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Accentuating the Alienation of the Elderly – A Study of Selected Indian Poems

G. Bhargavi

Research Scholar, Department of English, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam,
Tirupati, Email: gbhargavi74@gmail.com,

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Abstract:

Marginalisation commenced centuries ago and it persists till date. There are many vulnerable groups in the society including Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, LGBTIQ, Women and the Elderly. The older individuals are considered as nugatory, especially in their dotage. Instead of considering them as family fabricators, they are considered burdensome, especially when they reach retirement age and confined to the house.

Discrimination of the aged has become a serious issue dismally, not only in recent times, but from many years. Even though the time flies, the situation of the old remains the same. The aged individuals must cope up with the occurrences in the last phase of life, where body never cooperates, circumstances are never favourable, near and dear never show concern. They should learn to stand on their own and fortify themselves for departure from this world.

Literature ought to be used as a tool of discourse to address one of the important issues, like, marginalization of the elderly and uprear awareness. This paper illuminates the predicament of the elderly and their despondency from ancient to contemporary times in the light of the selected Indian poems.

Key Words: Ageing, Struggle, Helplessness, Lamentation

Social exclusion, a societal stumbling block, stems from social, economic, and political factors. Every group in existence is more or less prone to marginalisation. India is undeniably a marginalised country in many ways. The marginalization of the elderly is one such issue that has persisted in the country and has been portrayed in the literature as well for many years.



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When the family's architects reach senectitude, they may no longer be recognized as significant. They become powerless in their final moments of life and are driven out of their homes, treating them as strangers. They constantly have jonesing for affection as well as emotional and material support. They struggle to adjust to both their personal and societal circumstances. Although it is erroneous to extrapolate that all the elderly are marginalised, but in actuality, majority of the aged are considered vulnerable in the society. Certain elderly individuals may bravely confront the situation, while others may experience sadness for the rest of their days, or some may adapt to it. This paper tries to expound the marginalisation, struggles, attitudes of the older adults, employing poetry as a discourse.

Poetry is an aesthetic literary genre that readers find pleasurable. Additionally, by shedding light on any serious subject, including the joys and pains of aging, it helps the reader feel and comprehend the pain. The anguish of the ageing is depicted in the poems, “*Being Old*” (2022), “*While I Slept*” (2018) by Indian authors Anil Kumar Panda and Navtej Bharati respectively.

In the poem “*Being Old*”, the defenseless stage of the life is depicted. The poet frequently laments that “*There is no end to this pain*” because he is so distraught about the senility. It is believed that old age is a burden, and the only companion is silence. People, in the last phase particularly, view their own room as a prison. Emotional instability increases, every day is viewed as a taxing means of approaching death, where pleasure is absent, and thoughts of helplessness never stop.

In Navtej Bharati's poem “*While I Slept*,” the abuse of time and age is the main theme of discussion. It is evident that the author is reluctant to accept the old age, from the lines that follow.

*Time aged me
while I slept
I will not forgive it
for this treachery*

The poet rejects ageing, and he wants to hide himself in the nature. He is not ready to be caught in the wrinkled hands of the old age. The author views aging as something that happened suddenly, finds it burdensome, and finds it hard to comprehend aging.

For many women, growing older can be traumatizing. Women in their older years had to cope with the issues in that particular phase of life. A 1995 collection of poems by Srinivas Rayaprol describes an Indian elderly woman's whole life, including her old age. The poem refers to the indigenous method of aging. He gives the instance of his mother and says,



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My mother

for instance

sat on the floor

A hundred years

He claims that the women live their entire lives in their kitchen and are unaware of anything outside of it, including the rest of the house. The women of the Indian kitchen get their only reprieve from watching the trees in the yard. It is evident from the lines,

Sometimes staring

at the bitter

Neem tree

In the yard

She is barely able to go and take fresh air from her surrounding trees. Her entire existence has been spent in the kitchen, which is all they have ever known. Her only companions are kitchen floor, saucing pan, kitchen walls. The following lines say that, the kitchen is not less than a cage for her, whether it is one year, two years, or one hundred.

For a hundred years

Within the kitchen walls

Another poem from Sarojini Naidu's 2018 collection "Bird of Time" is "The Old Woman," which discusses an elderly woman's suffering. The entire three-stanza poem explores the depths of an elderly woman's lamentation and helplessness. The state of the Beldam is utterly distressing. She is blind and lives a life of destitution by begging all the time. Even though she begs, she is not weak-willed. Her faith in God keeps her from giving up on life, despite being alone and the uncertain fate of the world. She praises God throughout her days.

She is poor, she is bent, she is blind,

But she lifts a brave heart to the jest of the days,

And her withered, brave voices croons its paeon of praise,

She is blind and lives a life of destitution by begging all the time. Even though she begs, she is not weak-willed. Her faith in God keeps her from giving up on life, despite being alone and the uncertain fate of the world. She praises God throughout her days.

The elderly homeless woman combated the days of wind, rain, and sun. She positioned herself against poverty and starvation. Her only conversation is with the God and with her loneliness. The writer begs God to grant the potent, overworked, and exhausted old woman eternal sleep, since it is the only thing that will bring her any comfort. She questions



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Indian society as well, noting that women are still not given any consideration, particularly in their final days.

She spends her days praying to Allah, whom she regards as the Almighty and Muhammad as his messenger, while sitting beneath the shade of a tree every day. Her muddles did not stop her from believing in God, instead heightened her faith. To portray the old woman's current predicament, the author employs a code mix of Arabic and English.

*“La ilaha illa-l- Allah,
La ilaha illa-l- Allah,
Muhammad - ar- Rasul- Allah.”*

Sarojini Naidu raises concerns about the condition of women, particularly elderly women. The family's carvers are denigrated by both society and their own relatives when they near to closing years. Even though they might not receive any special treatment, they can at least be admitted in old age homes, where they can receive some care and pass their final way peacefully. The poem serves as an appeal to show our support for those who are on their last legs.

Every element has advantages and disadvantages of its own. The perspective that we take into account matters. "Welcome to An Old Age Home," penned by Hasmukh Amathalal in 2019, is one poem that encourages us to consider the positive aspects of aging. The author says:

*Remorse never
Patiently hear
draw near
and console dear*

The poem gives the elderly, a cause for optimism. The poem acknowledges the reality that older people are being ejected from their own nests. The author advises joining an old age home rather than cursing people or feeling sorry for them because of their helplessness.

*Yes. “an old age” homes
Always welcome
Give shelter and offer
Some room for peace alter*

He advises not to dwell on the past or become depressed when old age approaches; instead, consider the new friend who has knocked on our door: old age. Rather than cursing anyone, he advises taking refuge in an elderly home, where residents can make new friends



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to converse and share memories, peace to sustain, place to stay peacefully, be with good spirits and hopeful to God.

*curse no one,
enjoy with everyone
share the past memory
and pray to almighty*

It is indeed a heart-melting experience to deal with our loved ones' abandonment and loneliness. However, there will always be another door leading to tranquillity. This poem offers an excellent perspective on the final stage and encourages seniors to have hope, be joyful, and enjoy this final stage of life with joy.

Even though time passes and years pass, the elderly's precarious situation doesn't change. Their anguish, yearning for affection, and anticipation of brief exchanges with their dear ones never cease. Despite widespread awareness of the importance of elder care, elderly people continue to be ejected from their homes and treated like burdens. The spirits that brought us into existence shouldn't end up their lives as orphans on the streets, beneath trees, or in nursing homes. The situation needs to be altered, and the way that we treat the elderly needs to change. The elderly should be extolled rather than being marginalized.

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