Chapter III

SENIOR CITIZENS IN KERALA
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In this chapter an attempt is made to analyse senior citizens in Kerala. Each gray hair can be considered as the reservoir of knowledge and experience. The brightness of the gray hair reflects in the vast and wide knowledge that a person acquired through his life. Elderly citizens are really the guides of the younger generation. So it is the duty of all the people to make their ‘evenings’ peaceful, pleasant and memorable. Also it is the duty of the society to provide comfort, medical care and happiness to the old persons who are without family care. The lonely, desperate, grandfathers and grandmothers really need our attention and care. The opinions and suggestions of the aged people are precious to the society because they originate from the totality of their experience and knowledge which they acquired from various fields. But many people do not lend their ears to the aged. Some people even ignore the old people and do not give due respect and care to them.

We are committed to develop policies aimed at providing healthcare, emotional security, adequate income, proper housing, and homely care to the ageing population. The aged group is facing challenges of the socio-economic order, family atmosphere and setup.
Death is inevitable. Similarly before their last breath, most of the human beings have to come across old age and face all the resultant physical, social and psychological problems. Several aged people have also to face sorrowful life situations. It is a shocking revelation that elder people are finally prone to be mercilessly treated by their younger generations.

India is a welfare State. Despite the positive aspects of the welfare State, development of India has not been in favour of the elderly. The need to study and care for the aged has become important and urgent because every year the demographic figures of the aged are increasing in an alarming phase. This is the result of improved health and medical care facilities for all, social and economic development and concern and respect for the aged who have done so much to the society in their prime of youth.¹

3.1 Ageing of the Population

Ageing is a universal natural phenomenon. Ageing of the population occurs when there is an increase in proportion of old persons increase in the population. According to the United Nations, a population may be defined as aged when the proportion of persons

above the age of 64 in the population exceeds seven percent. With the rate of growth of ageing population exceeding general population, world is heading for, what can be called as ‘Graying of Nations’.2

Graying of population was one of the most significant characteristics of the twentieth century, and quite often the first quarter of the twenty-first century is called as “the age of aging”.3 The rapid decline in fertility and the lowering of the mortality rates in recent years, has led to a dramatic rise in the number and proportion of the elderly in the population of developed and developing countries. In some developed countries, fifteen percent or more of the population is already 65 and older while 3.4% are aged 80 or older. Although the percentage of the elderly in the population in developing countries is substantially lower than in the developed countries, the absolute numbers of old people worldwide are considerable. Almost hundred million people are being added to the world population every year, mostly in the developing world, eroding the gains of progress, causing irreparable environmental damage and putting unbearable pressure on families. At the same time, with increasing expectancy of life, the global population is ageing rapidly

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1 Sankaran K., "Management of Old Age Diseases – An Ayurvedic Perspective", Kerala Calling, Thiruvananthapuram: March 2003. p. 16
and, according to the projected figures, the world will be inhabited by 1.2 billion people above sixty years of age by 2020 and 71 percent of those are likely to be in the developing world. Until the early 1980's, developing countries perceived that population ageing was an issue that concerned developed countries also. The world's older population from 500 million people in 1990, is projected to reach almost 1.5 billion in 2050. In 1988, there were an estimated 159 million persons aged 65 and older in developing countries compared to 140 million in developed countries and over sixty percent of the monthly global net increase in older persons was in the developing countries. The major growth of older population in developing countries, will be particularly in Asia. According to UN forecasts elderly population is going to increase more rapidly in Latin America and South East Asia. Between 1990 to 2025, the percentage of the population aged 65 and older is expected to increase to just over twenty percent in Europe and North America and to double from five to ten percent in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Three of the four countries projected to have the largest number of old people in the year 2025 are China, India and Indonesia. India the second most populous country in the world is foreseeing this increase. Since

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India has about sixteen percent of the world population and about two percent of the global landmass, taking care of an elderly will require a lot of imaginative planning. The statistics pertaining to India are a major indicator of how vital is the issue.

The social and physical well being of the elderly population is becoming an important issue for India. The number of aged as well as their proportion to the population have shown a steady increase in India over the decades owing to the twin factors of decrease in the birth and death rates and increase in the life expectancy at birth and due to improvements in general health and nutritional standards of population. The elderly population in India ranks fourth highest among the countries of the world and by the end of the present century it will be second only to China. Both the absolute and relative size of the population of the elderly in India will gain strength in future. As per the UN classification, Indian society is progressing from a ‘mature society’ to ‘an ageing society’. According to the census figures of 1991, the population aged 50 plus was 56.7 million, which is 6.76 percent of the total population. The proportion of the aged population has been steadily going up in each census though at various rates. The decadal growth rate during last decade 1981-1991

was 31.31 percent whereas it was higher at 32.01 percent during the previous decade 1971-1981. India has 76 millions of elder persons. Another estimate shows that this number will increase to 177 millions by the year 2025. India currently rank fourth among the countries of the world with a larger population of elders. It is estimated that the proportion of elderly population in India is much higher than in South Asia as a whole. Table shows the distribution of the population growth of elderly in India from the year 1961-2001. (Based on the report of the Technical Group on Population Projections, August 1996)

Table No. 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Males Population</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Females Population</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>25,566</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>13,224</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>12,342</td>
<td>5.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>32,700</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>16,874</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>15,826</td>
<td>5.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>43,167</td>
<td>6.49</td>
<td>22,023</td>
<td>6.41</td>
<td>21,144</td>
<td>6.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>56,682</td>
<td>6.76</td>
<td>29,364</td>
<td>6.75</td>
<td>27,318</td>
<td>6.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>70,571</td>
<td>6.97</td>
<td>36,208</td>
<td>6.91</td>
<td>34,363</td>
<td>7.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>95,921</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td>48,859</td>
<td>8.05</td>
<td>47,062</td>
<td>8.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1,12,962</td>
<td>8.94</td>
<td>57,362</td>
<td>8.84</td>
<td>55,600</td>
<td>9.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Given the trend of population ageing in India, the elderly face a number of problems which range from absence of ensured and sufficient income to support themselves and their dependents, to absence of social security, to loss of a social role and recognition. The Emeritus Professor of Madurai Medical College, A. Venkoba Rao, has said that the country was not making any significant effort to provide psychiatric or other forms of support to the old-age persons whose number is growing at a very fast pace. The trend clearly reveals that ageing will become a major social challenge in the future when vast resources will need to be directed towards the support, care and treatment of the elderly.

3.2 The Kerala Situation

Concerning Kerala it should be noted that in no Indian State is the demographic situation as advanced as in Kerala. While the currently “aged societies” have well developed programmes of social security for their old, Kerala does not have any measure worth mentioning which will ensure the well being of the today’s youth when they enter old age. A unique pattern in the age-structure of the population is noticed in the state, Kerala, compared with other states.

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⁵ The Hindu, Monday, December 15 2003.
and the all India pattern, has a high proportion of the aged (60+) in the population. And the percentage is increasing year after year. In 1961, it was 5.8 percent of the total population, in 1971, it was 6.2 percent and in 1991 it reached 8.8 percent. Table shows the distribution of the aged population in Kerala from 1961-2001.

**Table No. 3.2**

*The Aged in Kerala: 1961-2021*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of 60+</th>
<th>% Of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>9,86,000</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>13,28,000</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>19,10,000</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>26,11,000</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>35,03,000</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>46,22,000</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>68,66,000</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 1996 figure shows that the aged in the state form 9.5%, which is nearly one-tenth of the population. According to the projections, by the year 2001, those above 60 years of age is 10.2% of the total population. By 2021, they will account for 16%. The number of senior citizens which stood at 23 lakhs in 1990 changed to 58 lakhs
in Kerala by 2001, due to the low death rate and high life span. In another 10 to 15 years Kerala will become ‘an aged society’, a status now enjoyed only by the industrialized countries.\(^8\) The age structure of a population is determined by three important factors: fertility, mortality and migration. The fertility rate has fallen in the past few decades in Kerala. The state is now credited with the lowest fertility rate. Infant mortality rates are also very low in Kerala. Migration to other countries also changed the age structure of the population in Kerala. Life expectancy of Kerala has improved substantially. The life expectancy of an Indian in 1991 was 56.2 years whereas it was 70 years for Keralites. All these have contributed to an increase in population of the aged in Kerala. The ageing of the Kerala population will be the most important demographic issue throughout the twenty first century.

Currently, around 30 percent of the Kerala’s population is under 15 years and 10 percent over 59 years. This means that these dependent groups are supported by the remaining 15-59 year olds. In another 25 years, the proportion of children will be reduced by 10 percent but that of the old will rise by 10 percent. Thus, while the total dependency ratio will remain more or less the same as of today, the

\(^{8}\) "Research and Development Journal", n. 7, p 5
service needs of the society will require a radical shift from child-care services to services for old age care. Apart from that, while the number of children under 15 will be reduced and the years of care needed for them will remain constant, both the number of the aged and the number of years of care needed for the old will progressively increase. The problem for planners and social workers is to ensure the quality of life of its elderly.

The coming years will certainly witness an alarming increase in the number of elder persons. The development of science and availability of medical care facilities have extended the life span of human beings. But the future of elder persons is not so bright. The disintegration of the joint family combined with rapid industrialization and urbanization and social values have together caused serious problems for the aged. Care of the elderly in the family depends on many factors. First, migration reduces the number of young ones, who would like to look after the aged. Secondly, the growing number of the workingwomen acts as a determinant in the case of the elderly. Thirdly, with low fertility, the elders have very few children to depend on. The nuclear family has actually become disadvantageous for the aged. The uprooting changes that have shattered the social system and human relations of yester years have made the life of elder persons pathetic and miserable. There was a time in Kerala when the aged people
enjoyed a unique position in the family, of having control over the
youngsters and being the final word on every decision concerning the
family. It was during the time of the joint family system that prevailed
in our society years ago which had infused in the elder persons a sense
of authority, security, belongingness, love and care. But the present
day nuclear family system has obliterated all such relationships and
has pushed down the old into a state of loneliness, insecurity,
helplessness, frustration, hopelessness, and meaninglessness. The
large number of the aged who are forced to leave their homes due to
personal, social or economic factors has become a serious problem. To
look after them has become the responsibility of the society. Thus
charitable societies, old age homes, beggar homes etc. have come up to
cater to the needs of unwanted aged.⁹

Thus nowadays one thing what is worrying the policy makers
is the growing number of elderly persons among the population.
Demographic expert V. Ramankutty says “By 2021, the population
structure of Kerala will be characterized by a significant number of
people over sixty years. One of the consequences of this rise will be
the increasing number of persons affected by chronic diseases which
will put an additional burden of around rupees nine thousand million

⁹ Muttagi P. K., Ageing Issues and Old Age Care, New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company, 1997, 142
at the present cost rates, on the exchequer for treatment."¹⁰ The outcome is clear. A life expectancy boom and sputtering birth rates have brought for Kerala an unavoidable demographic concomitant. That is too many old people with not enough young men and women with free time or the desire to look after them. A large number of people who are too old to contribute to economic production will place too great burden on a State that is too small, not very financially healthy, and beset with numerous socio-economic problems.

3.3 Position of the Elderly People

In the ancient communities old people play an active role in the work force, in the family, and in the community. In Indian culture, Indians have had the history of respect and reverence towards the elder, and have learnt from religious epics and other holy epics that elders commanded the supreme position in the society, and thus no one could think of speaking against them. The study of the Indian social system indicates the very high and respectable position for the elders. Nothing important in the family could take place without the sanction and blessing of the aged who invariably commanded the top position of respect and honour not only among

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the family members but also neighbours and relatives. It was indicative of the gratitude of the younger generation towards their parents and grandparents for bearing and rearing. It was also related to the inheritance of property of the elders. Another rationale for the respect and regard for elders was their wisdom and experience, which was supposed to rub off on the next generation. In the Indian traditional society, the life span of the individual is divided into four stages-young, youth, grown-up, and elderly. This division is based on the Hindu view of life where the individual is expected to pass through these four stages of life known as Ashrama. The Ashrama which are four in number are: Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha and Sanyasa. When an individual reaches each of these stages he not only gets certain status but also roles, duties and obligations towards his group, family, community and society at large and they are known as Ashrama Dharma. When young, a Brahmachari as a bachelor, is supported to acquire knowledge and skills which are needed to him future life and also he stays away from domestic comforts, at the Gurukula. After acquiring the required knowledge and on becoming old enough to shoulder the worldly responsibilities, he returns home to marry and becomes a householder. As a family man Grihastha, he performs obligations towards his old parents and society. Also he begets children, especially a son, to continue the progeny and a
daughter, to be given as a gift to earn merit in life, bring them up, give proper care and education. He also provides hospitality to the guests, perform rituals in honour of ancestors and gods. By doing all these duties he discharges his obligation towards his teacher, parents and gods. Once all these obligations are fulfilled and his sons start taking over his roles and duties, he gradually transform these and withdraws from active life and thus makes arrangements to go to forest to lead a life of a hermit-Vanaprastha. But he will continue to live with his family for some time guiding and helping his sons. On becoming old and transferring all his roles and duties to his trained son he renounces his worldly ties and withdraws to the forest to lead life as a sanyasi. Here he devotes his entire time and energy towards his religious and ritual activities. Thus in society, the aged are respected for their mature age, knowledge and services rendered towards their children and society. Ramayana and Mahabharatha are the two Indian epics which depict the status of the elders in society. Raman along with Sitha proceeded on 14 yearlong exiles in order to fulfill the wishes of his parents. The five Pandavaas married Draupadi, clearly because of the misunderstanding of their mother Kunthi’s off-hand remark. Ekalavya a fine archer got his thumb cut as guru dakshina to his old guru. Thus, India had a strong tradition of younger generation respecting their parents, grandparents’ teachers or that senior in age.
The age-old practice in pursuance of the religious, cultural and social heritage of India is to take care of the aged in the family and the community and to enable them to lead a life of fulfillment and contentment. It is regarded as a moral duty of children to provide financial and physical security to their parents in old age.

The aged in Indian traditions have always occupied a position of respect and held high esteem in their community. In rural India, village elders used to play an important role in the community. There were village panchayats, a body of five persons elected on the basis of their prestige and age. They settled disputes and took decisions, which affected the life of the village community. Although the percentage of aged is small, the senior citizens in India play an important role. In an average Indian household, it is usually the oldest male member of the family, who is the head of the household and his decisions are rarely questioned. He owns the property, decides where and how to educate his children, gets his children married when they grow; in fact; he brings under his umbrella his entire family regardless of the age of the individual members and considers it as his duty to direct, advise and guide them till the moment of his death. The influence of the elderly is far out of proportion to their numbers, in almost every walk of life in India,
The traditional norms and values of Indian society laid stress on showing respect and providing care for the elderly persons. As a consequence, the aged members of the family were normally taken care of by the family itself. Those who had no family were looked after by the community or caste organizations through institutions like the sadavarta, dharmasala, math, and the village council or the panchayath. These have been catering to the needs of the aged and the infirm destitute in a traditional way. People in rural areas continue to be engaged in rural occupations until physical incapacity prevents them from performing their occupational functions. Continuity in occupational activity ensures a steady income and a sense of being autonomous and socially involved. Two of the major problems of ageing, namely, losing one’s sense of worth and boredom for lack of anything to do are overcome to a great extent. Continuity of occupational role and income is also important in supporting the familial authority of the male. While no elder individual can escape from the physical consequences of ageing in terms of failing health and decreasing physical capacities, he is well supported in his social familial status, his sense of worth and the sense of being unwanted. The Indian family is thus supportive of age,

provides a formal location role, and a status for the aged in which they are respected to guide and counsel the young.

Traditionally Kerala also is reckoned for the family life where the older people were considered as a blessing than a curse. The strong Hindu traditions of filial piety and kinship bonds are a part of the adherence to dharma in Kerala culture, where it is commonly assumed that the family will provide for the care of their elderly members.¹² A high level of reverence and respect for the elderly is very much ingrained in the religious and cultural practices of Kerala, as in India as a whole. In the joint family system that prevailed here, the older generations were highly respected and honoured and they were considered as an invaluable asset. The reciprocal obligation of the parents to support the child in infancy and the son to support the parents in old age resulted in 'social insurance' through the cohesion of the traditional family comprising two or more generations. Desai and Bhalla Tata Institute of Social Sciences, in their book 'Social Situations of the Aged' says, "In the past, old age was associated with virtues, knowledge, and wisdom. Referring to a younger as an 'elder' was considered to be a great mark of honour."¹³ They enjoyed

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¹³ P A Prabha, Psycho-social problems of senior citizens, A Study conducted in Sree Sankara University of Sanskrit, Kalady, 1998, p. 10
unparalleled sense of honour, legitimate authority in the family or community, had decision-making responsibilities in the economic and political activities of the families and were respected for their wisdom. They enjoyed their life living with their children and grandchildren by telling them stories and by playing with them. The family system was extended in structure and it was more stable. Even the community imposed certain norms about the care of the senior citizens. Indian social norms not only call for the proper care of the elderly by the family and the kinship group, but also define their status with regard to most family matters. Therefore old age was never seen as a social problem in ancient India.

Unfortunately this is not the situation now. In contemporary Indian society, however the position and status of the elderly and the care and protection they traditionally enjoy have been undermined by several factors. Urbanization, migration, the breakup of joint family system, growing individualism, change in the role of women from being full-time caregivers, and increased dependency status of the elderly may be cited as reasons. There is also a generation gap in terms of education, aspirations and values, and the allocation of resources to different members of the family. Often the family is unable to meet the financial, social, psychological, medical, recreational and welfare needs of the elderly. The joint family system
has almost disappeared and nuclear families have sprung up. As a result the older generation have lost its position, which they held earlier. Joint families of traditional Indian setup respected aged members while nuclear families do not include older parents. The relations change from a humanistic to mechanistic style when families change from joint to nuclear set up. The search for better jobs and life conditions drove away the children from their parents, leaving them all alone at 'Tharavads'. In the nuclear families, there is nobody to look after the old parents because the son and daughter in law are employed. They have to earn their own bread and to secure their life itself, so they are busily engaged. In the traditional set up, if an old man did not have a son to support him, he was often welcomed by one of his brothers to join him in his household. This is becoming less and frequent, because of the shrinking form of joint family ties. In the case of a woman without a son, usually she was welcomed to rejoin one of her brothers. Nowadays, however, either she has no brother or, if she has one, her return to his home is becoming less and less frequent. Another fact in its horrible form is that there is no good will to take care of them, even if all facilities are available. There is another calamity that the younger generations cannot tolerate the

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style of life and behaviour of the old people. They are no longer looked upon as an asset but they are often considered as a burden. Lifestyle has undergone a change and privacy is also a fairly new need in cities. Even children now want a room of their own. The elderly are considered as a nuisance as they curtail the freedom of their children. So in a high-pressure society, grand parents become the odd people out, the appendages. The elderly now sometimes are exploited, as people to look after the children, or certain household chores almost like domestic servants in some cases. Childhood and old age are the two stage of human life, which badly need the help of others for safe existence. But the present day life style and social conditions do not allow the youngsters to take care of their old ones. So it may be unjustifiable to compel the youngsters to sacrifice their life and spend their time looking after the elders. The society has to venture into other avenues for looking after the elders. It is in this context the concept of old age homes was evolved. Death of the spouse, retirement and increasing physical and mental difficulties leads the older people to loneliness. Then institutionalization becomes a better way to overcome these problems for many elderly and they normally take shelter in old age homes.

15 India Today, September 30, 1991, Page 49
3.4 Institutionalization

Being the most advanced State in India, demographically speaking, Kerala has the largest number of old age homes for a State in India. Pathanamthitta and Kottayam have advanced more than the either districts of the State in their demographic transition. These districts have naturally more old age homes than the other districts of the State. In these districts, Christians are one of the most advanced communities; and they run majority of the old age homes. Nobody really likes old age homes; neither the persons who run them nor the persons who live in them.16 Yet there is an element of inevitability about moving to old age home for many elderly in Kerala. When health, economic and other conditions make it impossible for the aged to continue living in their own homes, and if there is no family member who can or will offer them a place to live, the elderly people are forced to look forward to a shelter, where they can have security, shelter, food and companionship. It is in such a context that the institutions for the care of elderly came into being. Different types of old age homes have mushroomed in our society by fulfilling the increasing demands of such homes. Kerala has the highest number of old age homes in the country. More than 5000 inmates are sheltered

in 134 institutions in Kerala. Some of them are paid homes, some of them are unpaid, some run by Government, others by private charitable agencies. It is the Christian missionaries who started firstly the old age institutions in the various parts of India. But at present there are non governmental organisations managing institutions for the older persons.

Though the old age homes provide the basic amenities of living, most of the inmates were observed to be unhappy and were just leading their life. In many cases, old age homes are found to be more consoling for the senior citizens than their own homes where they are badly treated by their kith and kin. The old age homes gives shelter to the parents and relieve the children from the 'burden of the aged parents'. But most of the aged people suffer from many adjustment problems and problems of alienation when they change from family to institutional life. As they are away from their close relatives sometimes they feel that they are unwanted and useless creatures. It is observed that the residents of the institutions often complain about the circumstances necessitating their entry into the home. Each and every inmate had a pathetic story to narrate.

regarding the factors that contributed towards institutionalisation. Thus it seems that negative factors tend to predominate the decision to enter an old age home. Several investigators have outlined in detail the terrible living conditions and psychological deterioration that can be associated with long-term residence in an institution. Liberman in a study on the institutionalized elderly found that they tend to be depressed, unhappy, intellectually ineffective possessing a negative self-image, and having low interest in the surrounding. Even though, the aged has lost their status and often have to face harsh treatment from their relatives, they prefer to stay with their family. Besides, there are some older persons seeking admission in an institution, who are practically alone in the world because they remained bachelors or were widowed early and do not have any near relations, like a son or daughter, with whom they would reside or share the home.

Institutions for poor, destitute, and the left out old persons are definitely relevant. But it creates a social situation conducive for children to neglect their parents or parents seeking to stay away from children and family surroundings. So institutionalization of care for old persons needs rethinking. Old persons in institutions feel

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neglected and isolated. Thus institutional care can not be a total substitute for family care. The Committee on the Problems of the Aged observed that ageing is not only a physical process, but also a state of mind. The Committee further commented that Home for the Aged can be built but experience all over the world has shown that it is not the kind of place where the elderly should be kept. The elderly need to remain active, to know that they still have a part to play in the family or community to which they can make a useful contribution. They still need to feel wanted and loved. To put them in institutions is so to let them know that they are being discarded. The support and care must come from the heart, with feelings of sympathy, affection, and compassion. The Committee had therefore recommended that concerted effort must be made to preserve and strengthen the traditional family system. In stead of admitting the elderly to institutions in the false hope that the problem will stop there, the government should adopt a national policy aimed at keeping every elderly individual physically and mentally fit and active so that he can retain his normal living arrangements as long as possible.

Our elderly people whether they are institutionalised or not, thus facing multitude of problems. The solution of which requires

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concentrated and coordinated efforts of the governments, voluntary institutions, learned bodies and individuals. There is a need to develop a healthy and encouraging attitude towards the aged.

3.5 Policy and Provisions for the Elderly

The UN had declared 1999 as the International Year of the Aged. The UN General Assembly held its first meeting on Ageing in Vienna in 1982 in which 121 countries, including India participated. In October 1998, the U.N. General Assembly launched an International Plan on the Ageing and declared 1999 as the International Year of Older People. The Year 2000 had been declared as the International Year of Older Persons by the Government of India.

The responsibility of the State of its senior citizens is enshrined in the Indian Constitution. The constitution of India lays down duties of the State towards the elderly. According to Article 41 “the State shall within, the limits of economic capacity and development make effective provision for securing right to work, to educate and to give public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement and in other cases of undeserved want”. Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 requires every person having sufficient means to maintain his father or mother who are unable to
maintain himself or herself. Under this provision the parents can legally force their offspring to maintain them by claiming a maximum allowance of Rs. 500/- per month provided the offsprings have sufficient means. The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act, 1956 lays down that it is the obligation of a person to maintain his or her aged or infirm parents. While the last two of the above provisions are enforceable in a court of law, the first i.e. The constitutional measure falls only under a directive principle which is really an appeal to the states. Besides these legal provisions, the age-old practice in pursuance of the religious, cultural and social heritage of India is to take care of the aged in the family and the community and to enable them to lead a life of fulfillment and contentment. It is regarded as a moral duty of the children to provide financial, and physical security to their parents in old age. Children are therefore the eyes, ears, hands and feet to their aged parents.20

The last two decades have witnessed considerable discussion and debate on the impact of demographic transition and of changes in society and economy on the situation of older persons. In India, in the International year of older Persons, The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has finalised a drafted national policy for the senior

citizens. This Policy focuses on the significance of tapping human resource among the elderly. This will serve a dual purpose- the society will benefit tremendously from their expertise and experience and the older persons will lead an active life with a healthy outlook. This policy which could become a milestone in the lives of millions of old people seeks to ensure the well being of the aged, strengthen their legitimate place in the society to lead a dignified and peaceful life. Also this seeks for their financial security, health care, shelter, welfare, protection against abuse and exploitation and opportunities for developing their abilities. This policy also envisages prompt settlement of pension and other retirement benefits, expansion of the coverage under old age pension scheme and revision in the rate of monthly pension. Higher priority has been given to geriatric health packages.

The National Policy seeks to assure older persons that their concerns are national concerns and they will not live unprotected, ignored or marginalized. The goal of the National Policy is the well-being of the older persons. It aims to strengthen their legitimate place in society and help older persons to live the last phase of their life with purpose, dignity and peace. The Policy visualizes that the State will extend support for financial security, shelter, welfare and other needs of older persons, provide protection against abuse and exploitation, make available opportunities for development of the
potential of older persons, seek their participation and provide services so that they can improve the quality of their lives. The Policy is based on some broad provisions. The Policy recognizes the need for an affirmative action in favour of the elderly. It has to be ensured that the rights of older persons are not violated and they get opportunities and equitable share in the development benefits, in different sectors of development. Special attention will be necessary to older females so that they do not become victims of triple neglect and discrimination on account of gender, widowhood and age.

The Policy views the life style as a continuum, of which post 60 phase of life is an integral part. It does not view age 60 as the cut off point for beginning a life of dependency. It consists 60+ as a phase when the individual should have choices and opportunities to led an active, creative, productive, and satisfying life. An important thrust is therefore, an active and productive involvement of older persons and not just their care. The Policy values an age integrated society. It will endeavor to strengthen interaction between generations, facilitate two way flows and interactions, and strengthen bonds between the young and the old. It believes in the development of a social support system.
System, informal as well as formal, so that the capacity of families to take care of older persons is strengthened and they can continue to live in the family.

The Policy firmly believes in the empowerment of older persons so that they can acquire better control over their lives and participate in decision making on matters which affect them as well as on other issues as equal partners in the development process. The Policy recognizes that older persons, too, are a resource. They render useful services in the family and outside. They are not just consumers of goods and services but also their producers. Opportunities and facilities need to be provided so that they can continue to contribute more effectively to the family, the community and society. The Policy recognizes that larger budgetary allocations from the State will be needed and the rural and urban poor will be given special attention. However, it is neither feasible nor desirable for the State alone to attain the objectives of the National Policy. Individuals, families, communities and institutions of civil society have to join hands as partners.

The Policy emphasizes the need for expansion of social and community services for older persons, particularly women, and enhance their accessibility and use by removing socio-cultural,
economic and physical barriers and making the services client oriented and user friendly. Special efforts will be made to ensure that rural areas, where more than three-fourths of the older population lives, are adequately covered. The Policy recognizes that the media have a very important role to play in highlighting the changing situation of older persons and in identifying emerging issues and areas of action. Creative use of media can promote the concept of active ageing and help dispel stereotypes and negative images about this stage of the life cycle. Media can also help to strengthen inter-generation bonds and provide individuals, families and groups with information and educational material which will give better understanding of the ageing process and of the ways to handle problems as they arise.

Housing for the old is another major thrust area where proposal to allocate ten percent of the houses under housing schemes through easy loans has been suggested. On the other fronts, issue of identity cards, fare concessions in all modes of transport, discounts for tickets for cultural and entertainment programs, priority in sanctioning gas and telephone connections are also proposed. The Policy will make a change in the lives of senior citizens only if it is implemented. Some of them came into being. In 1996 Government launched a scheme to assist Panchayati Raj Institutions and
Voluntary organisations for building old age homes. The Government of India has decided to help the poor old people in the country by launching a new scheme called ‘Annapurna’ which aims at providing food security to the indigent senior citizens who have no income of their own and no one to take care of them. The scheme came into being and it provide ten kilograms of food grains per month free of cost to all indigent senior citizens.

“Don’t be hard on your parents, you may find yourself in their place”, wrote the famous English writer Compten Burnett-Dame Ivy. Stepping into the shoes of youth, people see the world at their feet, the world of aged seems to be ugly and undesirable and they reject the old not realizing the consequences of their action. With the increase in life expectancy at birth due to better child care, medical facilities and economic well being, today the population of senior citizen have grown manifold. But in the past two decades the social scene has undergone drastic changes with the joint family system breaking down. Today nuclear families are the norm. Migration to cities in search of better opportunities, migrating overseas and breakdown in relationships etc. also contribute to isolation of the aged. This brings to the fore the need for social security and protection for the aged who become more

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dependent on others for even day to day needs. Social defense of the aged has been one of the priorities in the India Government’s agenda. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has finalized a national policy for the senior citizens which seeks to ensure the total well being of the aged.

Thus it is evident that due to socio-economic changes in the wake of urbanisation and increase in the proportion of the aged in the population, the problems of the aged have become formidable. Old age is a period of life like any other periods of life such as, childhood, adulthood etc. But since in this period, social physical and psychological problems are more in the elderly citizens, a soft approach can help them to get a feeling of satisfaction ad happiness. It is the family care that needs to be enriched for a social set up for the older person, rather than propagating Institutional care. The four components to be considered are the elderly, the younger generation, the community and the society. All the four components need to work to ensure family care. Older persons need to understand that situation has changed from their days. They should be brought to a level wherein they adopt and accept to the changing world.