

Status of Equality & Non-discrimination among Indian Elderly

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India is a large country of about 130 crore population, with nearly 9% people are in geriatric age (60+) group. Due to uniqueness of family structure & long cherished culture in India, elderly always received upper hand in family & society as well. Presently scenario has changed, Various types & ways of maltreatment with elderly has been prevailing in India now. Inequality & discrimination in diverse situation has been observed; that is putting elderly in suffering there by depriving elderly's right of healthy living. So, it is very much pertinent to remain informed about the matters of equality & non-discrimination of elderly in India.

Constitutional Provisions : Our sacred constitution has provided provisions for elderly as follows—

(1) Helping people during old age & disabilities by state Govt. (2) Right of protection of life & property, (3) Adequate means of livelihood, equal work, no forced vocation unsuited for age & strength (4) Just & humane condition of work, living wages for workers & uniform civil code (5) Raising levels of nutrition, standard of living & improvement of public health ;etc.

Provisions stated above entails a situation where an aged person can enjoy a life of graceful aging as constitutional right. But exact situation is very far from implementation.

Areas of inequality & discrimination : There is **no separate ministry or department** for geriatric population in centre or states, to the contrary there are separate department for child, youth & women; so it is evident that Govt. has the mind set for avoiding elderly problems that is a crystal clear discrimination. Apart from this, areas of inequality & discrimination can be described as follows –

- (1) **In Family :** since about 2/3rd of elderly lives with family in India, most prominent area of inequality & discrimination is family and by the way of **disrespect, living arrangement, food & nutrition, medical attendance, recreation, love & affection, movement** etc. Elderly has been provided worst possible room for living on the other hand other members gets better space; they have been deprived of food required as per their need, on the other hand taste, quality, quantity, frequency of providing food has been provided as per need of other members; medical attendance has been delayed/ denied in elderly, on the other hand there is no delay in providing medical care for other members; facility for recreation is scarcely provided if not at all to elderly comparing to maximum arrangement for other members. In many families restriction of movement has been demarcated, in some others restriction of movement is being imposed by daughter in laws by misusing **“Domestic Violence law-2005”** in existence in India.
- (2) **In Society :** Inequality & discrimination on elderly has been prevailing in the society by the way of **disrespect, environment, recreation, care, security, peace** etc. Very pertinent to mention here that there are multistoried building in enormous number, having no lift facility, special care has not been taken for safe living of elderly residents, **in house building**. Developers are not concerned about the parents of a buyer.
- (3) **In institutions :** lack of elderly friendly environment in road ways, road overbridges, public vehicles, markets, shopping malls, financial institutions, hospitals, railways, old age homes & so on.
- (4) **In Govt, Policy :** Absence of separate ministry / department has been described earlier. Periodical decrement in the rates of interest as determined by gov't. in small savings has decreased financial capability of very large number elderly in India, who has fallen in a discriminatory stage in terms of food, clothing, medical care etc. (**In 1999 rate of interest in Monthly income scheme in post offices was 13%, now it is about 7.5% !!!**). **There is decremental interest rate in banking sector also.** Financial allowance for destitute elderly is very little (about 04 US dollar per month by central

govt. plus another 04 dollars by state govt.); so, discriminatory features are clearly evident. There is **no special law for protection of elderly from torture** on the other hand ,there is an atrocious law (IPC 498A) for protecting daughter in laws from torture. As age advances elderly cannot buy a mediclaim policy (**Step of IRDA is rudimentary**). There is no separate geriatric OPD / IPD in rural & sub-divisional hospital (**Geriatric Medicine is a separate Medical specialty**) ; on the other hand there is separate units for women, & child . Separate Geriatric Unit has been lacking in most of district level hospitals & above . There is no **universal design of housing** , Govt. has been looking very little regarding elderly friendly environment in implementing projects, **propaganda for strengthening family bonding is also rudimentary** .

Availability of Statistics : We do not find presence of any established information system regarding quantity & magnitude of inequality & discrimination of Indian elderly . Some data can be brought out from crime record , health record etc. existing in India.

Measures to be undertaken for equality & non-discrimination of elderly :

- (1) Establishment of separate Ministry / department for geriatric population .
- (2) Enactment of Laws for amelioration of inequality & discrimination, Viz. Protection of elderly from torture ; Universal design of housing ; compulsory physical attendance of kids to their parents; marking accountability of daughter in laws in their parent in law's house(husbands residence).
- (3) Making elderly friendly environment in implementing welfare projects.
- (4) Establishing geriatric care facilities at all levels.
- (5) Prohibitory measures against private activities where there is inequality & discrimination against elderly has been observed .
- (6) UN steps for resolving the issue.