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Don't regret growing old, with a little effort you can cope with it

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October 1 is observed as International Senior Citizens' Day. As I am on the threshold of 70, I feel envious of octogenarians and nonagenarians who have got five or more children, with all of them or at least two or three remaining in India to lend their parents moral support in the evening of their lives. But don't think I am an anti-family planning crusader.

With the single/two-children norm coming to stay, the probability of the children remaining in India has become too remote. Initially, senior citizens can boast of their trips abroad, talk highly of their baby-care experiences, spic and span roads or perfect traffic discipline unmindful of the cultural shock obtained there. As years advance, hitherto unknown visitors like hypertension, joint-pain and high glucose levels become constant companions. The financial constraints, which arise out of frequent recessions, and pink slip threats faced by their children, result in less frequent visits abroad. 'Skype' becomes the only mode of communication.

NRI children, who visit their ailing father, don't fail to request their mother, while packing off, not to inform them unless some unfortunate event occurs. The poor mother simply nods.

To avoid expenditure on frequent travels, some parents end up becoming 'Green Card' holders much against their wishes. They live in golden cages, hiding their ailments for fear of huge medical expenses. For others, there is no alternative to living alone or in an old-age home considering it a reward for the right/wrong decision of giving their children a better future.

The lot of non-NRI parents is no different. I have seen an octogenarian father being shifted to places of his five sons at the end of every month. Will these children ponder for a second that they too would become senior citizens sooner or later? Don't their parents deserve a life of dignity, though not a life of luxury? The position of senior citizens suffering from serious ailments needing constant care is still more pathetic.

Advice on nutrition, exercises and correct attitudes is available aplenty on the internet and in journals. As long as everything goes on well, the senior citizen may feel proud of his success. Once there is some impediment, the entire confidence gets shattered. A man of 100 years was asked about the secret of his longevity. He replied: "I got married at the age of 21. My wife and I came to an agreement that whenever we had any argument, the loser should walk five miles to get over becoming mad. I have been benefited most by 79 years of fresh air."

The joint family system, a unique feature of our glorious heritage, is disintegrating fast. In view of stress, generation gap and change in lifestyle, the feeling of isolation and insecurity in senior

citizens cannot be avoided. If circumstances so warrant, it is better for them to get separated even while there is some attachment, so that permanent estrangement is avoided.

“Do not regret growing old. It is a privilege denied to many,” is an ancient saying.

“Aging is not ‘lost youth,’ but a new stage of opportunity and strength,” says Betty Friedan.

There are children who feel guilty for not looking after their parents due to circumstances beyond their control. Elders too have a responsibility to maintain harmony and peace. They should make a sincere attempt to understand the financial and professional commitments of their children and avoid interference. “Don't advise unless it is sought,” is a must mantra for the aged.

After all, life is a small journey from the womb to the tomb. Where is the question of success or failure? Life is not a game in which someone is keeping a score of achievements. We are the persons who can give a pattern and meaning to our lives. Let us be happy and await the divine call.

Anytime ‘death’ may knock at our doors. What shall we offer the guest? “All the earnings and gleanings of my busy life, will I place before him. The flowers have been woven and the garland is ready for the bridegroom. After the wedding the bride shall leave her home and meet her Lord alone in the solitude of night.” — Tagore in *Gitanjali* .

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