

AGEING WITH DIGNITY: NATION'S HOPE & PRIDE

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ABSTRACT

India is the country known worldwide for its joint family bonding structure. A set of tradition and culture prevailing in our society from civilizations has made ours a unique nation across the globe. This was the distinctive quality which has gained respect from all parts of the world. Love and affection within the members of family and an urge to help kith & kin, even if it requires sacrificing his/her own personal interest, for the overall welfare of joint family unit was seen commonly in India. These all were the attributes of ancient or medieval Indian society which no longer exist in modern India. The contemporary Indian society is busy in earning money by all means and this mindset is so deeply penetrated to the extent that had even lead to the trading-off of relations in present India. Youth is much more enthusiastic to utilize legal provisions and earn money through them. It is widely seen that our youth is more concentrated for their rights but their responsibility factor is approaching towards zero. The one sided view of government and other systems, reflected in their policies & decisions, and the lack of balance in analysis of holistic picture as well as non-analysis of the impact of such policies on other sections of society is more or less accountable for it.

Keywords: Position of Senior Citizens in Contemporary India, Pain of Senior Citizens, Plight of Senior Citizens in Modern India, Agony of old age people.

INTRODUCTION

Life of a person moves through various stages from birth till death. A newly born baby passes through various stages of infant, childhood, teenage, adult and old age in life. The old age is considered as the last stage of human life cycle. As the life passes on and a young individual become old, the strength, immunity and his/her working ability reduces with time. It is the age when person requires nearness, affection and support from his/her children and in absence of that the zeal to live life diminishes. Respect of elders and old age people was a prime characteristic of ancient and medieval India. Since Vedic age, honor of parents was

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considered above all and children were considering praise in fulfilling their duties towards them. Love and care between the members of family was the core family value. Indian history has ample examples where family members had sacrificed their own personal interests for the overall welfare of family. These were the attributes of past but it has been found that today's India is witnessing an entire separate picture. The materialistic approach of present youth have transformed them into a self centered person who is only in phase of demanding and his/her responsibility factor towards parents is becoming a concept of other world. It has been found that older people are often feeling neglected in their own family in contemporary India. When the parents reaches in 3rd phase of their life they expect only love from their children and grand-children but today's Indian family system, engrossed with western countries mindset, is finding no time for them. The opening of old age home is one of the example in this context where apart from all arguments of government or society the prime factor is the non desirability of children to fulfill their duties towards their old age parents. In this world of digital electronic revolution, people prefer to have hundreds and thousands of virtual friends on social media but don't find time to interact with their old age parents in real world.

This paper is an attempt to analyze the agony and troubles faced by senior citizens (old age parents/grandparents) of our society in contemporary India. A study is done by collecting information from primary and secondary sources for the analysis of the existing situation and challenges faced by them in the last stage of their life. Data collected in past one year from "All India Toll Free Golden Age Helpline for Senior Citizens: 1800-180-0060", the first of its own kind of helpline in India, reveals the real hidden situation where it is broadly seen that how much our old age parents are forced to live in the zone of dead isolation, and beauty lies in the fact that this is happening in our dear India after more than 70 years of Independence.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to find the balance between law and humanity factor in present India. The concept is explored to check that how much these newly framed laws in independent India are serving a means of easy domination for one particular section of society and harassment of other sections. It is to be analyzed that if the article 14 & 15(1) of our constitution are fully ignored and the concentration is only on article 15(3) as reflected by the act & policies of

government where they are everyday adding or advocating to add some new section or sub-section to existing clauses or by framing a new clause itself.

Main objectives of the study are to examine:

- If the laws made for the welfare of a particular section of society in present India are ignoring the “right to live with dignity” of other sections of society.
- If our system is “lacking the balance factor” while framing and implementing the new laws dedicated only for the welfare of young women in the role of daughter-in-law.
- If the senior citizens of our country are living in the zone of dead isolation in contemporary India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Constitutional Provisions for Senior Citizens in Independent India

Protection of the rights and the welfare of its citizens is the chief role of any government. The Indian constitution is distinctive in its contents and clearly explains various provisions segregated under different articles where the state also has an obligation towards the development and care of the old age people. The major points of Preamble to the constitution declares that “We, the people of India solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic and to secure Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity to all its citizens.” Article 21 states that “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law.” The well-being of senior citizens is mandated in the Constitution of India under Article 41 which obligates the state, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, to make effective provisions for securing Right to public assistance in cases of old age.

National Policy for Senior Citizens 2011

In pursuance of the UN general assembly resolution to observe 1999 as international year of older person and in keeping with assurance to older persons contained in the constitution, the government of India announced the national policy on older person in 1999. Both central and state governments put forward various policies and plans for the welfare of older persons. Further to create an age integrated society this policy was further revised and refined in year

2011 with core value to strengthen integration between generations, facilitate interaction between the old and the young as well as to strengthen bonds between different age groups.

The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens (MWPSA) Act, 2007

Parliament passed this act in year 2007 to provide more effective provisions for the maintenance and welfare of parents and senior citizens guaranteed and recognized under constitution and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. This Act contains 7 chapters divided into 32 different sections dealing with maintenance of parents and senior citizens, establishment of old age homes, provision for medical care for them, protection of their life & property and procedure for trial of crimes committed against them and some miscellaneous points.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology adapted for the study was based on primary data. Focus of the study was on the discovery of ideas & insights. The research design is flexible to provide opportunity for considering different aspects of problems under study. The primary data collected & analyzed was of those senior citizens who registered their grievance on golden age helpline and approached the mediation cell meant for solving their problems. Basic questions that arose in order to proceed with the research include – What are the present and past situations that causes the problem? Who or what is responsible for that situation? What are the key issues related to the problem?

DATA ANALYSIS OF GOLDEN AGE HELPLINE 1800-180-0060

A toll free helpline, first of its own kind and funded with the financial resources of its own members, dedicated only for the help of senior citizens of India was launched on 15th Jun 2017. The helpline is named “Golden Age Helpline” with tag line <say no to elder abuse> and is running without any external financial aid. The number of toll free helpline allocated by the BSNL is 1800-180-0060, where the last two digits “60” signifies the age required to become a senior citizen in India. In continuation to this a “Senior Citizen Mediation Cell” for listening to the plight of senior citizens thereby providing legal aid and solutions was also started on 20th Sep 2017 at the office of Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP), Lucknow. Both the helpline as well as the mediation cell are running successfully since last one year

and the real data of calls received on helpline and senior citizens those approached the mediation cell with their grievance is compiled below for analysis.

Golden Age Helpline 1800-180-0060

This helpline has received a positive welcome form those senior citizens who are suffering from some discrimination or facing abuse in society as well as in their own family. Many times the old age parents were found weeping on phone when they start telling about their sufferings. It has been found that in maximum of those phone calls the silent pain through which they were passing was provided by none other than their own children especially by their daughter-in-law.

Table 1: Monthly Calls Received on Golden Age Helpline 1800-180-0060

S/N	Month	BSNL Call Units
1	Jun-2017	200
2	Jul-2017	150
3	Aug-2017	69
4	Sep-2017	264
5	Oct-2017	205
6	Nov-2017	78
7	Dec-2017	96
8	Jan-2018	69
9	Feb-2018	53
10	Mar-2018	72
11	Apr-2018	459
12	May-2018	142
	Total	1857

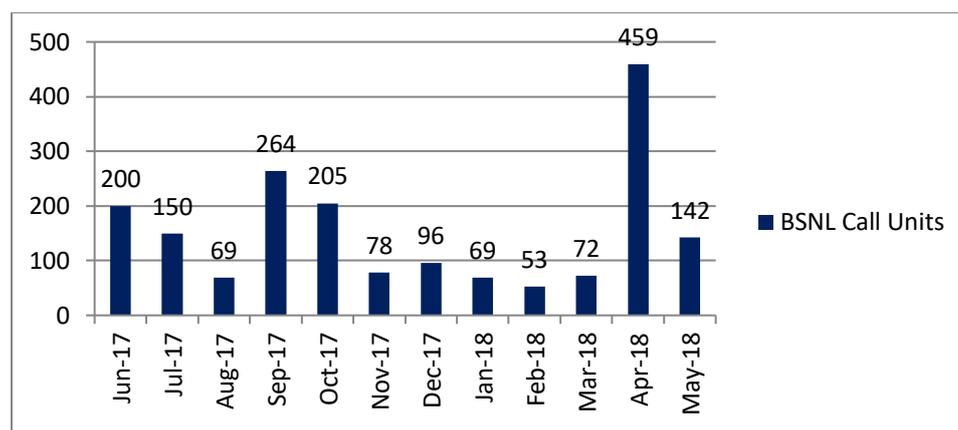


Figure 1: Statistics of Calls Received on Golden Age Helpline 1800-180-0060
 (June 2017 till May 2018)

Findings: The daily average of above data is 5.3 which signify that more than 5 calls were received per day on Golden Age Helpline in the very first year of its start.

Senior Citizen Mediation Cell

Apart from the telephonic helpline, the old age people are also approaching the mediation centre at SSP office Lucknow via two ways viz. by their personal presence on each Thursday between 10 am till 2 pm as well as by writing their agony through letters. Through personal interaction as well as by the analysis of the written complaints it has been again found that the maximum number of the old age parents who approached the mediation cell was those who were not only mentally but also verbally as well as physically ill treated by their young daughter-in-law.

Table 2: Number of Senior Citizens Approached Mediation Cell

S/N	Month	Date	Senior Citizens Appeared in Mediation Cell (each Thursday)
1	Sep-17	21.9.2017	8
2	Oct-17	5.10.2017	10
3		12.10.2017	18
4		26.10.2017	8
5	Nov-17	2.11.2017	4
6		9.11.2017	3
7		23.11.2017	6

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8		30.11.2017	6
9	Dec-17	7.12.2017	3
10		14.12.2017	9
11		21.12.2017	5
12		28.12.2017	6
13		Jan-18	4.1.2018
14	11.1.2018		4
15	18.1.2018		4
16	Feb-18	1.2.2018	5
17		8.2.2018	8
18		15.2.2018	4
19		22.2.2018	6
20		23.2.2018	1
21	Mar-18	15.3.2018	3
22		29.3.2018	3
23	Apr-18	5.4.2018	9
24		12.4.2018	7
25		19.4.2018	6
26		26.4.2018	6
27	May-18	3.5.2018	5
28		10.5.2018	6
29		17.5.2018	2
30		24.5.2018	8
31		31.5.2018	2
32	Jun-18	7.6.2018	6
33		28.6.2018	4
34	Jul-18	5.7.2018	8
35		12.7.2018	6
36		19.7.2018	11
37		26.7.2018	5
38	Aug-18	2.8.2018	9

39		9.8.2018	4
40		16.8.2018	4
41		23.8.2018	6
42		30.8.2018	7
Total			252

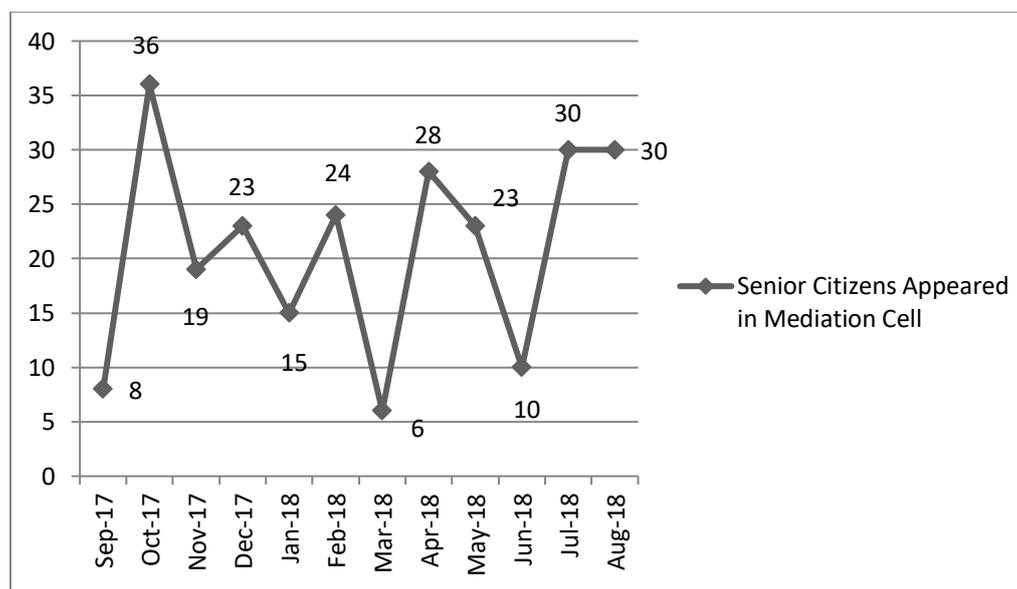


Figure 2: Statistics of Senior Citizens Approached Mediation Cell
 (Sep 2017 till Aug 2018)

Findings: In first year 42* counseling sessions were done in mediation cell (on each Thursday of each Month) and a total 252 senior citizens appeared in person. This makes an average of 6 persons per session in the very first year of its launch.

**The session was done only on 42 Thursdays in last year because either due to some other social activity of group or due to some festival/holiday or counselor being engaged at some other assignment.*

DISCUSSION

The approach of senior citizens to Golden Age Helpline as well as to the mediation centre (personally & through letters) primarily indicates the agony faced by them due to family disputes. The prime focus of the plight of these older people as told by them is on the neglect they face from none other than their own children. On close interaction these suffered senior

citizens revealed that their daughter-in-law is prompt enough to have an eye on their financial assets but when it comes to owe her duties its turning other way round. The agony faced by them in their own house is pathetic. These older people are in the 3rd phase of their life where they face anguish from their own daughter-in-law and thus spending life in a zone of dead isolation in their own house. Many senior citizens had shown the marks of beatings and other physical torture they suffered from the wife of their own son. Their condition become much more pathetic when the existing women centric laws of country are listening the version of women only when she is in the role of daughter-in-law and all other roles (mother, sister, grandmother etc) of women are set aside.

Even the concept of domestic violence is practically concentrated only around daughter-in-law because statistics make it clear that if a complaint is registered by any women in role of daughter-in-law the subsequent action is promptly taken by our system and if any senior citizen approaches to log a domestic violence complaint on the atrocities of their daughter-in-law then most of the time the complaint is not even logged and even if it is logged then also the action against daughter-in-law is seldom taken. It was also found that the old age parents had avoided and tolerated the troublesome behavior of their daughter-in-law for years and when the water has flown overhead and when they found a ray of light in the form of golden age helpline, they gathered their hope and came out first time to discuss their agony just to save their self respect.

The biased mindset of our system towards the young and energetic women in the role of bride/daughter-in-law is majorly responsible for the pathetic conditions of senior citizens in their own home in present modern India. Registering a matrimonial complaint by woman against her in-laws, arrest of those old age parents by police, to & fro rounds to honorable court to a far distance city and then the settlement of these matrimonial disputes by trading off money is a best example of this biased concept in present India. The terror created by daughter-in-law that she will file a complaint (irrespective of the fact that howsoever fake the complaint is) against in-laws is the biggest fear in the mind of old age parents. Although honorable judiciary look into the matters of senior citizens cautiously and had provided various reliefs to them through various landmark judgments but if the matter is between daughter-in-law and in-laws parents then the view as well as general condition is still critical.

LIMITATIONS & FUTURE SCOPE OF STUDY

Since the golden age helpline is started in June 2017 and running only from past one year, the data analysis of the study is based on the calls received on the helpline and those who approached the mediation cell at Lucknow during this specified tenure of about one year. Till now the toll free helpline is neither well acknowledged nor much popular across the country hence a much larger group of senior citizens is unable to register their plea on this platform. The results may vary and we may get a broader picture if the study will be done in future for a larger time frame. If the helpline will get a future help from government and will get recognition across the country, then more people will be able to approach and log their sufferings and hence the plight of senior citizens can be identified with deeper insight.

The authors will continue on this topic and after obtaining and analyzing the data of larger time frame, will compile it in the form of a report and will send it to the concerned ministry of government of India in order to further analyze the findings at their level and to come up with some concrete remedial measures with a balance approach for all.

CONCLUSION

The biggest question that arises from this study is *“whether the laws are made for human beings considering the humanity factor having a balanced holistic approach, or our government and other system is keeping only one sided view thereby ignoring the basic right of an individual to live life with dignity”*. The present fact where the laws are drafted with more than extra concerned only and only for young women, especially only for the role of daughter-in-law, thereby overlooking the needs, sufferings and agony of our own old age parents is a strong indication of nothing except a source of torture of senior citizens of our own country. The approach of senior citizens towards golden age helpline & mediation centre in the very first year of its launch has revealed the darker side of the pain of our old age parents which has not came to limelight before. It has been clearly exposed that the decorum of old age parents is at stake when a complaint is registered by their daughter-in-law, irrespective of the fact that howsoever fake and forge that complaint is. The agony faced by old age parents in these litigations is a permanent irreparable loss of their dignity. At the end we should say that the concept of advocating only rights for women is to be checked with a balanced mindset and the responsibility factor should be taught to our young women in harmony. Finally it can be concluded that the time has come when we all have to rise up and thus government, agencies and individuals have to commit themselves in a united manner to

respect and support our old age parents and other senior citizens, fulfill our duties towards them, honor their dignity and pledge to have “*no old age home*” in our country thereby again creating an environment where our parents will live happily with their children in their older age thus revitalizing the centuries old family value system of our nation.

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