



AFTER THE SUPREME COURT RECENTLY SOUGHT A RESPONSE FROM THE CENTRE ON A PETITION SEEKING OLD-AGE HOMES IN EVERY DISTRICT, CITY EXPRESS SPEAKS TO A FEW SENIOR CITIZENS IN THE CITY TO FIND OUT WHAT THEY NEED

A LIFE OF DIGNITY



Suhasini

According to the 2011 census, the population of senior citizens in the country is 10.38 crore, which is about 8.6 per cent of the total population in the country. The Supreme Court recently sought response from the Centre on setting up old-age homes in every district to take care of the elderly left to fend for themselves by their children.

Humans live emotionally by the bondage of love, which is unique for them. When any breach takes place in this bondage, whether it is big or trivial particularly in old age, the only option left for the person is to go to an old-age home to live with dignity.

Development cannot be devoid of disadvantages. Given the socio-economic scenario of the country, this has in general proved to be a curse rather than a blessing on our elders. Thus in contrast to families of the yesteryear's, elders, specially those in their old age do not find a place in the present day nuclear family system.

They are caught in the middle of independence of thought, financial stability and increased social connectivity. "The State-owned elders' homes in the country are not only inadequate in numbers but patently lack appropriate facilities to provide a decent habitation to the needy. So the need of the hour is for the private enterprises to step in. Apart from providing gated homes, corporates should contribute to building facilities that can house seniors of various of socio-economic status. The

government should step in to effectively contribute its financial and logistic support," feels Suhasini Ram, one of the inmates at the Smiles, a non-profit old age home. She stresses that the government should earmark a defined percentage from the corporate social responsibility fund to building affordable old-age homes. "The State's efforts should also concentrate on building exclusive homes for seniors," she adds.

Just like Suhasini feels that more physical spaces need to be allotted, another

inmate, AY Krishna feels that though emotional pain cannot be completely erased, the company of like-minded people may reduce the pain to an extent. "Though the management cannot attend to the emotional strain, they can definitely attend to the logistical challenges faced by the inmates by providing support like palatable and nutritious food, comfortable accommodation with aesthetic ambiance, activities like games and sports and entertainment to free them from emotional strain because of their separation from their kith and kin," he opines.

However, putting aside the concept of an old-age home is the age old Vaanaprastha Ashram which do not have place for emotional strains or any other logistic challenges. "Living here has given us an opportunity to work out a philosophy of life and then working that philosophy into way of life – a time for transcending senses to find and dwell with the reality that underlies the natural world. All other considerations will pale into insignificance," feels JP Chauhan, another senior citizen.

In the present times retiring to an old-age home has become common due to the transformation in the way of life of the younger generation. In India this becomes a problem as we are in the transition period where elders are still dependent unlike in western

countries where they are independent. "It is inevitable we balance this emotional stress and logistical challenges to lead a harmonious life. Ambience of an ideal old-age home will aid this," says Indubala from Smiles. The first problem one faces is no one to open up to. "Age, illness, immobility, hearing and sight impairment, emotional breach down are the biggest impediments to interact. Still the lighter side is that there is so much humour around old-age homes and reasons to laugh. Tragedy can also be comedy for one who accepts it in the lighter vein," feels D Shantha, another senior citizen.

- Swati Sharma



Krishna



Indubala



Vishwanathan



Shanta

More options

Not only old-age homes, there are organisations like Thodu Needa, for single seniors who are widowed or divorced, who have dealt with their loss and want to move on with their lives. The purpose of the organisation is to build lasting friendship, share ideas, encourage participations and enjoy life with like-minded people.

Senior citizens who have either lost their loved ones or have separated from their spouses can choose either to marry a partner or to just live-in together with mutual agreement at the get-togethers organised by Thodu Needa