

Concerns of the Aged: Explorations in the Select Hindi Short Stories

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Abstract: *Elderly people in India always remain a subject of respect and attention. But owing to changes in traditional value system, economic pattern, new lifestyles, nuclear family, materialism, poverty and urbanization elderly people are facing various problems in the final stage of their life. Due to their fragile mental and physical condition, they become more dependents on their family members. It is evident that the social support and family's coping capability towards their problem has become more diverse and complicated. These problems are being tackled by different academic approaches. Here in this paper, concerns and care with regard to elderly people will be examined with reference to select Hindi Short Stories: Premchand's **Budhi kaki**(Old aged Aunty), **Vaapsi** (Going back) by Usha Priyamvada, **Chief ki dawat** (Dinner) by Bhishm Sahni and **Apna Rasta lo Baba** (Go back to your place Uncle) by Kashinath Singh. Common thing in all the selected stories is apathy towards aged, reason and circumstances may be varied.*

Keywords: *Aged, Apathy, Materialism Psyche, Traditional, Urbanization*

1. Introduction

According to Encyclopedia Britannica study of ageing-Gerontology is “the scientific study of the phenomenon of ageing, including the sociological, historical and biological aspects as well as the medical phases (geriatrics)”¹. Ageing is worldwide phenomenon and developed countries from western hemisphere has been facing this situation for past couple of decades (neo-population bomb). For Asian countries especially countries like China and India, in the near future this may become a bigger challenge. Developed countries have more systematic institutional support for aged people. Social security system, Old age home and even care for carers from government is a routine process. But in country like India situations are quite different. Here in India older people may have reasonable access to family care but they are inadequately covered by government institutional security. As Arun P Bali opines: “The perception of responsibility for care of the elderly is very strongly influenced by the culture and history of the country. This conviction has not changed completely in the case of the elderly. In many cases, however, families care for their elderly out of necessity rather than by choice.”² Article 41 of Indian constitution has provision of public assistance to weaker section, which also includes old age people. Recently Indian government has passed a law regarding compulsory care of aged parents and senior citizen in the year 2007, but apathy towards them from family members are still prevalent today. This process is being studied through different academic discipline. In this paper, writer has tried to understand this problem through analysis of select four Hindi short stories.

2. Data and Figures

Before analysis of above theme, one has to understand dynamics of this issue through different sets of data and figures. According to the report World Population Ageing, 2013, process of ageing of the world population had significantly increased since the mid-twentieth century. In the World Population Ageing's report of 2015 it is stated that the number of elderly will grow worldwide from 901 million to 1.4 billion and by 2050 the elder's population is expected to be double, reaching 2.1 billion people. ³ Following data table is very important to understand this in Indian context:

Year	Population percentage
1961	5.63
1971	5.97
1981	6.28
1991	6.58
2001 (estm.)	7.08
2011 (estm.)	8.18
2021(estm.)	9.87

⁴Distribution of the aged population in India is not uniform. Some of the states/UT has higher percentage than national average-Kerala(8.77),Punjab(7.56),Pondicherry(6.90) and some has lower than national average-Arunachal Pradesh(4.23),Andaman and Nicobar Island(3.55)⁵. Percentage may seem lower to western country, but if you see this in respect of gross population it looks bigger in size. According to an estimate, every minute about 23 Indian becomes old. Almost 50 percent of the world's elderly live in Asia alone, out of which 23 percent live in India⁶. Naturally in coming future India will be a place, where there would be a large number of aged people, who will need proper care for dignity of their life.

3. Traditional Background for Aged in India

In Indian tradition, mother and father are treated equivalent to God-*Mtridevobhav*, *Pitridevobhav*, *Athithidevobhav*⁷. It's a duty of son/offspring to take care of their parents throughout their life and even after his father death he needs to offer *pindaan* to pay homage to the departed soul. For aged in India there is a term-*Vridhha*. The term *vridhha* is used to signify the supreme attainments of individuals.

4. Method and Background of This Study

Literature may be a different approach to study ageing people apart from other academic approach. Indian literature consist many voices in different languages towards literature regarding ageing people. Even in Hindi literature voice of elderly people may be traced in long span of History of Hindi literature. If one confines self to modern Hindi literature, again genre would be a problem to deal with. Here writer of this paper has confined the study to selected four short stories. Here are some of the other short stories in Hindi can be named for illustration of literature related to aged people in India:

'Khoonkarishta', 'Nishachar', 'Samadhi'-(BhishmSahni)

SayaniBua-(MannuBhandari),

Gend-(ChitraMugdal),

Sidhi', 'Baujiur Bandar', 'Daadiaur Remote'-(Suryabala),

Saanghe-(Govind Mishra).

Chhappan tole ka karghan-(UdayPrakash)etc.

Recently with other discourses 'vridhvimursh' is also taking place in contemporary Hindi Criticism. There are very few text, which are primarily based on aged people. There are some more where description of elderly people comes as reference. But that also can be studied as source material. There are very few reference materials which may be referred for research in this area. To name few of them are- 'Naidhara'-Vridhvimarshvisheshank.⁸ 'BujurgonkiDuniya'⁹. For this work theoretical framework has been designed on monograph named *Care of Elderly in India(Changing Configurations*¹⁰) by Arun P Bali and *Stories about Ageing Untold Stories, \Unheard Voices*¹¹. *Care of Elderly in India* is based on different aspects of aging and care of elderly in India and *Stories about Ageing Untold Stories, \Unheard Voices* is a master's Thesis by SAA Santarelli which deals about ageing in contemporary India based on four Hindi stories and framework of Mike Hepworth research on *Literature about ageing* in British Literature (2000). There is also a reference for the work

of Pandey and Pandey(2012) who has a collection of short stories titled *Der Alte und die Affen* on the theme of ageing written by several Indian authors. The short stories that have been selected are the following : *BudhiKaaki* (1918,Premchand), *Baapsi* (1960,Usha Priyamvada), *Chief kiDaawat* (1972, Bhishm Sahni) and *Apnaraasta lo Baba*(1982,Kashnath Singh).As mentioned in synopsis-central idea towards analysis of these stories is apathy towards aged people in family. Analysis would be storywise and in chronological order.But other aspects like gender perspective, economic perspective, rural-urban divide etc will also be taken in consideration while doing analysis. Other remarkable thing with this study is all the selected stories have been chosen from the time period of twentieth century and of before liberalization and globalization period. But contrary to our cultural belief in practice we can find elderly people being neglected and misbehaved in selected story.

5. Budhikaaki

Premchand is a signature of Hindi short story. He depicted elderly in sympathetic way. In this story Budhi Kaki is a lone widower and has transferred her property to his nephew after getting assurance from him that he will take care of her needs. But after getting the property he and her wife seems to be much fed up with her and always they misbehave with her,except her daughter Laadli.SometimesLaadli character reminds the reader PatherPaanchaliDurga and Pisi. Her plight can be felt by description of her internal monologue,her physical appearance and her living space.She lives in Kothri which reminds us as a solitary cell. During function of PanditBudhiram's son when Budhi kaki tried to get taste of Puris "The moment he saw Kaki, PanditBudhiram became red with anger. He dashed to the ground the trayful of *puris* he was holding; and just as a heartless money lender catches a dishonest and renegade debtor by his neck, he caught Kaki by her hands and dragged her into herKothri(unlighted room)."¹² Her physical condition was also very miserable and crying loudly was the means through which she attracts attention towards her- "Her senses, her eyes, her hands and feet had fallen into decrepitude. She would stay lying on the floor the whole day; and if the householders did something against her wishes, or she did not get her meal at the appointed time or in adequate quantity, or she was not given a share of the eatables brought from the market, she would break into wailing. Her crying was no ordinary thing; it was a full-throated outburst."¹³ Her loneliness, weaker physical condition, dependency on her nephew, lack of social intervention makes her very fragile and ill-treated. In the last of the story she had chosen to have food from leftover food from others. Even in last when her daughter-in-law (nephew wife) served her proper food, it does not assure her remaining life with dignity.

6. Vaapsi

Story by Usha Priyamvada depicts condition of Gajadhar Babu,who is a railway employee and getting retired from his service. After service he wants to spend relax and quality time with his family. But when he came back to his place, his dreams got shattered by apathy of his own family members. Even his wife got adjusted with rest of the family and she was quite happy with it. Throughout of his life Gajadhar Babu tried to fulfill their demand and when he except only few things from them, they not only failed him. Contrary to popular belief that economic deprivation is the main reason behind negligence of aged people, he is the main breadwinner of the family.But here reason for apathy from his family members towards him is different life pattern by the course of time they have developed in his long absence. Writer has put this problem very symbolically. Since there was no space in house, so first they put his bed in drawing room and later they shifted it to cramped Kothri(small room) of his wife. This single event is enough to understand the gravity of situation. After retirement getting back to another job was not a specific economic reason but it was a kind of escape from suffocating space of his own house. To sum up the above it can be said that he was not being included in making important family decisions; was not being given proper respect and being abused by family members.

7. Chief Ki Daawat

In the tradition of Premchand Bhisim Sahni was a progressive writer of Hindi, who has depicted elderly people very sympathetically. In this story, though the story is about a man and his visit to his boss's home for dinner, which is crucial for his promotion. But ultimately it draws attention of the reader towards Mr Shammath's mother. It is very interesting to note the result of a survey done by Help Age India in 2015 about the main abuser in family: "The main abusers identified by the respondent are from inside the family, mainly the daughter-in-law followed by the son of the abused elderly person. It is interesting to notice that only 24% of the youth perceived the son as an abuser, while 59% of elders in the 2014 survey blamed the son".¹⁴ Here in this story, the reader can easily assess that the couple are not at all concerned about the old lady. Even he has no sense of gratitude towards her mother, with such difficulty she raised him and makes him able to earn a respectable place in this society. In this story he emerges as the main abuser of this old helpless lady.

The prevailing anxiety in the house is about how to welcome the boss who is coming for dinner that night. Suddenly they realize that what to do with the mother, when the boss and other fellows would be there for dinner. She speaks in English, what that poor lady from the village could not comprehend. With bearing all the humiliation when in the last his mother asks him to send her to Haridwar then he replied very angrily: "you want to defame me, till the point that everybody will say that I am a son who cannot look after his own mother".¹⁵

8. Apna Raasta Lo Baba

Devnath alias Devu is living in a city with his wife and kids, doing a decent government job. All his things are confined to the immediate 'need' of 'his family'. One day while purchasing a cigarette, he overheard one voice, which he wants to avoid at any cost. Hurriedly he came back to his home and gave instruction to his wife that if somebody asks about him then she should reply in negative. Actually the visitor was Benchu baba, elder brother of his father in the village who wants to meet him. Usually in India urban people are smart, whereas people from rural areas have less exposure and they use to decide from their heart rather than mind. Baba's son Sudama and his wife doesn't give proper care to him and he was suffering from abdominal pain for a couple of years. He came to visit his nephew Devu in the hope that since he is a 'saheb', he may do something in this case. But the truth was the moment he heard him he started thinking how to avoid him. And he put all his wisdom in it, even after knowing that baba may suffer from cancer and it may be treated and got cured, he ultimately prefers to get rid of it. He put his brain over his heart and ultimately he sent back ailing Baba back to his place. This brings to the reader a very disturbing picture of elderly in Indian society.

9. Conclusion

This study is limited due to space constraint. This may have enhanced in more detailed work considering the theoretical framework of Gerontology and selected few more literary samples. But with the above analysis we came to know about the fact that through analyzing literary text with Gerontology perspective-literature may get a new tool of literary criticism and vice-versa. With the above analysis, it is implicit that age wise, gender wise, economic condition wise, health wise problems may be of different nature which ultimately becomes the reason for their abuse and apathy from family members. In all the stories readers may see it very easily that how they are being treated by their own/distant family members. In 'Budhi Kaki' and 'Chief ki Daawat', their family members are more interested in pushing their aged people to the kothri, so that they may not face them conveniently. Even in Vaapsi there is no space for Gajadhar Babu in their own home. In 'Apna Raasta Lo Baba' Devu is more concerned about his drawing room than listening to his (Baba) suffering. Ageing is a natural process and everybody has to go through it. Merely giving elderly status of God would not solve this problem. There is a need to sensitize people towards it and literature may become an effective instrument to do it.

10. References

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