Chapter IV

GERIATRICAL PROBLEMS
Chapter IV

GERIATRICAL PROBLEMS

In this chapter an attempt is made to analyse the problems aged people and their general outlook. Ageing is a phenomenon in life, which everyone has to accept. Old age and death are unavoidable and irreversible life processes. William Shakespeare aptly described the last phase of seven stages of man: "Last of all,

That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."¹

About one fourth of a man's life is spent in growing up and preparing for active participation in society. Similarly, about one half is engaged in a variety of activities in an attempt to gain happiness and the final quarter of life is spent in a progressive process of reduced activity leading to physical decline followed by inevitable death. The process of decline during the last part of life becomes a problem not only for the person concerned, but also for the close relatives and the society as a whole. Most of the people are enthusiastic to have old furniture, old pictures, old cars, everything old but not old people, presuming that old people are outwear, liability, and dogmatic, but not recognizing

¹ Bhattacharya S.K., *Social Problems in India*, New Delhi: Manak Publications, 199, p.147
them as omniscient, experienced and learned. This negative perception is the result of the changes that are taking place in the society and in the value system. Old age is a crucial stage in one's life span because a person's social obligation, privileges and expectations undergo a change. In every stage of life we have problems. Life without problems may not be worth living. So we cannot say that only old age is problematic. But in our society the increased life expectancy has resulted in a great number of old people and today old age seems to be a serious problem. It is conceivable that the problems that people are required to face in old age may be more severe than the ones that they are required to face when they are young or in middle age.

The problems that occur with ageing appear to be a product of the modern age. In the context of the dynamic changes taking place in the Indian society, the problems of the aged have assumed great importance. Our ancient culture demands that the aged should be respected. In fact, the order of prevalence in India has been matha; pitha, guru, daivam in that order. Since time immemorial, most of the traditional families in India cling fast to the belief that since it is the duty of the parents to look after their children, it is equally incumbent upon children to look after their dependent parents. One repays one's duty to the parents and also paves one's way to salvation.

---

Advancing age seems to bring meaningless misery, mainly because the elderly have been neglected and by-passed by modern society. The aged living in enforced retirement not only suffers from chronic diseases and frailties of the age but also from unhappiness caused by their feelings of uselessness, loneliness and despair. The changing social systems on one hand, and the artificially enhanced life span on the other triggered the multiple problems of the older persons. The young with their achieved status considering themselves as “fittest survivals”, leaving the old for “struggle for survivalness”. Today the older generations are remembering their past and dreaming for better future. For today’s society this might be a silent crisis, but for tomorrow’s society it will be a mammoth social problem. Ageing is a problem of almost every family, involving strains of caring and stresses of intergenerational interactions. It is every body’s problem as everyone is bound to age and experience the impact. Plans to support the elderly are generally inadequate. Many thousands of them are still rejected by the society, their final years grim and cheerless. Therefore, the present and expected increase in the ratio of senior citizens in the future, calls for greater attention to the financial, physical, sociological, and psychological adjustment problems that is specific to the elderly. This

makes it necessary to look into the various aspects of their problems – social, economic psychological and other related aspects.

4.1 Economic Problems

Ageing by virtue of itself indicates multiple problems and one of the major problems faced by most of the elderly persons are economic hardship. In the pre-industrial Indian society, most of the old people, used to remain financially independent till they lived. They retained ownership of landholdings and other occupational establishments and participated in productive activities according to their physical fitness. In the process of ageing, individuals grow old and their physical and mental strength gradually decreases. Consequently they may not be able to perform certain roles and work, which they were previously performing. Such an inability decreases their earning capacity and eventually they are forced to depend upon others.  

As one grows old, control over the finance of the family slips from him. Individuals who are required to retire and deprived of their main source of living may have to face these problems. Individuals who are dependent on others may face these problems if these persons die or become infirm, or the individuals may face these problems because of their increased need of medical assistance in old age.

\[\text{Muttagi, P. K., Ageing issues and Old age Care, New Delhi: Classical Publications, 1997, p.52}\]
The problem areas regarding financial aspects are not independent, but very much inter-dependent. In other words, problems in one area contribute to problems in other areas. To take an example, if a person has a problem of failing health, he may have to face increasing medical bills and this adds to his financial worries. So the health problems contribute to the financial problems. In general economic insecurity is the main economic problem of the old. Many old people belonging to lower and middle class groups have economic problems. The workers who had been earning their livelihood by putting their physical strength day by day grow old, cannot work fast and as efficiently as before. Consequently they cannot earn money in their old age and hence face financial crisis. They do not have enough savings to take care of their needs. Also transfer of all property in the name of children may lead to economic problems for the old. In the absence of their own regular source of income, they have to depend on their sons and daughters who find it difficult to meet their demands because of the difficult situation created by the price rise and the fast changing life styles and also they have their own families.

Having spent all their earned money on children's education and marriage, they are shocked when their offspring refuse to take care of their needs. The problem of economic insecurity is far more acute in
the elderly women compared to their male counterparts. This is mainly because even in the normal course, women have limited control over the household resources and they constitute a small proportion of the workforce in the organized sector, and therefore only limited numbers have the benefit of an independent pension. Also old people who live alone are highly subject to attack by anti-social activists on account of thefts of jewelry or meager amount of cash.

Financial problems are also many for the people retired from active workforce. Immediately after retirement, one of the major losses incurred by the retired persons is finance. This is due to the sudden reduction in the regular monthly income. If planning for retirement were not done earlier the economic crisis arising out of the reduced income would result in various socio-psychological problems. It is said that good income ensures good mental and physical health. A person with good health and adequate income can overcome various psychosocial problems and adjust himself effectively to a retired life.

It is said that on retirement, the financial condition of a person deteriorates. Sometimes, economic crisis forces the retired persons to take up part-time jobs in spite of their failing health and against their
will. Getting a suitable job after retirement is a difficult task. It is because in our country, there are not sufficient avenues open for the retired people even if they are physically fit and capable. Also even those who are the recipient of retirement benefits find it difficult to meet their basic requirements with the decrease in their income and increase in the cost of living.

In the case of other aged people, the situation is still worse. Old age pension schemes are in operation in all the states including Kerala for the old in unorganized sectors. But these schemes are non-contributing in nature and are primarily meant for the destitute aged. Also it is a fact that a large number of the destitute elderly who are eligible to receive old age pension are not getting the pension for various reasons such as lack of knowledge of the scheme, lack of awareness about their rights to get old age pension and difficulties of running from place to place for getting pension. The registering process for pension is a complicated process and it takes a minimum of six months thereafter for the payment to materialize. Consequently, not more than 10% of the aged population is able to avail of it. If the government were to involve voluntary agencies working for the aged in screening the applications for old age pensions, the process would be
faster.\(^9\) Also the amount of pension give under the old age pension scheme is approximately Rs 110 or Rs.120 per month. The amount is neither linked with the actual needs of the beneficiary nor with the rising cost of living.

A study of the working of old age pension scheme in Kerala shows that as many as 92.9% of the old age pensioners found their income, including from all age pension, as inadequate to support them.\(^10\) Still vast majorities of the aged in our society are poor and need financial support even for meeting their basic necessities. The role of children or other relatives though available to a large number of aged is insignificant as a source of support for the aged. Even the public assistance programmes in the form of old age pension scheme have failed to solve the problems of economic insecurity for the aged. For those outside the organized sector of employment, whether self-employed or employees, there are no retirement benefits. They have to fall back on their savings, or depend on their children to look after them in their old age. The fact is that there is no age of retirement in the case of bulk of the workers in the unorganized sector. Those who are self-employed, work as long as they can, gradually reducing their

---

\(^9\) Gayathri Pagadi, *The Times of India*, 29-9-91

working hours. Thus by all means economic crisis is a major problem caused by the elder people in our modern society.

4.2 Health Problems

Of all the problems that trouble old people, health seems to be very important. Old age in itself is not a disease. However with advancement in age many ailments comes to the surface. They may be of recent origin or a carry over from the past. Lucky are those who are able to maintain good health as they advance in age. Among the problems of old age, health problem is a major unsolved problem because it is accentuated by an increasing number of physical handicaps, more frequent and serious illnesses, more mental disturbances and a general reaction among the aged that ill-health is their major burden.\footnote{Desai K. N, n.10, p.149} Cuyler distinguishes between four main approaches to the definition of health: health as the absence of illness, health as a pragmatically defined entity: and health as the absence of disease, and health as an ideal state.\footnote{Steward Clarke Alison, \textit{Life Long Human Development}, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1988, p.291} Even when one is not suffering from any diseases, one experiences a gradual decline in physical strength with the growing age. Disability of both physical and mental types is an additional curse of many old persons.
It is widely known that old people suffer from multiple pathologies. The illness pattern of the old is quite different from that of the young and so the basic philosophy of approach and mode of treatment of old also need to be different. It is clearly obvious that people become more and more susceptible to chronic diseases, physical disabilities and mental incapacities in their old age. The illness of the elderly are multiple and chronic in nature. The National Policy for Older Persons recognizes that with advancing age, old persons have to cope up with health and associated problems, some of which may be chronic, of a multiple nature, requiring constant attention and carry the risk of disability and consequent loss of autonomy. Any illness may occur at any age. But certain disorders increase in frequency after the peak of maturity. These disorders, while not limited to senescence, are never the less characteristically geriatric. Moreover, the aged respond to habits rather than adjust habits to environment. They live by habits. This is a major cause of health problems. What has made the problem of health in old age, as a major unsolved problem is the ignorance and apathetic attitude towards the illness among the aged. The idea that old age is an age of ailments and physical infirmities is deeply rooted in the Indian mind, and the elderly accepts many of the

14 Desai K.N, n.10, p. 151
sufferings and stresses within curable limits as natural and inevitable. On account of old age various geriatric ailments like circulatory disturbances, heart diseases, visual and hearing impairments and disorder on mental nervous conditions usually attack older persons. Apart from the geriatric ailments, diseases like colic pain, gastritis, indigestion, asthma, joint pains and general weakness are found to be frequent among the old people due to decline in their power of resistance. New diseases like dementia and Alzheimer’s disease are making their appearance in a significant way and many soon find a place among other major incurable diseases.

In human body the muscular system works in conjunction with skeletal system. A human being grows by an enlargement of these muscle and bone cells, which he has at birth. The skeletal and muscular systems of humans attain their maximum size during early twenties. The ageing process affects the bones to lose density, resulting in easy brittleness. A body joint become less mobile and gets stiffened, particularly in the absence of exercise. Cartilage discs especially between segments of the spinal column degenerate and vertebrae come close together, and resulting in decrease in height and this may lead to a hunched posture. In some persons the cartilage between the weight bearing bones gets grossly degenerate due to long wear and this is
characterized as osteoarthritis, which may be crippling. This occurs mostly often in knee joints, lower spine and hips.

The ageing process also affects the circulatory system. With ageing the heart pumps become harder to compensate for decreasing elasticity of the walls of arteries. The buildup of fatty deposits leads to narrowing of the passages of blood vessels. Coronary Heart Disease (heart attack) occurs when a large blockage due to blood clot cuts off blood supply to the heart muscles. Similarly strokes occur when the blood vessels of the brain get blocked or ruptured. This can lead to paralysis.

Similarly, the endocrine system regulates the major functions of the body such as metabolism of sugar control and body temperature. Malfunction of these systems may cause high blood pressure, diabetes etc. Also the respiratory system is directly related to age. The ability to transfer oxygen from the alveoli to the blood declines due to decreased elasticity of the bronchial tubes. The nervous system changes with age in some people as a result of loss of brain and nerve cells. These cells in the brain are never replaced and can lead to mental impairment. Therefore senses became less sharp resulting in some cases in senile brain syndrome.

Considering the reproductive system and sexuality, although the function of reproduction ceases in the later years, yet sexuality and
sexual needs do not. However, there is a decline in sexual activity. In women menopause begins between the ages of 40 to 50 years. Decline in sexual performance in some of the males is more due to fear rather than actual physical status. Also the sensory and perceptual abilities get affected with ageing particularly the special senses such as sight and hearing, thus leading to poor quality of life. Advancing with age, the ability to focus objects decreases. And the elderly people therefore need glasses to counteract this disability. With age the lens in one or both eyes may become less bright or completely opaque. Therefore it may result in impaired or complete loss of vision and it is generally viewed as cataract. With ageing also the hearing capacity gets impaired. Older people are more prone to ear damage. With auditory nerve damage, sound is not carried to the brain and hearing aids do not help when the nerve is dead. But often the elderly refuse to admit to a hearing loss and this denial may lead to emotional problems. The ability to taste and smell also decline with advancing age.

Mental health of the elderly is another important area in understanding their overall health situation. It is generally expected that the elderly person should be free from mental worries since they have already completed their share of tasks and should lead a peaceful life. But often, the unfinished familial tasks become a source of worry over a period of time. All these physical and mental disabilities lead to
utter helplessness for old people. But at the same time, there is a general perception among the elderly that they are prone to illnesses mainly due to their advanced age and that it is natural to suffer from such problems at that age. However, in reality, most of their diseases are minor in nature and curable at the initial stage itself. But most of them neglect the illness and postpone seeking medical aid. And also it is a fact that the existing medical facilities are also inadequate to provide successful medical aid to our elderly people.

Thus physical problems are also a major cause of worry for the life of our elderly persons.

4.3 Social Problems

Ageing is not only physiological or chronological but also a social and cultural phenomenon. Every society has its own conception of ageing and age groupings. Social ageing as distinct from biological or psychological ageing refers to the stage in the life span of the individual that is regarded as old age by the social group or community.\textsuperscript{15} Ageing is the terminal stage of one's lifecycle, which is accompanied with decreasing energy and body resources and with infirmities due to decaying, and weakening of one's bodily organs.\textsuperscript{16} Such infirmities of the ageing process have always been present among the older people.

\textsuperscript{15} Pati R.N., Jena B. n.8, p.72
\textsuperscript{16} Desai K. N., n.10, p. 72
But in the past, they were take care of by the individuals concerned and his immediate circle of relatives and as such old age did not constitute a social problem then.

However, in recent times, as a result of changing circumstances due to demographic transition, disintegration of joint family structures into nuclear ones, increasing participation of females in non-agricultural labour force, the life of older people have became increasingly vulnerable not only to their physical disabilities, but also to social, economic and emotional alienation and isolation. Now a days, the traditional joint family structure where both young and old lived in mutual harmony is undergoing the process of disintegration. Even where the joint family exists for names sake, the elderly people are gradually being left behind and their grown up children are migrating to other places in search of employment and settling down there in nuclear units.

Furthermore, the traditional Indian value system used to place a heavy emphasis on prestige associated with old age. ‘Pitridevo bhava’ is the insignia of our rich culture that bestows high regard for the ageing. The elderly were the most respected members of the family and centers of authority. The seniors guided the younger generation. The household runs on his directions, he has to access to the finances and he is the decision maker for all the members of the family in all respects. He is
respected for his powerful position. They were invariably consulted with regard to all family matters. They were also enjoying good respect in the society because of their rich worldly experience. But in our modern society, the prestige, power, authority, status, and security enjoyed by the aged are now declining. Now with the increase of literacy among women, accompanied by their employment in offices and factories leave no time for these women to take care of the elderly at home. Besides, there is a tendency of distribution of larger share of income in favour of the younger generation. Apart from economic difficulties like high cost of living, expensive medical care, fall in income; many elderly people face the grim prospect of being unloved and becoming unwanted. The aged are gradually pushed to relatively insignificant social positions consequent upon loss of status, power, and authority in the family and society.

Ageing can be viewed as a social problem from two perspectives. First, ageing is a direct problem to that segment of the population, which is in the aged category. The elderly suffer all the consequences and indignities resulting from alienation—both physical and emotional. Second, ageing is a problem for society as a whole because the
presence of old people and their problems have profound effects upon the structure and functions of society.\textsuperscript{17}

Also retirement is becoming one of the major social problems in our culture. In our society the age of retirement varies between 55-65, and by this age, the people are forced to retire, even if they do not desire it. This forced retirement makes different problems for them. Pension reduces the people's standard of living. He becomes deprived of many customary activities and goods. He may also miss a sense of participation and usefulness which he felt while he was employed. Retirement makes the aged socially disengaged. Reduced income after retirement and the changes in the life pattern makes them socially isolated. The old people usually play less active role in social and community affairs, because of the developing unfavorable social concepts and they consider themselves as useless and unwanted. They also develop a feeling of inferiority. They think their status is decreasing in society. Since social identity is related so closely to one's job, loosing an occupational identity from another pursuit can confuse the aged person. The aged person, who lacks interest in practices and leisure pursuits, frequently gets bored by his free time.\textsuperscript{18} Old people may be required to face the problems of adjustment due to the loss of

\textsuperscript{17} Pati K.N., Jena B. n.8. p.37

spouse or loss of friends. They have a lot of free time and do not know what to do with it and hence utilization of leisure time may be a problem. Having no present role to play in family and in society, the old people often dwell on memories of past life, and often keep a distance from society.

Thus in our modern society the old people cannot compete with young people in the areas where highly valued trials are needed and the social attitudes towards them is unfavourable. Furthermore, here is a marked reduction in the number of roles; the elderly persons are able to play. Feeling useless and unwanted, elderly people develop feeling of inferiority and resentment that are not conducive to good personal or social adjustments.

4.4 Psychological Problems

"The progress of a nation may be marked by the care which it provides for the aged." This observation of Albert Epstein stresses on the importance of the care of the aged. Though the financial problems of the aged seemed to be urgent, psychological adjustment also need be looked into. Of course, the socio-psychological implications of aging in India are somewhat different from those in western countries. 'Vanaprastha' the third stage of typical Indian Ashram scheme of life was nothing but stage of preparations for old age or the 'Sanyasa'. As a

17 Pati R. N. Jena B n.8, p. 128
whole, the entire traditional system was systematic enough to avoid the social and psychological problems of an individual in the last quarter of his life. But the complex social structures of modern times have multiplied the problems of aged persons. The psychological aspects of aging involve a wide variety of problems. Although no period of life is free from the specter of emotional distress, older people encounter a high risk than any other age group. Old age comes with different psychological pressure in the minds of the people. The aged are worried for finance, anxiety over health, and feelings of being unwanted, loneliness and isolation.

Traditionally in our society based on the joint family system, it was the duty and responsibility of the younger members of the family to care the aged people. The younger members of the joint family were under the control and command of the aged chief of the family and respected him by seeking his guidance and advice. As a whole the entire traditional system was systematic. Now with the passage of time, the joint family system is replaced by the nuclear family system. The honour accorded to the old, the respect with which they were invited to sit in judgment over a dispute have become a thing of the past and are considered redundant in the modern context. Old people sometimes become separated from members of their family on account of their lack of capacity to enter into the day-to-day life of the home.
Sometimes this lack of capacity is increased by the reluctance of other members of the family to share the knowledge of day-to-day events with the old person, perhaps because he is slow to grasp them. There may be a tendency to exclude him from making decisions without consulting him, and sometimes without conveying the decision. Chowdhry has pointed out that “an old person begins to feel that even his children do not look upon him with that degree of respect which he used to get some years earlier. The old person feels neglected and humiliated. This may lead to the development of psychology of shunning the company of others. Loneliness in turn may give rise to depression and may eventually lead to worsening of sickness.”²⁰ Also there exists a psychological problem of feeling of inferiority and inadequacy that comes with physical changes. The loss of an attractive, sex-appropriate, appearance may lead both men and women to feel rejection by the social groups. Loss of hearing and missing of teeth or poorly fitted dentures interferes their communication with other people. Many elderly people suspect or realize that they are becoming somewhat forgetful, that they have difficulty in learning new names or facts. They come to think that they are slipping mentally and this encourage them in their belief that they are too old to learn anything.

They withdraw from all activities that might involve competition with younger people. They feel guilt about not working while other people still are. Growing old many elderly people are unable to afford the leisure-time activities. For entertainment they depend on Television. But majority of the programmes are youth or younger-adult oriented. They give little interest to the aged. Older people are very much susceptible to psychotic depressions. The two major psychotic disorders of older people are 'senile dementia' and psychosis with 'cerebral arterio sclerosis'.

Older people who suffer from senile dementia develop some symptoms like poor memory, intolerance of change, disorientation, restlessness, and extreme mental depression. Psychosis with cerebral Arterio sclerosis is accompanied by symptoms such as weakness, fatigue, dizziness, headache, depression, memory defect, and lowered efficiency in work. Another important psychological problem faced by the aged are the adjustment with the changes, which occurs, in the family structures and functions.

4.5 Adjustment Problems

Old age is considered to begin in an individual when he is no longer able to keep his share of those role-playing activities that are

---

22 Mary P.M. A Study on the institutional Care Services for the old, – Study conducted in Sree Sankara University of Sanskrit, Kalady, 1998, p.28.
typical of an average adult. Old age means reduced physical ability, the gradual giving up of role-playing in social activities, usually work in the case of men and household management in the case of women and a shift in economic independence to economic dependence upon other for support. The family life of the elderly people changes with their retirement or loss of job. They face problems in relationship with their spouse, with the offspring, with in laws and grandchildren. The relationship of the aged with their in-laws and offspring are often less satisfactory. Economic insecurity forces them to depend on their offspring. But they were not ready to share their authority with others. The parents continued to treat them as a child. The relationship of the old with the grandchildren is another problem. As a result of changing values and attitudes there is a generation gap between the aged and the grandchildren. With the impact of modernization among the young members of the community, the traditional norms and values have been affected, and the attitude and behavior of younger generation have also been changing. It is true that the requirements of each generation differ and the members of each generation want to solve their requirements with their own choice. The choice of younger generation is mainly based on the modern way of living, which the old do not like. The old being the head of the family try to bring the younger members into confidence by convincing them in various ways.
But the younger member has become so much rigid that he is not in a position to hear anything from the aged people. In some cases, the young ones in spite of paying respect to the aged begin to insult them.

Relationship with their in-laws can be another area of adjustment problems. Old people often have complaints about others that they do not pay enough attention to them. So there are misunderstandings making their lives miserable. The only thing to be done is that the aged should try to adjust themselves according to changed circumstances. It should essentially be a two way process. The aged and the young should try to understand each other and make each other happy. Then only it is possible to ensure a comfortable life for the elderly people.

4.6 Disintegration of Family

In our culture family is a sort of insurance that one will be looked after in one's old age.23 The aged were respected as well as feared in our ancient culture since time immemorial. They were considered as well experienced persons. During their good days they cared their younger ones and in their old age the youngsters are expected to care them. But recently the existing system changed, due to many reasons. Families are now undergoing a transition in structures, functions and values. Industrialisation, and urbanization

---

changed the complete picture of our society. The disintegration of joint family system poses a clearly negative impact on life of aged people. The traditional joint family system has been undergoing a drastic change with the advent of industrialization, urbanization and modernization. The younger generation seeks more freedom and enjoyment. For that they migrate to urban areas seeking better job and other life facilities. This became a reason for the emergence of the nuclear families in our society. This changing pattern of the family has deleterious effect on the aged as they are losing prominence in the family system. Now the attitude of the youth towards the aged changed negatively and they consider the aged as a burden on their families. Generally, in many cases after partition of the property, the old parents have to stay a month or more with one son and then the same period with another son and so on. In some cases, the land is divided equally among the sons and one share extra for parents. The share of the parents goes with the chosen son with whom they like to stay. They start to live with this particular son and other sons become free from taking care of the old parent. Now it is sole duty of this son to render all sorts of care to the old parent. In the beginning, the son and his family members behave well and feel proud to save the aged parents. Soon the requirements and necessities of the elderly parents are neglected and they are even forced to lead an unhappy life.
4.7 Loneliness and Isolation

Another problem, which the aged suffer, is isolation and loneliness. Loneliness is the lack of social contacts or interaction with outside world.\textsuperscript{24} There is more time available and no pressure to use it. In nuclear families, which are becoming more predominant now, in which both husband and wife are working, the problem of loneliness becomes more acute. In a situation in which all the family members are awfully busy in their own work and are not in a position to spare any time with the company of the aged, they feel lonely and isolated. The young generation finds fault with the behaviour and the beliefs of the old. Also the aged want the family affairs to be conducted according to their directions, which do not, became acceptable to the younger generation. Since the aged in the family have enjoyed the highest status and supreme authority earlier, even in old age they expect the same respect to be given to them, decisions should be taken by them or at least in consultation with them and their orders should be obeyed by all the family members, and when these expectations are belied, they feel that they are being ignored, disobeyed, and disrespected. Since all the family members in contemporary society are awfully busy in managing their own affairs, children going to school and adults going

\textsuperscript{24} Chowdhary Paul D. Ageing and the Aged. New Delhi: Inter India Publications, 1992, p.98
for occupational pursuits, they hardly find any time to interact with the aged who quite often mistake it as their neglect.25

An old person may feel dependent and if no one takes notice of him, he gets a feeling of inferiority and he feels isolated and lonely. A sense of loss of prestige, and social status are equally important factors leading to insecurity. The needs of both the young and of the aged are different—while youth want to enjoy his life by all means, the aged want to renounce the world or to live in peace. For example, youth want to listen to pop music while the aged would prefer bhajans. Both are intolerant of each other. Very often elderly persons create isolation for themselves by distracting people's time and tales of their achievements in the past. Sometimes the younger people avoid the elders because of fear of this boredom, although repaying their past gives comfort and consolation to the aged. Because of his personal inadequacies, mannerisms style of living, generation gap paucity of accommodation with his son(s) and absence of wife, family or peer group, an aged person may feel isolated which is in itself a great social and emotional handicap for an elderly person.26 Sometimes, when he is ill, he has to depend upon others and sometimes he may get the feeling of being given up by relations and friends and as a burden on them. He may

25 Husain M.G.n.20, p.67
26 Chowdhary Paul D. n.24, p. 89
have the feeling of being unwanted or not being consulted by his sons and daughters although an elderly may feel that asked on his past experience and performance he is the most able and able person. So they are forced to lead a lonely and isolated life.

Social isolation due to the gradual disappearance of near and dear ones is also a major cause of distress among the elderly. The aged who have lost their spouse are the worst sufferers of loneliness and agony, as they have nobody to understand their misery since they have nobody to understand their misery since the youngsters have their own matters to attend to. Impairment of vision and hearing and various chronic ailments make social interaction difficult, and attitudes of self-pity or centering of interest may alienate family and friends alike. In many cases, older persons also become increasingly rigid and intolerant in their outlook and are unable to make effective use of the opportunities for meaningful social interaction that still remain open. The aged do not know what they want and do not have clear ideas of what they feel. A large number of the aged turn to religion to overcome their feelings of loneliness, emptiness and distress.

4.8 Depression

Depression is another common problem associated with ageing. The aged may begin to feel that they are not cared for properly and also feel neglected and become useless dependents. When their words and
opinions are not accepted, and are not involved in certain activities, then also they became depressed. It is said, “If fire burns the dead, worry burns the living.”

When in youth if someone has any problems he tries to solve these using his skill, strength and other means. When one becomes old and weak, and does not keep good health, does not earn and has become a dependent on others, one has every reason to get worried. Of the many problems faced in old age, worry is considered the worst. Often the aged worry about their sons who are not doing well in life, daughters to be married and those who are not happy in their conjugal home, and also about property transactions.

Old people are often subject to sudden, unexplained depressive feelings lasting for hours and even for days. These are normal and non-preventable and should be treated as such. Grief reactions are also universally experienced, at the loss of spouse or at the loss of employment. The replacement of these real losses, with new gratification, poses a challenge especially in new of the reluctance to become vulnerable to death and illness.

Loss of occupation is a major cause, which creates psychological vacuum in the life of some people. Old age is associated with reduction

---

of income and social status and this also creates depression in the minds of some people. Very often, family members are unable to understand this stage of depression and misunderstand the old. Old people have complaints about others that they do not pay enough attention to them. Soon they become quarrelsome and make life miserable for themselves and for others. If both the spouses are living they play supportive role for each other. But if the spouse is dead, the remaining person feels very lonely, desperate and depressed. Thinking on these things, it is clear that the mental difficulties such as depression and loneliness etc. are more than the physical difficulties for the elderly people. As physical health goes down the mental urge for recreation, sympathy and acceptance grows higher. Also it is obvious that a person with any of these physical or mental difficulties cannot contribute his best to the society.

Nature of the problems that the old people are required to face may differ from individual to individual. The age of an individual will make a lot of difference in the nature of problems. The problem of old people in their 60's may quite different from those in their 80's. The problems of old men would be different from those of women. The problems of persons who are required to retire from their service are different from those who are self-employed and are not required to retire from their services. But it is clearly obvious that there is a great
measure of inter-relationship between the problems of old people as a whole. For example, failing health may stand in the way of getting suitable employment. This may in turn create a kind of atmosphere in family in which an old person begins to feel that even his children do not look upon him with that degree of respect, which he used to get some years earlier. Some of them show a tendency to withdraw themselves in to their own shells. Hence they keep away from the society without any external reason. The truth about ageing that it is a natural and universal process. It is not at all a crisis, which hits us suddenly, and we can equip ourselves to cope with it when it comes, but also enjoy the opportunities and challenges it presents. Thinking of all these things as reality, Clifford K Anderson in his book ‘Your Guide to Health’ states with a universal truth: “Nothing is more certain than the passage of time and the changes that come with it. Whether we like it or not, we are all growing older every day. Naturally we all wish we could stay young, but this we cannot do. We must therefore find ways to adjust our minds even as nature seeks to adjust our bodies to the change of time.” The proverb that the green leaf of the jack tree has no fundamental right to laugh at the fallen yellow leaf prove to be effective in the case of situation of the elderly people. Here,

30 Mary P. M., n. 22, p. 12
younger generation has to express their love and affection besides sympathy to the elders that it is their duty and responsibility.

In short the old people are sufferers of many types of socio-psychological problems. Even if the extent of problems are different in all elders, they all suffer these problems in one way or another to some extend. The extent of problems that they have to face may be different as per their living conditions, but the typical problems faced by them are interdependent. In addition to health problems, they all are suffering from psychological problems of one form or another. The solution to the sufferings of the elderly people actually needs emergent attention. If the elder people, their family members and the society involving them try to understand the problems concerning them, then only all these problems can be replaced.