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## Making Old-Age Homes A Lively Place: NGOs, CSR Foundations Hold The Key

*Buckling under the societal, financial and personal transformations, the youth today are finding themselves incapable of looking after their aging parents*



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Famous English journalist and satirist Thomas Malcolm Mugeridge had stated that one of the many pleasures of old age is giving things up. However, in our country as a sharp contrast to this, youth today are giving up on their parents. While there are old people who have no one to look after them, there are those who have been deserted by their children and are forced to live in old age homes. Buckling under the societal, financial and personal transformations, the youth today are finding themselves incapable of looking after their aging parents. The situation in India is quite different from trends prevalent in certain European countries.

In the west, old age homes are synonymous with care, they have full-fledged daycare facilities, nurses and psychologists who help the elderly cope with the vagaries of the old age. Further, in those countries, youngsters also prefer to drop their parents to an old age home due to the lack of time, while in India, the elderly are being abandoned.

A joint report by the United Nations Population Fund and HelpAge India has said that the numbers of elderly persons are expected to grow to 173 million by 2026. According to some studies, India is aging much faster and may have 20 percent population above 60 years by 2050.

Many youths today don't shy away from sending their parents to old age homes. The gradual erosion of traditional joint family or extended family systems has led to nuclear families, thus excluding the elders. Although the withering of the societal fabric is one of the reasons behind it, the influence of western society cannot be overlooked since many of them think that they can get more liberty only when the elderly are not around. This has led to the need for a home where the elderly could be housed. Old age homes, the harsh reality of today's world, are a result of this social transformation.

Another survey by AISCCON in 2015-16 had claimed that about 60 percent elderly/septuagenarians living with their families face abuse and harassment, 66 percent are either 'very poor' or below the poverty line while 39 percent have been either abandoned or live alone. This calls for better healthcare facilities and infrastructure for the elderly.

Government welfare schemes like old age pensions are of little help for the elderly. Though the 'Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act,' provides that every city should have government established old age homes, the reality is far from it. There are around 700 old age homes across the nation and most of these are privately run institutions.

Although the old age homes provide much-needed roofs over the heads of those in a need, the sense of family and togetherness isn't there. The old age homes do provide shelter to the elderly, but healthcare and emotional gratification are some of those needs which commands attention.

Life in an old age home is considerably monotonous. It barely provides a reason for excitement to its residents. Those living in old-age homes are often surrounded by people who are in similar circumstances; still, they always feel alienated. With the government as well as management of old age homes exhibiting a nonchalant attitude it falls upon the agencies working in the developmental sector to step up.

In the last few years, CSR Foundations have been actively working to break this monotony. They engage with the inhabitants of old age homes in such a manner that helps the septuagenarians lead a gleeful life. These organisations want to make the elderly feel that they are not a burden on the society rather are blessings in disguise.

Occupants of an old age home are engulfed in the thoughts of their children and family members. This further makes them feel dejected. Thus, various activities organised by CSR foundations at these old age homes becomes of utmost importance. These activities engage the elderly and help in rejuvenating them.

They work towards organizing recreational activities to enable senior citizens to lead a quality lifestyle. The foundations encourage senior citizens to participate in various creative and interesting activities like yoga classes, spiritual sessions, picnics and food festivals. This fills them with enthusiasm and liveliness. Such activities not only improve the functioning of their brains but also have a positive impact on enhancing their mental and emotional well-being.

From time to time, they do organize health check-up camps to take care of their physical health and provide them all necessary aids. There are helpline services also run by the foundation to step in their need of the hour and provide them comfort through counselling and other activities.

It's the responsibility of society to take good care of the elderly who are seeing the autumn of their life. Foundations can play a key role in this by involving college youths and school children. This will also help in sensitizing the younger generation.