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Old and home alone

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Building or remodelling houses for senior citizens requires a lot of care.

Day in and day out we come across offers from builders and developers highlighting the special features of homes built by them. Some homes are meant for the elite, some for the lower strata of society, etc. Very rarely do we find a house built solely for the convenience of senior citizens who live alone, what with their children having settled abroad. May be, in our country, people look for old age homes as a convenient staying place. But, with the increase in the number of senior citizens in our country (said to be around 20 crore), a new lifestyle for the older generation is likely to emerge.

Some of the housing needs of the elderly are:

- Wheel chair access to the house

- Ramps and chair lifts to stairs

- Open floor plan with few lockable rooms

- Hand rails at all steps and staircases

- Wide doors for easy entry and exit

- Non-slippery flooring

- Lever-type door handles

- All bedrooms and bathroom to be preferably on the ground floor itself

- Curbless showers in bathrooms

- Grab bars all round the bathroom

- Low-level kitchen platform, wash basin/s, microwave oven stands etc.

Medicine chest near the bed/ reclining chairs etc

Bright lighting and contrast colours for depth perception

Sensors for fans, lights, stoves, burners, floor mats (for reminding oneself that he or she is out of the bed).

This list is more or less comprehensive, and is borne out of the possibility that the occupant is likely to have partial disability also, leading to limited mobility, and even a 'walker' is of assistance to a small extent only.

Long-term vision

It is rather difficult to plan large number of homes to cater to the needs of the elderly with mobility problems. Further, it is beyond comprehension to expect that someone who invests in a house in his youth will plan for his old age emergencies too. Yet, the need for creating a sub-segment for the partially mobile or differently abled cannot be wished away in these days of longevity in lifespan.

Remodelling homes for the owners once they are old is a specialised job. Apart from shifting to 'senior friendly' floors, driveways, etc., sophisticated equipment are used to make 'changeovers' to existing homes.

Technological support need to be entwined into such remodelling. Paramedics suggest use of equipment such as voice detector with remote controls, computer-assisted TV programming, recording equipment and even panic button/s attached to finger/s or hands, etc.

Security alarm systems are reported to be tailor-made for use in remodelling plans. With the increase in the number of nuclear families, the future seems to hold increased opportunities for this type of home remodelling and even building new homes with tech aids and what not.