on studies and insights from the biological sciences, Social sciences, and the humanities. None of these alone is sufficient to describe or understand the process of aging.

Attempts have also been made to combine different conceptions of aging. Some people use their chronological as a criterion for their own aging, whereas other use such physical symptoms as failing eyesight or hearing, increased tendency to fatigue, decline in sexual potency. Still others assess their aging in terms of their capacity for work, their output in relation to standards set in earlier years, their lack of interest in competing with others, lack of motivation to do things to the past rather than dwell on the present or the future.

Just as old age is a universal phenomenon, "Every society has a group of persons who are defined as old. Age
Aging seems to be a universal phenomenon in all societies. Anthropologists maintain that without exception every society has divided its people into categories based on age. At different points in history, however, the age at which one was considered to be old has varied considerably. Forty-year-olds in many primitive societies would have been considered very old persons, having for the most part outlived the great majority of their cohorts.

The definition of 'Older persons' may differ from country to country as a result of differences in the level of longevity, in law, in customs in other public programmes. It is difficult to define 'Old age' precisely because the term 'Old' is used to describe persons of different ages depending on the circumstances and on the area of operation. In spite of these difficulties a person is treated as having become old on the basis of certain criteria. In opinion of R. C. Atchley, "Defining the term 'older person' is no easy task, for a number of reasons. First, aging beings very early in life. Biologists agree that almost as soon as the organism stops growing it begins the process of growing old. Second it is possible to measure age in two quite different ways. 'Chronological age' is calendar age. The life course measures a person's age in relation to an idealized sequence of events that begins with birth and ends with death. In between two points, there are many stages, events, and phases. The terms
childhood, adolescence, adulthood, middle age, later maturity, and old age refer to some of these phases. The chronological age of an individual is important in understanding aging only because it provides clues as to the current phase of the individual's life course.

Scientists have not been able to fix any lower age limit for older persons and this is due to certain socio-economic as well as psycho-physiological problems. A very important reason is the relativity of old age. People are considered to be old for different purposes and from the viewpoint of physical and mental health of the person. However, scientists generally identify four bases on which people are judged to be old or otherwise, namely the physiological, Psychological, Sociological, and chronological.

"Psychological definitions of old age are based on changing mental abilities, such as memory and intelligence, changing attitudes and changing emotional reactions. Here again there is no one age when all individuals begin to show the signs of aging. The rate of change is very slow and difficult to measure, and there are internal differences for a given individual in the appearance of the various signs of aging as well as in the rate at which they proceed. It is not feasible at present for determining who is old because the problems of measurement have not yet been surmounted".
"From a sociological viewpoint a person is old when he has relinquished the social relationships, roles and status which are more typical of persons in the later years of life." Even this base is not quite satisfactory and to explain its inadequacy the authors give examples from preliterate and urban communities. To continue in their own words: "In primitive societies it is relatively easy to classify persons in this way (i.e. sociologically), for in them definite active roles such as preparation of food and clothing, midwifery, ceremonial leadership, and the like have been assigned to older people. In modern urbanized America, however, there is no definite pace established for the aged, and as a result we cannot define old age precisely on the basis of sociological criteria".

R. M. Gray and D. O. Moberg also say that "Chronological age is the standard used by most who speak or write about it. Although age in years has varying significance for different individuals, many positions people fill in society are determined in part by their chronological age. A person's physiological, psychological and sociological age are related to this chronological age".

Ward R. A. have clearly defined the term old age. "Old age may be defined functionally as a substantial change in an individual's capacity to contribute to the work and protection of the group. This functional capacity is
determined by the socially perceived usefulness to the group of the qualities and abilities of its older members, and here cultural difference in the definition of age begin to emerge". According to Atchley R. C. "Old age is a stage of the life cycle socially defined or typified by increasing frailty and disability, much introspection and concern over the meaning of live; distinct awareness of approaching death; financial and physical dependency, isolation, boredom, and loneliness". Balu Z. S., says, "Old age is, after all, something more than a state of mind, since the aging process is marked by objective physical and behavioral changes. Although these changes usually occur gradually and, therefore, do not immediately intrude upon the consciousness of the individual, one might expect that they become increasingly apparent to him and his associates as the years pass and thus finally bring about identification with old people". Old age is the evening of one's life. It is the closing period in the life span. It is a "period of moving away from previous and more desirable period - 'the prime of life' or 'the years of usefulness'.

The idea of old age varies with circumstances and countries and there are different age limits fixed for people to enter into and retire from different spheres of activity. But old age, in addition, is the last stage, from which one can only retire in one's death though there could be an age
fixed for entering into that stage. The crux of the problem, therefore, is how to fix the lower limit of the age for the older persons. That limit, especially in modern times, is the age of retirement from one’s active life, i.e. the life of productive activities.

Public curiosity about aspects of human life-cycle is quite old, but the systematic study of aging is quite new. Students of intellectual history have noted that every period of history highlights a particular division of human life and designates a privileged age. Aries (1962) argues that youth was the privileged age of the seventeenth century, childhood of the nineteenth, and adolescence of the twentieth. Although old age is yet to be a time of privilege in modern societies, the aged and aging were discovered as social problems in late nineteenth century Europe and as social scientific problems in the second quarter of the twentieth century in the United States.

"Old age is a bio-economic contingency. It is biological in origination and economic in consequences. Retirement age on the other hand, is a legal concept. It is supposed to be the at which a person generally becomes unfit for playing an effective role in the productive system and hence he should take leave of employment. Old age also resembles invalidity. Invalidity becomes so prevalent in old
age that to prove it in individual cases is a worthless exercise. Moreover, incidence of sickness is also very high in old age. And unemployment, when it occurs during old age, is likely to continue for the rest of the life. Hence, old age is the basis on which retirement age is fixed”.

From the above quotation it shows that old age or retirement is a human problem. The old person suffers from several problems over which he has no control. Old age has become an acute problem in modern society. Modern industrial society puts high value on productive role of a person. Old age or retirement means a person is no longer playing his productive role in society. So his importance in society declines due to retirement or old age. The modern world is too materialistic in nature so with the lose of productive role due to retirement or old age, a person feels a loss of significance in life. As the following quotation amply proves the importance of the sense of significance in the life of old person.

"Significance is of course, only one of the many losses which characterize the position of the old person today. Fixed retirement policies, while of great benefit to many manual workers tried out prematurely by favourable working conditions, act unfavourably on others who have by no means completed their usefulness in national affairs. Unfortunately too, in a materialistic world, feelings of
significance are tied up with earning capacity, so that when the latter ceases, so does the former. The tragic fact is that not only may the retired person be less of himself once gainful employment in past. He also suffers some restriction in material prosperity since his pension is generally only a fraction of what he earned, while the savings he carefully put away years earlier have suffered from economic inflation. Sooner or latter in retirement health too many deteriorate, the body and mind becoming merely feeble or actually diseased. This loss of health is commonly accompanied by failure of the special senses of sight and hearing, so that the enjoyment of some of life pleasures which should make leisure hours sweet is restricted, and individuals independence in life threatened. Bereavements, too, become common, the marriage partner, relations of the some generation and old friends die while, if one lives long enough, one's own children predecease one, so that the old person is absolutely alone in the world".

The psychological problems too, are involved in old age. "Old age presents not merely physical but psychological problems. The definite psychiatric manifestations of mental senility, such as various psychoses due to disease of nervous tissue, are not only infrequent but do not constitute the essential psychic problems. Psychologists do not agree as to how far usual manifestations of psychic changes are result of
physiologic conditions, and as to what extent they may result from the awareness of approaching dissolution and of old age as the prelude to death. This awareness may be responsible for the tragic attitude which seeks escape in relations with the younger generations, sublimating the desire for immoratality by solicitude for the young, expressing fear of personal insecurity in an attempt to retain control over the economic structure of the household, tribe or nation”.

The problem of the aged are clearly expressed in the observation of Birren J. E. "The social problem of older persons include income maintenance and employment, housing, medical services, social mobility, and opportunities for compatible interpersonal relations. Aged persons tend to have low incomes and little accumulated wealth and are therefore in a poor position to maintain their standards of food; clothing, housing and social amenities. In addition, poor health and sensory defects frequently limit social mobility, resulting in a still further lowering of the standard of living”.

No doubt old people present different problems. But if we examine different society’s at different stage of civilization we find old people are treated differently in different societies. In this connection, ‘Faina Jyrkilas’ observation suggests the trends witnessed in the position of
older people. "It can be said, that in primitive societies the aged have generally occupied leading positions and roles for as long as they have been able to maintain their physical strength, property rights and magical powers. In this societies the respect towards the aged has been generally stressed. However, after arriving at the final stage of decrepitude, old people in many of these societies have been abandoned, rejected or even killed. There also have been differences in the treatment of the aged in different types of societies. The attitude towards the aged has been most favourable in the familistic, particularistically oriented peasant societies. Under the impact of western ideas, with societies starting to turn to industrialization, the attitude towards old people has also changed. In modern universalistic-achievement-oriented societies; it can be said to be rather negative. The position of old people in these societies greatly reminds one of the decrepit members of primitive societies, who were abandoned and rejected, although this abandonment takes place now-a-days at a stage where old people still possess their physical and mental powers".

It seems, when the societies become more and more literate the importance of old people in the family and in the society, declines. In non-literate societies old people are the revered of societies wisdom, because there are no
other indirect mechanism communication. "There is one aspect
of old age in societies without writing to which little
attention has been paid. Whatever innovations and changes a
new generation succeeds in introducing into a particular
society, they are directly dependent on their immediate
predecessors for acquiring their language and their culture.
While this is true of all societies, in non-literate ones the
vast majority of communications have to be fact-to-fact,
whereas with writing, indirect communication through books
and other graphic techniques becomes of increasing important.
Given books, the old appear no longer necessary, indeed even
redundant, as repositories of wisdom. Learning is not
confined to the familial context. In oral societies, the aged
are always an important resource for information about the
past and hence about tradition and the right way of doing
things, they remain 'useful' not simply as repositories of
family love but as repositories of social life itself. This
is particularly so of communicative acts that become relevant
only at long intervals. For example, the performance of the
60-year ceremony of the sigi of the Dogon must depend very
greatly upon the childhood memories of oldmen, without whom
the ceremony might disappear, or anyhow suffer a sea change.
Other central rites of society, such as the funeral
ceremonies of chief, depend for their continuity upon the
supply of old men and women, who thus provide a cultural fund
of a very significant kind their memories are other people's
(69) culture".
"Retirement has far-reaching repercussions on most aspects of life. In the first place, it usually brings about a noticeable fall in the standard of living. However, the most important aspect of retirement is the loss of what is to most men their cardinal role. The society's emphasis on productivity and achievement leads to a fixation on the occupational role, which becomes the core of personal identity".

The following quotation emphasizes the problems of old people. "After retirement, activities that were fully absorbing and gratifying throughout adulthood often lose much of their meaning. Solitary, hobbies, for instance, may provide a much needed respite from the hectic interaction during working hours, but the same hobbies to not necessary facilitate adjustment of retirement and may even have a confining or isolating effect. Similarly, leisure time activities that are part of fulfledged family life may lose much of their attraction after the onset of aging. When the children have homes of their own. There is also the problems of the synchronization of leisure, the retired are free at times when most other members of community are occupied, and this may increase again peoples feelings of alienation from the community".
Isolation and loneliness thought to be common problem in old age. By comparison with the young and the middleaged, the old are known to be liable to loss of attachments and activities. But their vulnerability may be exaggerated. The change in their social and emotional experiences may not be as dramatic or as widespread as many people in Western societies fear, and is therefore worth investigating carefully."
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