

CHAPTER VIII

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

PART B

8.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE ANALYSIS

It has already been stated previously that the main objectives of this part of the investigation are (i) to examine the condition of the aged from their own point of view, and (ii) to discuss in general the problems of the aged in order to see whether they are influenced by the attitude the young express toward them. The aim is to develop a better insight into the nature of old age problems. Moreover, the exploration is not only limited to the objective aspects of the problems as such, because the problems are further related to the adjustment level of the old people. Taking this fact into consideration, the perception of the problems by the old becomes even more important than the problems themselves as they are in reality. The perception of the problems that may be non-existent factually is likely to affect the adjustment level as much as the factually real problems. That is why the main emphasis is laid upon the perception of the aged of their problems in the various areas of adjustment covered up by the interview guide.¹

¹ See Appendix VIII.

The responses obtained from the 160 old subjects in their interviews were analysed area-wise. The clusters of questions in each area brought about responses that could be classified with reference to a single problem or, at times, more than one problem of similar nature. The responses were coded¹ on the basis of their frequency. As has already been stated, this part of the work has been conducted along purely qualitative lines. Exploring the dimensions of old age as a phase of development was the main objective. Keeping this aim in mind, no attempt was made to impose a quantitative treatment upon the analysis of the responses, beyond working out the frequencies. In order to emphasise the qualitative impact, the peculiar individualistic responses were noted. The subjects for the case studies are selected on the basis of such responses. The analysis of such cases is the main theme of the next chapter.

8.2 APPEARANCE AND PERSONALITY

It was observed that a majority of the aged were conscious of the various changes in their appearance due to age. Many showed a concern over these changes and some were even upset a little. Only a few subjects showed complete indifference regarding them. Out of the 160 subjects interviewed, 12 cases were seen to be

¹ See Appendix II.

extremely upset about their changed appearance. Females far outnumbered the males in this matter as was seen from the fact that among these subjects, 10 were females. The changes that caused them so much concern were, graying and losing of hair, spoiling of teeth and the wrinkles on the skin. They also reported concern about other changes, but their main disturbance was about the above mentioned facts. Eventually they were the subjects who consciously made use of various correctives like hair dye, dentures and face creams etc. It was also noted that these subjects were among those having some charm of appearance. It is considered to be quite natural for them to be upset when they find that they are gradually and constantly being deprived of their prized endowment. The males who showed disturbance were only two in number and their disturbance was noted to be about the trouble of teeth that caused inconvenience and the loss of poise and grace, which they were afraid may come in way of their social contacts. Both these cases were highly educated and actively participating in social life. Of the female cases, only 3 were educated.

Among the 37 cases showing disturbance over the changes, 28 were females and 9 were males. Some of them used hair dye. Some females also used artificial hair, dentures, face creams, etc. Some males too were regularly

getting their hair dyed. But this class of the subjects was not excessively upset about the changes.

However, it was noted that a majority of cases, (81) were relaxed about these changes in their appearance, though they were conscious as was seen from their responses. In this class the males outnumbered the females, being 53 against 28 females. A few subjects were completely indifferent to these changes and a few more not even conscious of them, their numbers being 16 and 14 respectively. The observations lead to the conclusion that the female subjects were more concerned about their appearance and the various changes in it.

The old subjects promptly reported numerous changes in their appearance due to age. A majority reported the loss and graying of the hair as an outstanding change. Wrinkles on the skin and loss of lustre of the skin was the response that can be rated next. Loss of teeth and spoiling of them was also reported as a major change in the appearance of the aged. A number of other changes as the loss of lustre in the eyes, loss of poise, loss of suppleness etc., were reported. But simply reporting the changes did not amount to having concern about the changes. Some expressed the opinion that these changes were natural and expected by them. From their attitude in viewing them, it could be seen that they had little

feeling of regret over their changed appearance. As already stated, such subjects formed the majority.

The individual differences in viewing and reporting the changes even extended to regarding a specific change as the main source of disturbance. Individuals differed in emphasising the seriousness of a certain change or changes. Among the subjects, thus concerned, 57 showed some concern about their wrinkles. Here too the females outnumbered the males. In all 45 females and 12 males expressed concern about wrinkles. Some of these same subjects and some more showed concern about losing teeth and some about the gray hair. Here too the females far exceeded the males. In using correctives too the females were in greater number except for using dentures where 26 males and 21 females were found to use it.

Further analysis of the responses leads to the conclusion that a person may report concern about a particular change in his appearance. The magnitude of his concern may, however, differ from that of another individual concerned with the same or similar change. Apart from the concern for a particular change, the old, in general, differed in the degree of their pre-occupation with these changes. Some had accepted their changed appearance as normal whereas some others could not reconcile with it. They were perturbed and made every attempt to compensate for it.

As regards the changes in personality, a majority of subjects agreed that the personality of the aged went through certain changes. But opinions differed in specifically naming them. Many subjects reported that in old age the personality of the individual became tense and anxious. There were 75 such responses. Psychologically, these emotions cannot be considered as the personality dimensions. Perhaps they wanted to express the changes in emotions of the responses. However, this response is included in the coding, as it rated first. Some expressed the opinion that old age does not bring about any changes in the personality. The subjects feeling that old people become tempered, whimsical and altruistic were 29, 27 and 19 respectively.

8.3 SOCIAL STATUS AND RELATIONSHIPS

In analysing the perception of the aged of their social status, responses were classified according to their tone of social satisfaction and the degree of social participation. In all, 23 subjects reported that they enjoy a normally adequate social life. Their social contacts were not restricted due to advancement in years. They felt that opportunities for social life were ample for them. Their interest in social affairs were as lively as before. They experienced no feeling of being ignored, avoided or neglected by others. They did not report to

have been experiencing a feeling of loneliness. They felt wanted and accepted in society, had a meaningful place in society and were satisfied with it. They desired to continue their social experiences.

But some others were not experiencing such a meaningful social life. The subjects who were interested but felt that the opportunities for social participation are restricted were 33 in number, while others feeling avoided, neglected, disrespected, pitied, etc. were much less in number. However, there were 75 responses who expressed the feeling that the old in society have to face such situations that they feel lonely most of the time. According to the subjects giving these responses, the constant sense of loneliness upset them continuously. They thought that society treats them as superfluous. They felt that they have no effective meaningful place in society. Although they still took interest in social contacts and social affairs, their contributions were not wanted by society. They failed to receive any appreciation for their efforts. They still had confidence in their abilities but perceived the restricted opportunities for their expression. Similarly, they expressed a sense of grudge, that they were not respected and, at times, neglected by society. They complained for the ingratitude of the younger people around them. They felt that their life can be much happier with adequate

social opportunities, if they are not avoided as they are at present and are accepted as persons normally should be.

A number of other subjects did report a sense of loneliness but did not feel unwanted, neglected, ignored or disrespected. They were satisfied with the returns they got from society but had, somehow, lost the former glamour of their social life. They did not report any lack of suitable opportunities. But in spite of the opportunities, they found that social contacts had lost all charm. They did not put the blame on the youth or society but admitted that the changed perception was mainly due to themselves.

A few subjects reported to have no interest in social affairs. They had their own peculiar interests and were devoted to them. They had no regret for the restricted social opportunities but obviously, were not experiencing an adequately normal social life.

8.4 EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED BY THE OLD

The responses of the subjects concerning their emotional adjustment revealed the nature of the emotional problems of the aged. Some subjects were found to be emotionally adjusted in a normal manner. They expressed their views that although emotional tensions were at times experienced by them, there was nothing out of the

way about them and that such tensions were experienced even previously during youth. Moreover, they thought that any individual is normally subject to occasional emotional tensions. Such subjects too expressed some fears, worries and anxieties which were found to be of a peculiar nature and which, there was good reason to believe, were peculiar of old age. They feared illness and being disabled. Similarly the fear of bereavement was seen to surge at the surface. In all, 111 responses showed that they feared bereavements of the relatives. The fear of illness and being disabled was experienced by 54 subjects, fear of death by 17 and fear in general by 11 subjects. Frequent emotional tensions were experienced by 45 and temper outbursts by 26 subjects.

Others were explicitly conscious of their emotional tensions and attributed them to their advanced age. Some subjects did not have any marked tensions, but believed that one undergoes a change in emotions during old age. Thus the perception of the emotional problems by the subjects varied from individual to individual. But certain aspects were seen to be common about the emotional life of the old, as can be seen from the responses, already discussed as being peculiar of old age.

8.5 FINANCIAL STATUS OF THE OLD

The investigation about the financial status of the aged revealed some problems that were experienced by the aged. A majority of males had their independent sources for their own expenditure although they stayed in the family of their adult children. Most of the females did not have such sources. In spite of these differences, both males and females had similar perception of the problems.

Some felt that they are the dependents of their adult children, in spite of their personal savings to lean upon. However, they accepted it as quite natural and thought that the adult children also recognized it as their duty to support them.

A few reported that the tendency of the younger family members showed that although they took it as their duty to support the aged parents, they no doubt, treated it as an unpleasant duty. At the same time, some female subjects were found to be so much used to their financial dependence that they completely failed to realize it. Depending upon certain circumstances, some subjects had complete freedom of planning their own expenditure while others had not. A few subjects had this freedom to such an extent that although they were not actively contributing to the family income, they were controlling the

budget and expenditure. There were in all 22 such cases. Some were happy with their status as they were often consulted in money matters. These were also 22 in number. Some others were seen to experience the stigma of dependency. They had no voice in the financial matters of the family. Such subjects were financially dependent upon the younger family members with regret. In all 23 such cases were observed.

8.6 THE HEALTH PROBLEMS

The topic of health appeared to be of importance to the aged. They showed willingness to express themselves with all possible ease on the subject of health. Even those subjects who were initially found to be a bit tough for establishing the rapport, responded willingly on health matters.

It was found that a number of subjects were obviously suffering from health problems and disabilities. Some others were normally healthy in spite of general weakness and minor disabilities. But the individual differences were marked regarding the attitudes of the subjects toward their health. Some showed optimism although they were actually bedridden. Others had frail health and were pessimistic about the future of their health. Some had minor disabilities on which they worried immensely while some others with serious disabilities also could ignore them slightly.¹

¹ See Appendix II

Almost all the subjects reported at least some complaint or other, about their health. These complaints differed from subject to subject. But some were reported very commonly. Indigestion, rheumatism, cough and asthma and general weakness are some of them.

One more problem for the old about their health was the adequacy of facilities for maintaining good health. This included the possibility of proper medical help and the essential nursing and care by the younger family members. Besides the provisions made by the young the attitude of the aged themselves influenced their practices of care of health. Some had no faith in medical aid. Others did not think their health as an important matter to care for. However, 105 subjects from the total sample were cared for and nursed properly.

In some families, the younger members imposed the medical care upon the elderly members whereas in other families, they were not concerned about the health of the older relative. In all, 55 cases felt that their health was neglected by the younger family members. A few subjects (21) had no faith in medical aid and 20 were seen to feel guilty that their health is a botheration for the family.

8.7 FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The subjects revealed diverse kinds of family relationships. In some cases, these ties were so close that the aged parents were practically exercising their former parental authority. Such subjects did not experience any changes in their family relationships due to age. Their experiences were only more extensive due to the coming of grand-children. The number of such subjects was fairly large (99). In spite of other problems, these subjects had a voice in the important family decisions. They had warm intimate relationship with their adult children and grand-children.

All of such subjects were not staying in a conventional joint family under the same roof with their grown up children. Some had their adult children staying away independently. Still the close emotional ties with them gave the aged a respectable and secure place within the family. They were consulted in important family matters and children stayed with them on frequent occasions. They showed affection for the grand children.

Some were staying in the family of the grown up children. They were respected. They exercised a good deal of authority. They had their chore of work in the routine family life. But the duties were self-chosen. They were happy to exercise them and were completely at

ease in the homes of the adult children. Such subjects too were found in a large number.

Some other subjects belonged to an opposite type. They did not feel accepted within the family. They did not feel like having a secure place or a respectable position in the families of the adult children. They expressed the feeling of being homeless. Such subjects were 24 in number. Some were staying independently, their adult children having settled in another city. But no close ties of affection existed between them and their children. Such subjects were comparatively a few. They did not show marked affection for the grand-children and felt neglected by their own children.

Those staying with the adult children, but resenting their family relationships, either had no duties in the families or else, their chore had been imposed due to direct or indirect pressures. At least they felt that way. They were conscious of their lack of status and aspired for an independent home for themselves. However, they admitted that it was an impossibility for them.

8.8 RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOUR

The responses by the subjects related to their religious views and behaviour, were analysed in relation to the place of religion in the life of the aged. Some

old subjects were seen to be much engrossed in religious matters. Such subjects were seen in large number (81). They spent most of their time in going to temples, listening to religious sermons, doing puja, observing fasts and the like. The females of this type, outnumbered the males. For 40 subjects, it was seen that religion was a perpetual source of satisfaction and life was worth living because of it. Some others failed to observe this attribute of religion. Similarly, it was seen that all did not have the same freedom for indulging in religious matters the way they preferred, as was reported by 26 subjects who felt that the young family members interfered with their religious behaviour. Only 28 subjects had no faith in religion.

8.9 MORAL PROBLEMS OF THE AGED

The analysis is done in the direction of visualizing the moral ideals of the aged. Attempt is made to find out the degree of difference the aged perceive between the moral values of themselves and those of the young. Similarly, it is seen to what extent the old are satisfied with the present day moral values. At the same time the analysis also aims at locating those old persons who have complete freedom of practising their moral ideals and those who do not have. The old who considered their moral values superior to those of the young were

37 while 123 subjects considered their moral values on par with the young. It was observed that 92 cases were satisfied with the behaviour of the modern generation, while 68 were dissatisfied and 33 were thinking that the moral values of the modern generation are lowering in standard.

8.10 THE PERCEPTION OF THE AGED OF THE ATTITUDE OF THE YOUNG TOWARD THEM

Almost in every area of adjustment, the questions in the interview were directed towards finding out the perception of the aged themselves of the attitude of the younger family members or society members towards them. These responses were ultimately analysed to view the felt affect of the attitude. If at all the attitude of the younger people influences the adjustment of the old, apart from the objective affect of it, the felt affect is bound to be more effective in influencing the aged and their behaviour or adjustment. Hence the attitude of the young was viewed from the point of view of the perception of the aged.

It was seen that among the 160 subjects interviewed, 83 were satisfied with the attitude of the young as they had a perception of favourable attitude and 31 were having some complaints and grudges, 31 completely dissatisfied and 15 resentful concerning the attitude of

the young. Thus it can be seen that 77 subjects did not have the perception of a favourable attitude, though the degree of unfavourability of this perception differed for the three classes. If these results are compared with the results of the preceding chapter, it is evident that a majority of young subject had displayed favourable attitude toward the aged while many aged fail to perceive the attitude of the young as such. Consequently, they experience a deep seated sense of insecurity and loneliness which is expressed in different forms all through their responses.

The discussions prove the last hypothesis that due to various complex changes, old age is a problematic period. But the attitudes of the young as experienced by the aged make a considerable difference to the intensity of their problems.

8.11 SUMMARY

The responses of the 160 old subjects in the interview were coded and analysed. The analysis was conducted area-wise. In all the eight areas, a number of problems are seen to be experienced by the aged. Although some subjects experienced a few problems or difficulties, old age, on the whole, can be viewed as a problematic phase of life. In analysing the perception of the aged, of

the attitude of the young toward them, it is seen that quite a considerable number of the aged have a perception of partly or wholly unfavourable attitude. This perception can be contributory to adding to the intensity of the problems of the old.