Living in an Old Age Home in a Matrilineal Society

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Abstract: Population ageing is a dynamic demographic trend all over the world. Population ageing, which was initially the concern of developed countries, is now encompassing developing countries too. India, by no means, is an exception to this phenomenon. Rapid increase in the elderly population, changes in the family system and the lifestyle of the younger generation have led to changes in the living arrangements of elderly both in the developed countries and developing ones. The intervening factors of financial constraints and absence of family support further compel the elderly to shift to old age homes. In this background this paper attempts to gain a better understanding of the changes that are taking place in the matrilineal society and the consequences of those in terms of redefining roles and responsibilities of family members towards the old. An old age home was selected for the present study as it could provide an insight into the society at large by examining the various factors and challenges that the elders are confronted with, and the causes that have compelled them to take refuge in the home. In course of this study a group of elderly inmates living in an old age home – all belonging to the matrilineal society of Meghalaya, have been targeted for getting into the inner details of their life. In-depth personal and qualitative interviews were conducted with five women and five men with ages ranging from 63 to 80+. Having no daughter or sister in the family, social changes affecting the living arrangement, not owning immovable property, health issues, being widowed or unmarried or orphaned were found to be the other factors that were responsible for elders shifting to the old age home. In the context of a matrilineal society it has far reaching implications.

Key words : Ageing, Elderly, Old age home, Matrilineal society