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When will we give our elders their due?

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Voyovrudhas were a venerated lot in ancient times. Even now some societies hold elders in high respect. Over the years, with the advent of 'nuclear' families where both the husband and the wife work, there is no time to look after the parents who are on the wrong side of 60. This is understandable given the fact that such families have no time for each other or their own growing children. It would be unreasonable to expect such 'working' couples to spare their time or resource for managing elders at home. As such, the trend of such seniors being packed off to senior citizens' homes has increased though some stigma is still attached to this arrangement.

Should elders, euphemistically labelled as senior citizens, be given any special privilege in a society? In some offices, senior citizens are provided with special counters or they could bypass the lines and go directly to the counters for payment of bills or buy tickets or get some other work done. However, there is an undercurrent of resentment among the general public: why are older people given such a facility whereas they have to wait for a long time to get their work done? In fact, such resentment is so obvious that a few senior citizens would wait in the general line rather than use a facility provided for them. That's true of reservation of bus seats. Unless a senior person asks for that reserved seat to be vacated, rarely would anyone get up on seeing a senior citizen struggling to stand in a crowded bus. Contrast this with the attitude of the general public in the advanced countries. If a senior person asks for a concessional ticket for rail, bus or air travel, entrance to a museum, art gallery, amusement park and so on, he/she gets it instantly without question. Rarely, that person is requested to show his/her photo identity. In our country, anyone claiming a concessional ticket is looked upon with suspicion and it is the rule rather than an exception that person is asked to produce proof of age. Take another example. When a senior citizen crosses a road, traffic in the advanced countries either slows down or stops completely. Here in our country, nobody cares. Vehicles whiz past anyone, notwithstanding that person is old and infirm, in the mad rush to gain time. So one crosses a road at one's own risk.

"Adopt a grandparent" is a novel idea where elders are 'adopted' by young people who would like to take care of them. Such a bonding is essential if one has to appreciate what a senior citizen means to a society. In general, there has to be a sea change in the attitude of society to aged persons who need no sympathy but respect and a bit of consideration. After all, they have earned these due to their long innings of useful service to the nation. Where there is respect for elders that society has a bright future based on values, which our ancients preached and practised.