Participation of Senior Citizens in Socio-Economic Development

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Introduction

Old people were widely respected in ancient societies and in India also, old age evoked deep respect and honour in the traditional society. In the joint family system a sort of gerontocracy prevailed. It was customary to obey the directions of the eldest member of the family. Even today, the elderly persons are respected and well looked after in the Indian Joint families. They are considered to be the best source of social education, social service and social cohesion. Their experience and perceptive ideas are invaluable assets for the development of community. But, with the passage of time, the position is gradually undergoing a change due to the process of industrialization, urbanization, social mobility, easy communication facilities and individualism. The wind of change brought about by modernization and technological advances has affected the traditional ties and earlier emotional links. The younger people migrate to urban areas leaving behind their congenial rural habitats. They are virtually thrown into a life of uncertainty and anonymity. Under such predicament, the old people who stay behind can not be taken care of do they have the same prestige and honour as they used to enjoy earlier (Bhattacharya: 1989:1). But, due to rise of number of aged persons in every society, their participation in the Socio-economic development must be ensured because these persons have experience, which can be utilized in constructive manner.

Why Participation?

Participation is important because it expresses not only the will of the majority of people, but also it is the only way for them to ensure that the important moral. humanitarian, social, cultural and economic objectives of a more humane and effective development can be peacefully attained. In this way, participation strengths the capacities of individuals and communities to

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mobilize and held themselves (Midgley and others; 1986:8) and furthers the goals of empowerment, equity and democratic governance,

What is Participation?

It is difficult to give a single definition of 'participation' because the dimension and direction of participation of people in any given situation vary according to the contents and contexts of the task (Rehman and Rehman, 1998:5).

For the Oxford English Dictionary, participation is the action or act of partaking. having or forming a part of. In that sense participation could be either transitive and intransitive, either moral, amoral, or immoral, either forced or free, either manipulative or spontaneous. According to Wolfe, participation designates the organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given situations, on the part of groups and movements hither to be excluded from such control (Goulet, 1986:165). For Baefz (1975:3), participation in development means how community members can be assured the opportunity for contributing to the creation of the communities goods and services. WHO (1982) defines participation as the process by Eherintions Becer(1912) which individuals, families or communities assume responsibility for their own health and welfare and the community's development. While explaining the concept of participation, Human Development Report, 1993 says that participator means that people are closely involved in the economic, social cultural and political processes that affect their lives. Oakley (1991. 8-9) has described (i) participation as other forms of contributions which implies voluntary or other forms of contributions by people to pre-determined programmes/projects; (ii) participation as organization which puts forth that organization is a fundamental instrument of participation; and (iii) participation as empowering which recognizes that there exists relationship between participation and power.

In this way, in a nutshell it can be concluded that by participation, it can be meant that it is a process through which human beings will realize their full potential in all areas of life and

solve their own problems and initiate struggle for them resulting into desire socio-economic development.

How to Participate?

Aged persons can participate in socio-economic development as contributors, institution builders as well as an agents of empowerment.

As Contributors

Aged persons can contribute both socially as well as economically. Socially they can contribute by:

I. establishing good relations with family members and neighbourhood by changing their authoritarian attitude and inculcating in them a sense of tolerance, patience, non interference and cooperation;

II. Maintaining their health through exercise, cooperation with doctor, if necessary. taking necessary prescribed meals and imbibe in them a positive attitude towards day-to-day happiness;

III. Utilizing their leisure time in a constructive manner such as engaging themselves in different hobbies such as painting, music, reading books, playing cards, chess, etc., telling stories and experiences to younger, engaging in religious activities such as kirtan (religious songs), pravachans (religious discourses). etc.: playing with grand children; performing household chores; giving support to youngers in solving their emotional, educational and social problems;

IV. Attending and participating of Social function and helping family members in maintaining Social contacts.

V. Transferring responsibilities with authority to younger generation with a sense of cooperation and faith; and always remain ready to give them proper guidance, if asked for;

VI.   Showing non-resistant attitude towards change and cooperate with pro-changers by sharing the experiences and mobilizing other aged persons to respect such change;

VII.   Sorting out problems of family, neighbourhood and community by offering constructive suggestions;

VIII.   Understanding and respecting needs, hopes, aspirations and capacities of younger generation and expecting accordingly from this generation which would certainly save them from expecting too much from this generation;

IX.   Managing or sharing the responsibility of managing or participating or showing positive attitude towards community functions such as organization of fairs and festivals, as well as organization of functions in educational, health and other social service institutions;

X.   Developing, maintaining and managing community assets such as community buildings, community entertainment gadgets, community gardens, lands, groves, ponds, schools, etc.

XI.   Helping community members, particularly in rural areas, in maintaining land records which will certainly reduce litigation;

XII.   Acting as contact person between governmental and non-governmental officials working for the development of whole community or for certain section of community;

XIII.   Following scientific and rational approach in dealing things instead of rigid and dogmatic approaches;

XIV.   Not imposing fulfillment of their needs on family or community members rather than trying to balance between fulfillment of needs of younger generation and older one;

XV.   Not suffering from the feeling of rolelessness, worthlessness, powerlessness, depression, social alienation, cultural deprivation, humiliation, physical insecurity, emotional instability, social maladjustment etc.;

XVI.   Not finding faults with the behaviour and belief of the younger generations; (xvii) Giving opportunity to young generation to express their views i participate in decision making;

XVII.   Not indulging in such activities which give rise to social evils such as dowry. corruption etc.;

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XVIII.   Developing a sense of respect among younger generations towards accepted values of society by acting as role model as well as awareness among them against social evils like dowry, corruption, etc.;

XIX.   Taking active part in cultural activities of community so that cultural customs of the community remain intact:

XX.   Developing companionship with younger persons and students;

XXI.   Acting as councilors to hospital, wards and neighbourhood to meet patients and families who need their help and support (Gurumurthy, 1988:166):

XXII.   undertaking study and inquiries concerning the life and living conditions of fellow aged which will provide them an opportunity to meet and express their viewpoints and relieve them of their stress and tension;

XXIII.   not interfering in the personal and private life of youngers for showing their superiority:

XXIV.   engaging themselves in discussing social, economic and political issues through group discussions, seminars, symposia, etc.; and

XXV.   understanding problems of weaker and vulnerable sections of community and cooperating with governmental and nongovernmental agencies working for them.

Economically, they contribute by:

i.   engaging themselves in occupations like teaching, writing, doing light jobs or business like poultry farming, looking after nursery, running a preparatory school or working as consultant:

ii.   engaging themselves in producing things specially needed for aged such as spectacles, dentures, walking sticks, foot wear, warm dresses, bedding, etc.:

iii.   organizing training and counselling programmes for aged who are interested in self-employment;

iv.   investing life-time savings, if any at right places;

v.   securing social security benefits available to them;

vi.   helping young persons in expressing choice regarding their occupations:

vii.   keeping ancestral property intact and trying to add in it as well as properly distributing it fairly and timely among family members in order to avoid mutual acrimony among family members.

As Institution Builders

Aged persons can contribute towards strengthening of existing institutions and build new institutions/organizations for the development of people:

i.   The institution of family can be strengthened by providing emotional support involving the provision of moral and psychological support through sympathetic and caring relationship, informational support which assists the family members with the problem solving and decision making and finally instrumental support which takes the form of help with the practical tasks of every day life (Antonucci: 1990: 205-216);

ii.   Neighbourhood and community relations can be maintained and strengthened through establishment of old age clubs. These clubs may take up the work of redressal of the grievances of any family through mutual help and support as well as organize educational, recreational and developmental activities in community;

iii.   Aged persons should take active part in the activities of Panchayat through participation in various committees and utilizing their experiences in guiding and supporting office bearers and officials of Panchayati Raj resulting into its strengthening.

iv.   Utilization of the services of non-governmental organizations is another area through which older persons can benefit the community for its socio-economic development. Here, they can act as facilitator for the services of non governmental organizations;

v.   They can also accept patronship or membership or the position of advisor in the existing non-governmental organization or form their own organizations such as aged clubs, recreational clubs, religious clubs, bhajan mandli, etc. or. take active part in these organizations.

As Empowering Agents

Empowerment is an emotional and mental process, in which the understanding of individual and social identity develops. The contemporary relevance of empowerment is closely linked to social change. While it is the role of every individual to strive towards the building of an egalitarian society, this process can only take place through their active participation. The basis of this pro-active role is the internalization of empowerment.

As an empowering agent, aged persons can contribute by:

i.   organizing themselves for getting services both governmental as well as non governmental organizations;

ii.   organizing marginalised sections, comparising mainly of women and dalits as well as tribals who have limited access to education and economic resources; and

iii. developing awareness among members of community so that they may get space to move away from bureaucracy, politicians and middlemen towards collective self-reliance.

To conclude, it can be said that time and skills of aged persons can be utilized by giving them proper care at family and for this programmes and policies should be focussed on fostering and strengthening relationship within families such as public education for the young and recreational activities to bring the family together that incorporate both young and old persons (Chadha, 1997:201).

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