Chapter 5

HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY OF THE AGED LIVING IN OLD AGE HOMES

Introduction

In Chapter 4 we have discussed how, despite all associated problems, the households and families have retained the elderly whereas in this Chapter we would discuss the processes and the changes in the households and family systems which contribute to the movement of the elderly to the old-age homes. We would also discuss while living in old-age homes whether the elderly are abandoned or deserted by their close ones or they continue to support them and what are the forms of family and kinship support. One has to look into the circumstances that compel the elderly to take the decision of moving to the Homes.

In Chapter 3 we have already observed that a large section of the Home dwellers did not have their own family as they were unmarried or had lost their spouses; 21 out of 56 elderly were unmarried and 32 were without spouses. These two categories together constitute 95 per cent of the informants. There were only three couples staying in the old-age homes. This information is convincing enough to suggest that the elderly with weak family support are most likely candidates for a movement to old-age homes.

Household dimension

We have considered the household composition of the elderly at the point of their shift to old-age homes. Out of 6 male residents 3 were unmarried and they were living in single-member households while 2 others were a part of their respective joint households and 1 belonged to the supplemented nuclear household. Of the 26 female Home inmates 21 were living alone, 3 were part of supplemented-
nuclear households, one belonged to the sub-nuclear household and one was part of joint household.

1. **Joint households**

(1) Mr. D. P. Ghosh Dastidar (78), unmarried, was a part of a supplemented joint household with his brother, brother’s wife, brother’s son and brother’s son’s wife. He adjusted well in the household but after the marriage of his nephew there was space crisis and the latter was complaining about loss of privacy in the house. This prompted Mr. Ghosh Dostidar to move to Mukto Bihanga about two years back.

![Diagram](image1)

(2) Mr. G. Sengupta (74) has been living in Rabindra Niketan for the last 14 years. He is unmarried and was living in a joint household consisting of his siblings, their spouses and children at Bhawanipur at the time of shifting to the old-age home. He came here not as a result of any quarrel; he just wanted to live a life of his choice. Being a retired central government employee he lives on his pension.

![Diagram](image2)

(3) Mrs. K. Basu (68) lives with her husband (72) in Rabindra Niketan. Both husband and wife suffer from various ailments. Mrs. Basu was a Professor in a college while Mr. Basu was bank officer. Both of them receive good amount of pension. They were living in a flat at Lake Gardens with their only son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren. There was space crisis in the flat and Mr. and Mrs. Basu moved to Rabindra Niketan. They wanted to grant freedom to their son and daughter-in-law in living their life.
Sub-nuclear household

(1) Ms S. Datta (70), unmarried, moved to Mukto Bihanga in mid 2014, leaving behind her younger brother. She was and is still supported by her brother. It was a mutually agreed upon arrangement. She is suffering from knee pain and cannot walk without help. It was becoming too much of a pressure on her brother who was a widower to take care of her.

Supplemented nuclear households

(1) Mrs. D. Mukherjee (85), widow, used to live with her son and daughter-in-law and granddaughter in their own flat. Mrs. Mukherjee cannot walk without a walker. It was her son and daughter-in-law who took initiative to drop her in Mukto Bihanga, although she wanted to live with them. Her only daughter is married out. Her son, however, takes care of all her expenses. Her married daughter also supports her, and cares for her.

(2) Ms. A. Bhattacharya (82) unmarried, who suffers from osteoporosis and heart disease, was living with her brother, brother’s wife and his daughter in the latter’s flat at Jadavpur. She was not under any pressure to move to old-age home. She was a government employee and draws pension. It was absolutely her decision
to come here; she thus allowed her brother and other members to live their life. They are in contact.

(3) Mr. B. K. Das (83) has been living in Mukto Bihanga for three years. He suffers from chronic back pain. He was the head of a household consisting of his wife, a son and a daughter. His wife passed away a few years back. His daughter was married out and his son was also married. He was treated as someone “unwanted”, and humiliated at times by his engineer son and daughter-in law. Since he was not economically dependent on them he shifted to Mukto Bihanga to live in freedom and with dignity.

(4) Ms. D. Ghosal (76), unmarried, post-graduate, retired school teacher has been living in Rabindra Niketan since 2001. Before coming here she was living as a part of her brothers’ household. After retirement, she did not want to depend on others and therefore moved to this old-age home. She developed tension in her relationship with her brothers. She walked out of the household to live a life of her own choice.

Single member households
Four out of six male informants and eight out of 26 female informants are unmarried. Besides, there are 16 widows and two widowers. Among other two, one is deserted by her husband and one lives in the old age home with her
husband. The result of all this is 24 out of the 32 cases (75 per cent) the households of the elderly persons were single-member at the time of movement to the old age home. These households have turned into single-member through a long process; the factors that contributed to the process are (a) taking a decision to remain unmarried, (b) death of husband, (c) premature death of the only son or sister, (d) dispersal of sons along with career movements, (e) dispersal of daughters after marriage, (f) serious illness and so on. The decision to move to old-age home is the outcome of a long course of transformation that the households and families go through. The most cited reasons are (a) loneliness and a sense of insecurity, (b) deterioration of health condition and (c) a positive assessment about the old-age homes, which they felt would be the answer to their problems. Only in a very few cases ill-treatment or misunderstanding with children was cited as the reason. A few of the elderly expressed that they do not want to live as a burden on their close ones but want to live with dignity and freedom.

(1) Mr. G. Dey (78), unmarried, an asthma patient, lives in Mukto Bihango. He has a long history of living alone since his only brother married and set up a separate household.

(2) Mr. M. Kar Majumder (75) of Mukto Bihanga was living alone after the death of his wife and marriage of his two daughters. He has high blood pressure, blood sugar and respiratory problem. He was feeling lonely and insecure and decided to move to the old age home.
(3) Unmarried Mr. B. C. Ghosh (75) has been living in Rabindra Niketan for eleven years. He had a small business and is economically self reliant. He suffers from high blood pressure, high sugar and problems in her eyes. Despite being a member of a big family a brother and two sisters he used to stay alone in his own house. With aging and ailing health he closed down his business, sold his house in Behala and moved to Rabindra Niketan.

(4) Childless Mrs. S. Roy (78) was living with her husband in their own flat in Salt Lake. After the death of her husband she was alone, feeling lonely and was down with knee pain. She disposed of her flat and moved to Mukto Bihanga in 2014.

(5) Mrs. J Mukherjee (76), a retired private company employee, was living alone after the death of her husband in a rented house. She has six daughters, all are married. She has some savings but her elder daughter and son-in-law extend their financial support. She developed neurological problem and it was no more possible for her to stay alone.

(6) Mrs. S. Banerjee (69) used to live in a flat at New Alipore with her husband. Earlier she had a happy joint family with her husband, only son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter. Her husband has passed away and her son has shifted to Bangalore with his wife and daughter. With deteriorating health and growing insecurity she shifted to the old-age home. Her son bears all the expenses of her stay in the Home.
(7) Mrs. S Sarkar (72), a widow, has two daughters, both married. After the death of her husband some years back she was feeling lonely and insecure. She was also suffering from some ailments. She therefore shifted to Mukto Bihanga. Her elder daughter supports her financially; she meets a part of her expenses from her savings.

(8) Mrs. D. Mitra (72), a widow with pre-university level education, used to live alone in her own house at Harinabhi. The death of her husband, who was a bank employee, and marriage of the only daughter she moved to Mukto Bihanga. She lives on her savings besides receiving financial support from her son-in-law.

(9) Mrs. G. Sengupta (83), widow, moved to Mukto Bihanga in mid 2014. She had a happy family consisting of her husband, two sons and a daughter. Her younger son and husband died untimely and her only daughter is married out. Her elder son, who works in Jamsedpur, lives there with his family. She was living alone in her own house at Belgharia. Her son was not too keen to take her with them. She was not keeping well and was feeling insecure. Her son found out this home and left her here. Mrs. Sengupta sold out her house before coming. Her son and daughter-in-law come to see her occasionally. She draws interest from the money she has saved in a bank.
(10) Mrs. J. Chatterjee (69) lived in her parental house in Rajabazar area alone. Her two daughters are married out and her husband is no more. Apart from loneliness she was ailing with diabetes, high blood pressure and thyroid problem. Feeling insecure and lonely she decided to move to Mukto Bihanga in 2013. Her daughters and sons-in-law take care of her expenses. She has some savings as well.

(11) Ms. U. Debi (80) has been living in Rabindra Niketan for 13 years. Unmarried Ms. Debi was a government employee and she lives on her pension. She had three sisters, all married. Before moving to this Home she was living alone in her parental house in Howrah. She disposed of the house and shared the money with her sisters. She had health problems like high blood pressure, blood sugar and knee-pain. Loneliness, health issues and a feeling of insecurity drove her to old-age home.

(12) Mrs. G. Sen (79) has been living in Rabindra Niketan for the last 10 years. Before coming here she had already lost her husband. Childless Mrs. Sen was living alone in a rented house. She suffers from high blood pressure, high cholesterol and thyroid disorder. Death of her husband left her lonely and
insecure. Her ailments also made her insecure. She lives on the family pension of her husband, who was a government employee.

(13) Ms. T Bose (69), unmarried, has been living at Rabindra Niketan for the last five years. She suffers from acute asthma. Before coming here she was living in her parental house at Shyambazar. She was M. Muse from Rabindra Bharati University and offered worked as a private music teacher. She used to stay with her widow mother for many years. The death of her mother and dispersal of her siblings made her lonely and insecure. She then moved to Rabindra Niketan. She meets her expenses out of interest she gets from her savings. She maintains very close relation with her siblings.

(14) Mrs. D. Bhattancharya (72), widow, suffering from high blood pressure, blood sugar and problems with her eyes, came to Rabindra Niketan in 2010. She lost her husband, a retired engineer, about five years back. Her only daughter was married out 15 years back. Her loneliness, insecurity and health problems prompted her to move into the Home. She lives on her husband’s pension. She is in close touch with her daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren and visits them whenever she wants.
(15) Mrs. K. Mitra (82) has been living in Rabindra Niketan for the last two years. Before coming here she was living alone in a rented house at Ballygunj. She lost her husband, an engineer, a few years back and had her only daughter married. Her daughter lives in Kolkata with her husband and a daughter. She does not have any major ailment but loneliness brought her to the old-age home. She now lives on family pension.

(16) Mrs. M Duttagupta (78) shifted to Rabindra Niketan in 2013. She suffers from arthritis and back pain. She has savings and family property to meet her living expenses. She had a happy nuclear household with her husband, a son and a daughter. After marriage her daughter has shifted to Delhi and her son lives in Mumbai with his family in connection with his job. Death of her husband a few years back left her alone. Ailments made her scared and she moved to Rabindra Niketan. Her husband was an engineer and she draws family pension.

(17) Mrs. I. Ghosh (75), graduate, widow, retired government employee, has been living in Rabindra Niketan since 2013. She was an employee in a private firm and her husband was a government employee. She lives on her pension and interest on savings. She had a family with her husband and two sons. Her husband passed away in 2010. Both her sons are married; one lives in Mumbai while the elder one lives in Kolkata with their respective families. She wanted to have a life of her own and did not want to be a dependent. Besides she had health problems and needed care.
(18) Mrs. U. Nandy (72), widow, retired school teacher, has been living in Rabindra Niketan since 2010. She lives on her pension. She suffers from osteoporoses. Her only daughter lives in the USA with her family. She was living in her Bansdroni (in South Kolkata) flat for many years with her husband. But after the death of her husband in 2008 she was living alone. With aging she developed health problems. She felt insecure and decided to move to the old-age home.

(19) Ms. I. Majumder (79), unmarried, graduate, retired school teacher, has been living in Rabindra Niketan since mid-2014. She lives on her pension. Before shifting to the old-age home she was living in her flat at Rajarhat. With aging and ailments she was feeling insecure. She gave her flat on rent and moved to the present Home. She keeps relations with her close kin who live in the city.

(20) Mrs. S. Sinha (81), widow, retired film and television actress, has being living in Rabindra Niketan since mid-2014. She has high blood pressure and high blood sugar. She has some savings and husband’s pension. Her husband worked in the print media, who passed away in 2010. She has two sons and a daughter. Her younger son lives in Delhi, while her daughter is married out. Her elder son teaches in Kharagpur IIT, and he lives there with his family. She put
her flat on rent and moved to the old-age home for a secure life. She maintains close relation with her children and their family members.

![Family Tree Diagram](image)

(21) Ms. P. Sarkar (80), unmarried, post-graduate, retired school teacher, moved to Rabindra Niketan in 2006. She has high blood pressure and blood sugar and cannot walk without a walker. She lives on her pension and interest on savings. She was living alone in her flat at Naktala. She gave her flat to her two brothers and moved to the old-age home. She did not want to be a burden on anybody. She keeps close contact with her brothers and their family members.

![Family Tree Diagram](image)

(22) Ms. R. Chatterjee (66), widow, post-graduate, retired school teacher, has been living in Rabindra Niketan since 2014. She lives on pension and interest on savings. Her husband, who expired two years back, had a medium scale business. She is childless. Before moving to this Home she was living in a flat at Santoshpur. The death of her husband shocked her so much that she did not want live in that flat any more. She disposed of the flat and moved to this old-age home.

![Family Tree Diagram](image)

(23) Mrs. S. Banerjee (74), widow, graduate, retired school teacher, has been living in Rabindra Niketan since 2002. Her husband, who was a railways employee, died in 2000. She draws pension and interest on her savings to meet her expenses. Her husband died of liver problem in 2001. Her son died of liver damage in 1988 at the age of 16. She was living alone in their house at Behala.
She wanted to free herself of loneliness and insecurity in their house and therefore moved to this old-age home.

(24) Ms. A Roy (80), unmarried, suffering from serious ailments, came to Rabindra Niketan in 2010. Before coming here she was living alone in her flat in Salt Lake. Earlier she was sharing the flat with her sister but after the death of her sister in 2008 she was living alone. For her living alone is so painful. She was mentally broken; her health was also deteriorating. She thought old-age home could be a better place to live at this stage.

*Dynamic of family relations*

Household dimension is only one aspect of family study; more interesting aspect is the evolving or changing relations; the support, care and love embedded in family relations and the tensions that either bring about changes in relations or split the families into smaller households. The turning points are marriage, birth and death of a person or persons, property sharing, dispersal of the younger members (especially sons and daughters), retirement, ailments or some other crises. The elderly often bear the brunt of all these processes and make necessary adjustments often by shifting to the Homes. Let us consider a few case studies to understand the processes the family relations, particularly the relations of the aged with other members go through.

1. **Joint families**

(1) For many years Mr. D. P. Ghosh Dastidar (78), who moved to Mukto Bihango in 2012, was a part of a supplemented joint family with his brother, brother’s wife,
brother's son and brother's son’s wife. They used to live in a 900 sq. feet flat in Lake Market. But after the marriage of his nephew there was space crisis. Apprehending discomfort of the newly-wed couple in the house Mr. Ghosh Dastidar moved to Mukto Bihanga. Mr Ghosh Dastidar has breathing trouble and hearing problem. His younger brother and nephew extend him financial support.

Mr. Ghosh Dastidar's parents died years back and all his siblings stay with their respective families in separate houses in different parts of the city. In his parental family he had two brothers and seven sisters. All his kin, particularly his brothers and sisters, keep in touch with one another over telephone. One of his brothers, with whom he lived for many years and sister-in-law visit him whenever they get time. Although the care arrangement in the Home is good he misses his family a lot.

Earlier, Mr. Ghosh Dastidar had a photo studio and he used to stay in Anwar Shah Road with his parents and siblings. Then his sisters got married one by one thus changing the size and structure of the family. His parents died, first his father and few years later his mother. His other two brothers got married and bought flats of their own. They sold out their house at Anwar Shah Road. Mr. Ghosh Dastidar sold out his studio (since it was not running well) and started staying with his youngest brother in the latter’s flat in Lake Market.

Mr. Ghosh Dastidar’s bordi (oldest sister) and mejdi (elder-middle sister) have died but he maintains warm relation with her other sisters. His nephew and nieces also visit him with their parents periodically. He recalls his childhood days in joint family and his relations with his siblings. He has preserved a good number of photos of his brothers and sisters and friends.

(2) Mr. G. Sengupta (74) has been living in Rabindra Niketan for the last 14 years. He is unmarried and was living in a joint family of his siblings and their children at Bhawanipur at the time of shifting to the Home. He came here not as a result of any quarrel; he just wanted to live a life of his choice. He maintains good health. He is a pension holder, as he was a central government employee, thus economically self-reliant.
In his parental family they were eight brothers and two sisters. Mr. Sengupta maintains a close contact with all his siblings, nephews and nieces. His siblings call him frequently and enquire about his health. His nephews and nieces come occasionally and bring gifts and necessary things for him.

Mr. Sengupta's family moved from Dhaka to Chinsura when he was only six. His elder brother became a doctor and his mejda (elder middle brother) also started working in Kolkata. When Mr. Sengupta was studying in class IX the whole family shifted to Dumdum. After graduation Mr. Sengupta got a central government job in Kolkata. He continued living with his siblings. His father died, followed by his mother. With the growth of family size his elder brothers started setting up separate households. His nephews got married and brought home their wives. Mr. Sengupta then started feeling awkward to stay with them as they needed privacy. As a solution he moved to the old age home.

He sometimes visits his brother and his wife who live in Salt lake IB block. They always persuade him to stay with them but he does not want to be a “burden” since he loves the freedom he enjoys in old age home. He also has many friends who stay close by and he is in touch with them; he sometimes visits them in the evening.

Mr. Sengupta maintains a very cordial relation with all his relatives, his siblings and sisters in law, nephews and nieces. His siblings call him frequently. They cannot come to visit him but his nephews and nieces come to see him often. Two days ago his elder brother’s son came with his wife. They brought lots of dry fruits for him. But whenever his brother, nephews or nieces come they come with so many things that Mr. Sengupta cannot consume them in a month. He also gives cash and gifts to his nephews and nieces at the time of Durga Puja, Poila Boishakh.

While asked why he didn’t get married he smiled and said ‘I never felt like getting married’. He said: ‘many girls used to like me and their parents also had come to talk to his parents with marriage proposals but I did not show any interest’.
All his siblings have grown so old they cannot come to visit him and he also because of his ill health cannot visit them. But they maintain contact over phone. One of his nephews is chartered accountant, another works in the US. His younger sister’s son stays in Germany. His elder brother’s son stays nearby. He comes frequently. All his close relatives are in touch with him; most of them came to see him when he had a heart attack in November 2013.

Mr. Sengupta recalls his younger days, the days he spent with his family particularly with siblings and his friends. Now most of them left this world. He doesn’t have any album or photos with him in this home. He has adjusted with the home environment so much so that he now doesn’t want to go anywhere else and wants to breath his last over here.

(3) Mrs. K Basu (68) has been living with her husband (72) in Rabindra Niketan for two years. Both husband and wife suffer from various complicated ailments. Mrs. Basu was a Professor in a college while Mr. Basu was bank officer. Both of them receive good amount of pension. They were living in a flat at Lake Gardens with their only son, his wife and grandchildren. There was space crisis in the flat so Mr. and Mrs. Basu decided to move to Rabindra Niketan. They wanted to grant freedom to their son and daughter-in-law so that they can live their own life.

Her daughter-in-law and grandchildren also come to visit them frequently. They call them almost on a regular basis. All her relatives maintain a very cordial relation with them. They call Mrs. Basu and her husband frequently and visit them sometimes. Mr. and Mrs. Basu maintain a very strong bonding with all their relatives and friends. Mrs. Basu sometimes feels sad for not being able to live with her son and daughter-in-law and especially with her grandchildren. However she does not have any ill feeling against her son and daughter-in-law as coming to this home was their own decision.

Mrs. Basu’s parental family moved to Kolkata from Dhaka in 1947, the year she was born. Mrs. Basu has spent her childhood days in a rented house in Cornwallis Street. In 1970 she completed her Master’s degree and started teaching in a school on deputation. Around this time, her parents had her
married. Her husband was from Economics background and was employed in United Bank.

After her marriage she moved to North Kolkata in her in-law’s place. Her in-laws’ was a joint family. Her parents-in-law, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law used to stay in the same house. Mrs. Basu quit her job before marriage and turned a home-maker; for many years she had performed all her household duties but after a point life became monotonous. Just before her marriage she got an appointment letters from Balurghat College and also from a school in Krishnanagar. Her marriage prevented her from taking up the job. She was upset but the birth of her son she kept her busy.

The thought of doing job was alive in Mrs. Basu’s mind. With some preparation she got her first posting in a college at Shakrail, Howrah. She had to take a lot of trouble to reach her college but she was happy with her new job. When she started teaching in a college her mother-in-law and her husband’s brother’s wife stepped in to take care of her son.

When their son was in class III or IV they bought a flat in Salt Lake and shifted there. With their dispersal the in-laws’ joint family became supplemented nuclear and Mrs. Basu’s family turned nuclear. In this household arrangement they faced a new problem; since both Mr. and Mrs. Basu were busy with their jobs their son had to manage many things alone. This impacted upon their son negatively; he turned naughty and stubborn and disobedient. He lost interest in studies, and started telling lies to Mr. and Mrs. Basu. Mrs. Basu requested her father, who used to live in Dhakuria after retirement, to give company to her son on weekdays. Mr. Basu’s son got so much spoilt that he wouldn’t even listen to his grandfather. He used to spend time with his rich spoilt friends and developed all bad habits. Mrs. Basu was stressed as she had to look after her son’s studies and do the household activities, besides shouldering responsibilities relating to her job. She developed high blood pressure. Her husband did not take any household responsibility.

After graduation and a course in computer Mrs. Basu’s son got a job in a tea estate at Guwahati. After doing that job for a few years they offered him the post
of manager of that tea estate. But he left the job since the place was not safe and shifted to Kolkata. In Kolkata he joined a private firm and there he fell in love with a girl, a colleague, and married her in 2002. With her son’s marriage they family again became a joint family, although for a very short period. In 2004 her elder grandson was born. In 2005 Mr. and Mrs. Basu bought a flat in Baguihati and shifted there.

In 2007 Mrs. Basu retired from her job. In 2012 Mr. Basu got seriously ill. Her son and daughter-in-law used to come all the way from Salt Lake to look after Mr. Basu. In 2012 their son, daughter-in-law and grandchildren shifted to a new flat at Lake Garden; Mr. and Mrs. Basu also shifted to that flat. Mrs. Basu was very happy as she could spend time with her grandchildren. However, they were having space crunch. So Mr. Basu decided to give their son and daughter-in-law some space and decided to move to an old age home in 2013.

Mrs. Basu felt very sad because she didn’t want to leave her own family, especially her grandchildren. But she agreed to move with her husband since the latter was ailing. Her younger sister’s husband told them about this home. Initially her son was very unhappy and he also didn’t want them to move to Home. But Mrs. Basu made him understand that Mr. Basu needs peaceful environment so that he could recover soon.

Their son and daughter-in-law maintain close relation with them. Her son comes to visit them on every weekend. When she had eye operation her son did everything, starting from taking her to the hospital to fix the appointment with the doctor. Her grandchildren and daughter-in-law also come to visit them frequently. They talk to Mrs. Basu everyday over telephone. Whenever her daughter-in-law prepares any special dish she does not forget to send it for Mr. and Mrs. Basu. Their son is happy with his own family, their daughter-in-law has been putting all her time, love, care and effort in raising their children, and most importantly they maintain a very strong relation with Mr. and Mrs. Basu.
Sub-nuclear families

(1) Ms. S. Dutta (70), unmarried, moved to Mukto Bihanga in mid-2014, leaving behind her only brother and his wife. She was and is still financially supported by her brother. She is suffering from knee pain and cannot walk without help. It was becoming too much of a pressure on her brother and his wife to take care of her. She came to this Home with the help of Mrs. J. Chatterjee, who was already staying here.

Before coming to this old age home Ms. Dutta used to stay with her elder brother and sister-in-law in their own house at Sonari which was built by their father. She also has a flat in Kolkata which is rented out. Ms. Dutta’s younger brother now stays in the ground floor of the house and her elder brother in the first floor. Her sisters got married and stay with their respective families. When her elder brother first brought her in this home she was very sad and unhappy since she didn’t want to leave her family. But now it has been six months that she is staying in this Home and she has started liking this place. All her siblings are in touch and concerned about her. They call her frequently in order to enquire about her health and activities. Her elder brother visits her once a month.

Ms. Dutta was born in Bishtupur, where her family of orientation used to live in a rented house. She along with her elder sister studied in Shantiniketan. The family moved to Sonari, where her father built a house. Ms. Dutta did not study after schooling; but she took good care of her parents, besides extending voluntary service to Bharat Sevasram Sangha. When she was in hospital Ms. Dutta looked after her mother and did the household chores. When they were at Sonari she used to help her mother in the kitchen.

In their house at Sonari her younger brother stays in the ground floor with his family in a separate household and Ms. Dutta used to stay with her elder brother in the first floor. Both the brothers maintain a very warm and cordial relation although their hearths were separate. When Ms. Dutta’s elder sister-in-law (boro boudi) died it became difficult for her elder brother to look after Ms. Dutta. So he brought her to this Home thinking that here she would get proper care and friends.
Ms. Dutta enjoys her life at this Home but she misses her family a lot. She carries the memory of good old days in her parental family. All her sisters, elder and younger brothers, husband of younger sister come to see her occasionally. I met her younger brother and sister-in-law, who came to see her. Her sisters cannot come frequently as they have their family responsibilities but they do call her frequently and keep on enquiring about her health. At this age she regrets her decision of remaining unmarried. It is not that she was not interested in marriage, it just did not happen. ‘Had I been married I would have my own family to live for in this old age’ Ms. Dutta regretted.

**Supplemented Nuclear Families**

We had four such families out of 32 families.

(1) Mrs. Mukherjee (85), a widow, had to move to old-age home while living with her son, daughter-in-law and granddaughter, against her will. The busy son and daughter-in-law were not ready to take responsibility of Mrs. Mukherjee since she developed serious problem in walking. Her son, however, bears the expenses and makes occasional visits.

(2) Ms. A. Bhattacharya (82) unmarried, was living with her brother, brother’s wife and his daughter in the latter’s flat at Jadavpur. She was not under any pressure to move to old-age home. But she was suffering from osteoporosis and heart disease and did not want to be a “burden” on her brother. She was a government employee and draws pension. It was absolutely her decision to come here. Despite separation of households the family relations continue.

(3) Mr. B. K. Das (83) has been living in Mukto Bihanga for three years. He suffers from chronic back pain. He was the head of a household consisting of his wife, a son and a daughter. His wife passed away a few years back. His daughter was married and so was his son. He was treated as someone “unwanted”; felt humiliated at times by his engineer son and daughter-in-law. Since he was not
economically dependent on them he shifted to Mukto Bihanga to live in freedom and with dignity.

(4) Ms. D. Ghosal (76), unmarried, post-graduate, retired school teacher also had to move to old-age home since she developed tension in her relationship with her brothers. She walked out of the household to live a life of dignity in the old-age home.

**Single-member households**

(1) Mrs. S. Sarkar (72) has been living in Mukto Bihanga for two years. She has heart disease, high blood pressure, vertigo and joint pain. She is economically dependent on her elder daughter and son-in-law. Her daughters are married. Earlier she lived with her elder daughter in Bombay for some months but her elder son-in-law got transferred to Singapore and her daughter also had to accompany him. They wanted Mrs. Sarkar to go with them but latter refused and came to Kolkata and lived in her elder daughter’s flat in Jadavpur for some years. She was having problem in living alone and decided to move to this Home.

In her family, Mrs. Sarkar had her husband and two daughters. Her husband died when her daughters were very young. In Mrs. Sarkar’s family of orientation they were 3 brothers and 4 sisters. In Her spouse’s family of orientation they were 2 brothers and 1 sister. Mrs. Sarkar was a school teacher and her spouse used to work in a jute mill as a supervisor. Her elder daughter is a housewife and younger daughter teaches in a school.

Mrs. Sarkar maintains a very cordial relation with all her relatives. Her sister visits her every month. Other relatives keep in touch over telephone. Her younger daughter lives in Pune with her husband and teaches in a school. She cannot visit Mrs. Sarkar often. Her elder daughter and son-in-law, who live in Singapore, call her everyday and enquire about her health. Mrs. Sarkar often talks to her daughters and relatives over phone.

Mrs. Sarkar had moved from Dhaka to Kolkata along with her family of orientation after partition. For many years they lived in a rented house in College...
Street. After completing her I.A. examination she got married. Her husband used to work in Midnapur Ramkrishna Mission as librarian and later he joined a jute mill in Jagaddal. After her marriage she went to her in-laws’ place in Haldia. After staying there for a month she came to their College Street house as she got admitted to college. She completed her graduation from her parental house and then went back to her in-laws. Her husband and in-laws took good care of her. Her cousin (mother’s sister’s daughter) sister was her sister-in-law (jaa) and her father-in-law was her grandmother’s uncle.

When her in-laws’ place she moved to her husband’s quarters at Jagatdal. Her brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law have always maintained a very strong and cordial relation with them. Even after the death of her husband they used to call her and enquire about her health. Now as many of them have passed away their children keep contact with her. When she was studying in college she started teaching in the school. When they shifted to Jagatdal she used to come to the school from there, travelling a long distance. That time her mother-in-law was also very sick. She brought her mother-in-law to their place. They hired a care giver who looked after her mother-in-law during the day time, when she used to be in her school. Six years after her marriage her elder daughter was born. She left her job to take care of her ailing mother-in-law and her new-born daughter.

Fourteen years after the birth of her elder daughter her younger daughter was born. In 1989 her elder daughter, a graduate then, was married to an engineer who works with a foreign shipping company. She has two daughters and a son. Their son is a pilot, who stays in Bombay. When Mrs. Sarkar’s husband passed away she got a job in her husband’s office. But she couldn’t do the job because she wanted take care of her daughters. Her younger daughter did her Masters in Bengali literature from Rabindra Bharati University and was married in 2004 to a medical representative; she now lives with her in-laws in Kolhapur. She teaches in a school there. Her husband runs a multi cuisine restaurant out there.

Before shifting to this Home Mrs. Sarkar was having a lot of problem in staying alone in her elder daughter’s flat in Jadavpur. The caregiver on whom she had to depend was not sincere and trustworthy. In search of a secure life she
first moved to Ramkrishna Ashram in Panihati. After a year her brother-in-law’s son and his family took her with them to their house in Haldia, where she stayed for about two years. Then she moved to her nephew’s place in Garia, from where she finally moved to this Home.

She maintains a very cordial relation with all her relatives. Her in-laws love and respect her a lot. Even today the children of her brother-in-law and sister-in-law visit her in the Home. Her sisters, nephews and nieces visit her frequently. Her younger sister comes every month to give her money to meet her expenses. Her sister also brings medicine and other things for Mrs. Sarkar.

(2) Gita Sengupata (83) fell alone because of death of husband and dispersal of her son and daughter. She gets her husband’s pension and receives economic support from her son. She suffers from joint pain and cannot walk properly. Before coming to this home she used to stay in her own house at Belgharia. Her husband died a few years back and she was not keeping well. There was none to look after her. She thus moved to Mukto Bihanga in mid-2014. Her son helped her finding this old age home and came to visit the infrastructure before leaving her here. Mrs. Sengupta sold out her house before coming to this home. Her son lives in Jamshedpur, where he is employed, with his family. Her married daughter lives with her in-laws in Keshtapur.

In her family she had her husband two sons and a daughter. Her younger son died a few years back. In her parental family she had a brother and three sisters. In her husband’s family of orientation they were one brother and four sisters. Mrs. Sengupta is matriculate and her husband was a graduate. Her son is B. Tech. and daughter is M.A. She has always been a housewife. Her husband was an accountant in audit department of the state government. Her son works with Tata Company and daughter is a housewife. She doesn’t have much contact with her relatives. Her son comes to visit her every month. Her daughter also comes whenever she gets time and also calls her frequently.

Mrs. Sengupta’s family of orientation came to Kolkata from Faridpur (in East Pakistan) to Kolkata following partition. In Kolkata they used to live in a rented
house at Krishna Bose Street. Mrs. Sengupta’s family used to stay in the first floor and her father’s elder brother and his family used to live in the top floor. After completion of matriculation she got married. That time her husband was doing graduation in Presidency College. Her father-in-law used to work in Railways and was posted in Uttar Pradesh. Soon after her marriage she went to Uttar Pradesh to live with her in-laws. She was there for a few years. When her father-in-law retired the whole family shifted to Kolkata. Her father-in-law had bought a small house near Rathnala where she lived in a joint family. However, when her husband got a job she had to travel along with him to different parts of India.

Mr. Sengupta used to send a decent amount of money to his parents every month. Mrs. Sengupta also used to visit her parents-in-law frequently. Her son completed his B.Tech. and the daughter got married after completion of graduation. When her son got a job they had him married to a girl of their own choice.

After the retirement of her husband Mrs. Sengupta along with her husband came to Belgharia, where her husband had built a small house. Mrs. Sengupta lived in that house until she came to the present Home. After the death of her husband Mrs. Sengupta couldn’t live alone in that house. Her son wanted her to stay with them but Mrs. Sengupta was having some problem with her daughter-in-law. Her daughter-in-law wanted a life without any interference. Mrs. Sengupta also wanted to live a life of dignity. After selling out her house she first went to live in an old age home in Ariadaha but she did not like the place much. After two years she shifted to Mukta Bihanga, which she considers much better than the earlier home. Her son comes to meet Mrs. Sengupta, and brings her whatever she needs. He also pays the bills of the home. Her daughter, who is unwell, has her own family with two daughters and cannot come to visit her frequently; but she calls her whenever she gets time. Earlier Mrs. Sengupta and her husband used to help their daughter and son-in-law financially but after the death of Mr. Sengupta she has stopped sending money.
Mr. B. C. Ghosh (75) is living in Rabindra Niketan for the last eleven years. He suffers from high blood sugar, high pressure and eye problem. He is not economically dependent on anyone; he has savings in his account and he also has the money that he got after selling out his house. Unmarried Mr. Ghosh used to live alone in his house at Behala. Ailing and suffering from loneliness he decided to sell his house and move to old age home.

Mr. Ghosh had two brothers and three sisters. He had to look after their family business. He maintains more or less cordial relation with all his living siblings and relatives. They call him and enquire about his health. As all his relatives have grown old and suffer from various ailments they cannot visit Mr. Ghosh. Instead, he goes to his relatives places to spend time with them. All his siblings got married and have their own families.

Mr. Ghosh was born in Taltala Lane in Kolkata. His maternal family had a big establishment in Bhagalpur. Mr. Ghosh stayed in his maternal uncle’s place from 1947 to 1949. In 1949 they shifted to Kolkata. They started living in a rented house in Gorcha Road. After completing graduation Mr. Ghosh started looking after the family publishing business with his father. He never had interest in marriage. His mother died in 1985 at the age of sixty five. His father died in 2001. After his father’s death their family business started making loss. In 2001 he sold out his the business office. That time he used to live alone in their Behala house. His siblings particularly his sisters used to come to his house and spent some time with him. All his siblings were married and used to live with their respective families. With their consent Mr Ghosh disposed of the house in 2004 and shifted to Rabindra Niketan.

Among his siblings Mr. Ghosh maintains close contact with his youngest sister, who always comes forward to his help, whenever he faces a crisis. She comes to visit him in this Home occasionally. She also calls him and enquires about his health over phone. His elder sister stays in Jamshedpur and doesn’t come to visit him although she calls him up occasionally. Mr. Ghosh doesn’t have a good relation with his brothers. His youngest sister used to teach in Bethun College, and his brother was a professor of Bengali in Jadavpur University. His
mejdi (middle-elder sister) used to teach medicine in a private medical college. They are busy with their own life and various responsibilities and they have also grown old. So Mr. Ghosh doesn’t have much expectation from them.

(4) Mrs. S. Sinha (81) came to Rabindra Niketan in mid-1014. She was suffering from high blood pressure and blood sugar but can move without aid. She is economically self-reliant; she has savings in her bank account and gets her husband’s pension. Before moving into Rabindra Niketan she used to stay in a rented house near Lake Road. They had a house which she sold out after the death of her husband. She decided to live her life independently, not being a “burden” on anybody, and that is why she took the decision to move to this old age home. Her two sons and daughter are all married and live with their own families in different places.

In her parental family, Mrs. Sinha had a brother while her husband had two sisters. Mrs. Sinha completed her intermediate examination. Her husband was an M.A. Her elder son is a Ph.D., her younger son did M.Phil. and her daughter did B.Sc. Mrs. Sinha was an actor; she acted in television serials and in movies. Her husband was a researcher in Indian Statistical Institute but later shifted to media and became a writer. Her elder son used to teach in Kharagpur IIT, her younger son used to teach in college but presently he works with an international NGO, based in Delhi. Her daughter is a housewife.

Here Mrs. Sinha is in contact with her children over telephone but since they live away they cannot come to see her often. She also doesn’t regret for not being part of any of her children’s family. She is very happy and enjoys her life in Rabindra Niketan.

Throughout her career she got tremendous support from her family. Her husband always encouraged her and her father-in-law was also equally supportive. When she started doing theatre her sons were very young but she could manage her household responsibilities alongside her profession because of the support of her in-laws. Her husband after returning home from the office looked after the children.
Mrs. Sinha’s married life was a mix of happiness and struggles. Their house used to be crowded with friends every weekend. Both Mrs. Sinha and her husband raised their children in their unique way. They always maintained a relation of friendship with their children. They never put any kind of pressure on them. All their children were very meritorious and they have excelled in their respective fields; Mrs. Sinha is very proud of their achievements.

Mrs. Sinha maintains a very strong and cordial relation with all her relatives. Most of the relatives from her husband’s side are no more. Those who are alive are so aged and ailing that she does not expect them to come and visit her. Her elder brother’s daughter stays in Kolkata with her husband. She is Mrs. Sinha’s local guardian and she calls her every day. She visits Mrs. Sinha often.

Mrs. Sinha’s children call her on a regular basis, they enquire about her health and everyday activities. Mrs. Sinha used to spend a lot of time with her daughter who now stays in Hyderabad with her husband. Her son-in-law was also very nice and he was like her third son. Her daughter calls her every evening and they chat for long hours.

(5) Unmarried Ms. A Ray (80) is staying is Rabindra Niketan for the last fourteen years. She is very sick and feeble and can’t walk. She is economically self-reliant as she has savings out of sale of her flat. Before coming to Rabindra Niketan she was living with her sister in her flat in Salt Lake. After the death of her sister she was living alone; there was none to look after her. So she decided to come to the Home with a hope to get proper care and security. Miss. Ray is unmarried and most of her siblings and relatives have died. A few are alive but they too have aged and have health problems. They keep in touch over telephone.

Miss Ray was born in Patna where she grew up with her siblings under the care of her parents. They had a joint family. Her uncles, aunt and cousins also used to stay in the same house. Miss. Ray’s father’s died early of liver ailment.

After her father’s death Miss. Ray and the whole family shifted to Ranchi to live in the family of her father’s elder brother. Her mother, jethu (father’s elder brother) and jethima (father’s elder brother’s wife) raised her and all her siblings.
After graduation her elder sister took up a job to support the family. Miss. Ray has tremendous respect for her. In 1973 Miss. Ray along with her elder sister shifted to Durgapur to work in Durgapur steel plant. For a few months they stayed with their maternal uncle then they shifted to a rented house. They stayed there till 1990. Retiring from her job in 1990 Miss. Ray came to Salt Lake where she had bought a flat.

Miss. Ray’s younger brother lived in Delhi in connection with his job. He left the job and joined Bengal Chemicals in Kolkata as a high official. He had bought a land in Salt lake DL block. Miss. Ray and her elder sister also bought a flat in Karunamoyee. They thought of living in proximity. But his brother’s death of an accident broke all their dreams. After his brother’s death her sister-in-law sold out the land and started staying with her parents. Her sons are now settled in America.

Miss Ray and her elder sister came to their flat in 1990 after Miss Ray’s retirement. When they came to the flat her elder sister fell ill. Miss. Ray with all her health problems took good care of her elder sister. Because of her poor health her sister persuaded Miss. Ray to move to an old-age home. Miss. Ray was reluctant to leave but because of her elder sister’s insistence Miss. Ray sold off their house and went to an old-age home called Bairag in Salt Lake, where they stayed for five years. Miss. Ray’s elder sister died in Bairag. In 2000 Miss Ray moved to Rabindra Niketan.

In Rabindra Niketan at this late age, when almost all her close ones have gone, she does not feel happy. With her ill health she is confined to her room and is dependent on the service providers. Now her only wish is to leave this world as soon as possible.

**Summary of the findings**
The discussions in this Chapter bring out the processes through which the families of orientation over time split into a number of smaller households and then as the urbanites become the senior citizens they become alone. As they catch ailments, lose their spouse, have their children and siblings dispersed, they
become lonely and suffer from a chronic sense of insecurity. In cases where they live with their children or siblings they either develop stress in relations or are looked at as “burden” by their “busy” near ones. Under such a situation they either choose to move to the Homes or are dropped to the Homes. In the first case the self-reliant middleclass urbanites exercise their “agency” as they look for a life of dignity and freedom and in the second case the elderly do not have a choice as the persons on whom they are dependent take the decision on their behalf. The reason for movement to old-age home lies in a common pattern of breakdown of the support system in the household or family. The dispersal of children, the death of the spouse, catching ailments and a sense of insecurity and loneliness together contribute to movement to old-age homes.

The most significant finding is that a large number of old-age home residents are unmarried, widow and widower. We have seen that 24 out of the 32 cases (75 per cent) the households of the elderly persons were single-member at the time of movement to the old age home. These families, however, were not necessarily single-member; they became so through a long process; the contributing factors being (a) the decision to remain unmarried, (b) death of the spouse, (c) premature death of the only son or sister, (d) dispersal of sons along with career movements, and (e) dispersal of daughters after marriage. The same factors reduce the larger families into nuclear households of different forms and sub-nuclear households. The decision to remain unmarried or the process of becoming alone is the reason why such elderly are most unlikely to have a family support system and they are the most likely candidates to land into Homes.

The elderly passes through a long process of expansion and shrinkage in the family, starting from parental family to their own family and finally down to the family of their children. The general pattern is that the parental family expands up to a point and then a long but gradual process of dispersal begins with the marriage of the daughters and movement of the sons when they set up their own family-cum-households. The relations evolve in course of time and go through different phases of stresses and strains. It has also been seen that the relations in the family may lose warmth in due course but the members largely value the
relations highly. The close family relations work in finding the right kind of old-age home, extending financial support when necessary, keeping in touch and standing by the side of the elderly in moments of crisis. The siblings and close relations keep in touch with one another over telephone and by making occasional visits. We have seen cases where the decision to move to old-age homes is a mutually agreed upon family decision and is neither the effect nor cause of strained relations. The family and kinship support system works in many forms even after the movement of the elderly in the Homes.