Ageing is an inevitable phenomenon in human life. But, being and becoming old is considered as a major issue today. Decay in terms of physical or mental or both is the characteristic of old age. So the old need special care and attention. When the system (discourse) finds difficulty in providing care and attention, old age turns out to become an issue. In earlier times, when the life expectancy was very low, the number of old who survived for long years were less, the old or the old age were not issue to the society. The joint family easily accommodated the old and the economy organized around agriculture offered a reputed space and role for the older generation. There the discourse of the classical order provided sovereignty and right to the old. ‘Being old’ was enough to capture authority in such discourse. There the people would often pretend to be older than they were in order to benefit from this. Wisdom, spirituality and power were seen as attributes of long experience. More specifically, it is discourse of the time, which provided such golden age conception for old age in earlier days.

Today, such conceptions are changed. The major aspects of modernization combine to place the aged in a very different position from
the younger generations, and the net result is lower status for the aged, as
prestige-generating social structures are replaced with devaluing structures.
The process of urbanization, industrialization and occupational re-
structuring, coupled with social and spatial mobility, emergence of small
family norm and individualism have a significant bearing on the life of the
aged today. Here ageism, the modern notion comprises the old to a
burdensome concept among the society. At the same time, accommodating
and providing greater recognition for the distinctive interests and needs of
the old turns out to be the major agenda of the State. At one extreme, the
old is considered as burden to the society, and on the other, the problems of
old age are debated at academic, political and social levels and policies are
formulated for the welfare of the old. From this perspective, this study
traces the process of these changed conceptions of old age. This is a socio-
historic study tracing the changes in the social conception of old age. The
study analyses the conception of old age over centuries with the
categorisation-traditional and modern.

The study relies mainly on qualitative approach where the social
theories and the theories of ageing are used to examine the social context
reflexively to gain an understanding of the meanings attributed to the
phenomenon, ‘old age as a social problem’. Case study of the aged along with
the survey of old age homes from the district of Pathanamthitta by using an
open-ended interview schedule was for collecting field of data. It describes
how the social, economic, and cultural discourse make human beings into its subjects so as to produce the effect of both ageism and care of the old. Today old age is an issue because the society is discursively constituted.

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