



ICSSR NERC



VOLUME 3

AGEING IN NORTH EAST INDIA

ARUNACHAL PRADESH PERSPECTIVES

Edited by

R.M. PANT

**AGEING
IN
NORTH EAST INDIA**
Arunachal Pradesh Perspectives



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DR. R.M. PANT

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FOREWORD

In the recent years, much literature on North-East India has been published by the scholars of this region on various issues related to the people and the region as a whole. However, the issues related to ageing, the elderly persons of this region are not properly addressed so far. Although every 1st October is being observed as the international day for the elderly, yet the magnitude of the problems of the elderly persons in North-East India is not properly addressed neither in the myriad seminars organized by the various academic bodies and the NGO's nor their problems and aspirations are documented.

Considering the lacunae in this field, the Indian Council of Social Science Research, North Eastern Regional Centre (ICSSR-NERC), Shillong took the initiative to bridge the gap by organizing a day long seminar on the magnitude of the problems of the elderly persons in North-East during 2006-2007. This book has its origin in one of the seminars organized by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST), Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh on November 18, 2006. Dr R M Pant and his colleagues in the

department took the keen interest in the seminar not only in organizing it but also compiling and revising the papers presented in the seminar in the present book format.

The papers carefully put together for this volume by R M Pant raise some of the vital questions related to the elderly persons in the State of Arunachal Pradesh and will, I am sure, prove to be essential reading for anyone interested in the field of ageing.

ICSSR-NERC
Shillong

C. J. Thomas
Acting Director

PREFACE

The rising population of aged and elderly is an emerging concern for social demographers as well as for policy-makers. This shift in the population structure is taking place mainly due to longer life expectancies and falling birth rate. Even among the aged, the problem of old women, divorced, single and widowed population is different from those of aged males. A very high rate of rural-urban migration also creates psychological, social and economic problems for the elderly.

Among the indigenous people, who are experiencing very rapid transition from their simple community life in rural and many a times inhospitable areas, to a life in rapidly growing towns and over burdened cities, the aged and elderly are facing severe problems of poverty, ill health, isolation and complete neglect. On the other hand, when the aged are taken along to urban areas, by the migrating younger relatives, it creates another set of problems. The health care system is quite inadequate and there is hardly any specialized agency focusing on the problems of aged and elderly people in fast emerging urban centers. The problem becomes more serious in the absence of any programmes available to train people for taking care of aged. Thus the responsibility of caring

aged remains with the traditional institution of family and kinship network, which are also getting transformed due to several forces of change.

The gradual marginalization of the elderly in the decision making process in an average family and the breakdown of the family as a traditional social unit that took care of elderly in the transitional society. It is also important to recognize that with rising number of old persons and their changing socio-economic and physical context, the proportion of the destitute may also be rising. This is more prevalent among the indigenous people in the different parts of the country.

Arunachal, the land of dawn-lit sun is experiencing changes at all the fronts in an unprecedented pace and these rapid changes are taking its toll in terms of socio-economic and psychological anxieties among its population. Elderly and aged people are most vulnerable to these changing realities.

Need of the hour is to understand the problems of aged and elderly people in Arunachal Pradesh in their right perspective as this tribal state offers a diverse cultural canvas. Each tribe has its own indigenous social systems, which too stand exposed to the wind of change.

To probe in to this growing problem a seminar on the topic 'The problem of aged and elderly in indigenous communities of North East India with special reference to Arunachal Pradesh' was conceptualized. With generous financial support from the Indian Council of Social Science Research, North Eastern Regional Centre (ICSSR-NERC), Shillong and encouragement from Dr

C.J Thomas, Director, ICSSR-NERC, this seminar was conducted on November 18, 2006. Researchers, academicians, social workers and people from diverse backgrounds participated in this seminar actively and the highlight of this event was the participation of the elderly people themselves.

Following papers were presented in the seminar:

1. 'Problem of Aged and Elderly with reference to Arunachal Pradesh', P Lingfa, Senior Lecturer, Department of Mechanical Engineering, NERIST, Nirjuli.
2. 'Problems of the Aged in Arunachal Pradesh: Reflections', Dr Tado Karlo, Chairman, (NIHRO), Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh.
3. 'Globalization and the Future of Aging in an Indigenous Society', Pratul Joshi, Programme Executive, AIR, Itanagar.
4. 'The Problem of Aged and Elderly in Indigenous Communities of Arunachal Pradesh, North East India', Dr. S J Neethirajan, Senior Lecturer and Mrs D S Sworna Latha, (MBA 1st year student), Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, NERIST, Nirjuli.
5. 'A Socio-Economic Study on Aged Persons in Arunachal Pradesh', Dr B D Nayak, Senior Lecturer, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, NERIST, Nirjuli and Dr (Mrs.) Shipra Sarkar, Freelance Researcher, Nirjuli, Arunachal Pradesh.

6. 'Ageing and Psycho-social Development', Dr P Parida, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, NERIST, Nirjuli.
7. 'Problems of Aged and Elderly Indigenous Communities of North East India with a special reference to Arunachal Pradesh' Pradeep Kumar, Editor, *Arunachal Times*, Itanagar.
8. 'Ageing Population in Arunachal Pradesh – A Comparative Study', Dr R P Bhattacharjee, Secretary, APISSR, Itanagar.
9. 'Globalization, the Traditional *Arunachalee* Identity and the Psycho-social Gap of the Aged and the Elderly', Raju Barthakur.
10. 'Welfare Schemes for the Aged: Scenario in Arunachal Pradesh', R P Bhattacharjee and R M Pant.

Some other prominent scholars of the state i.e. Professor T Mibang, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, Professor Pura Tado, Department of Political Science, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh also enlightened the audience with their presentations on the issues related to the problem of aged people in Arunachal Pradesh. Some elderly persons, invited to share their views with the researchers and the audience, were felicitated.

Out of the day long seminar that provided some useful insights to the problem of aged population of Arunachal Pradesh, some papers are being presented in this book with the hope that this will provide a starting point in finding solutions to the problems that

today's elderly population is facing, and that today's young generation shall also be facing tomorrow:

At the end, I take this opportunity to express my deep sense of indebtedness to the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research-North Eastern Center, Shillong for their generous financial support for carrying out this work. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Dr C. J. Thomas who not only conceptualized the idea but also motivated me for this noble work. I acknowledge the contribution of my friends Dr. Ashish Pandey, (IIT, Roorkee) and Dr. S.K.Tapaswi, (MDI, Gurgaon), who helped me in organizing this seminar, which paved the way for this publication. Mr Angad Barman, my departmental colleague also deserves appreciation for his contribution in sprucing up the designing aspects of this volume.

I also acknowledge the support I received from my family members, friends and colleagues, without which this work would not have been possible. I sincerely hope that this collective effort will serve the purpose for which we all worked.

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1

In Search of Solutions: Aged and Elderly in Arunachal Pradesh

—*R.M. Pant*

The quiet land that lived in isolation for long years broke its silence suddenly after Independence. Especially past two decades were quite prominent in the development of Arunachal. From a sleeping, stagnant and subsistence economy to a march towards rapidly moving economic activities to keep pace with rest of the world, saw Arunachal emerging out of its hibernation in last two decades. This rapid economic change brought economic prosperity and opened new vistas but changed the age-old socio-economic scenario in the state. As it is rightly said that, 'In a changing environment, all those who fail to change, face entropy'. In every society, there are few sections in the society who do not respond to changes with the same pace fall victim to changing demands and become vulnerable to face entropy. Elderly people fall in that category, as they find it difficult to come out of the fetters of traditional living that have had lived with for years. They have spent long years in developing expertise in some area, they have lived in their own way

and suddenly when the 'rules of the game' change, they find it difficult to adjust to these changes and left to sufferings. Elderly population in Arunachal seems to be standing at the crossroads, looking for solutions for this unprecedented phenomenon.

Elderly population in the 21st Century continue to live primitive life

20th and 21st century ushered human civilization to new heights with so many inventions and innovations. Advancement in healthcare sector has improved longevity. Long life expectancy and falling birth rate are welcome changes in Indian condition, but they are at the same time bringing in some complications. Lesser active manpower and more mouths to feed is an agony for bread earners; and it can be a psychological nightmare for the elders. Elderly population is showing rising trends in India. In the year 1996, the share of elderly population was only 6.7% of the total population of India, which rose to 9% in the year 2006 and according to an estimate, it will rise to 21.2% by 2050.

Scenario is equally alarming in Arunachal Pradesh. The Table 1 suggests the age-wise composition of the population in Arunachal in the year 1991.

Table-1
Age wise composition of population in Arunachal in the year 1991

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Total population</i>
0-14	3,45,933
15-29	2,32146
30-49	1,95759
50 and above	85,683
Total	8,59,521

Source: Census 1991

As per the 2001 census, Arunachal's population has gone up to 10,97,968 and a conservative estimate suggests addition of another 2,00,000 persons in the age group of 50 plus population, that makes the share of elderly population a one fourth of the total population in the state. Facilities to take care of their health and hygiene (Table-2) remain almost static and inadequate, making the plight of elderly miserable. This situation is undoubtedly sending alarming signals for the planners to wake up.

Table-2
Total number of medical (allopathic) institutions
in Arunachal Pradesh

General Hospitals (Govt)	General Hospital (NGO)	District Hospitals
02	01	12

Source: Directorate of Health Services.

In addition to the above, 17 family welfare clinics are also operational in Arunachal, albeit with extremely poor facilities. Three Ayurvedic hospitals (2 government and one private) are also serving the state with minimum facilities. All these health institutions together fail to meet the total demand for health facilities and remain inadequate and primitive.

High Migration rate and enhanced sufferings for elderly

With the concentration of opportunities in urban areas, more and more youth are attracted to the glamour

of urban life. Be it education or employment, these opportunities exist only in urban Arunachal. Rural Arunachal continue to languish and this is causing mass exodus from rural areas to urban centers. From the year 1991-2001, Arunachal Pradesh has witnessed a population growth at the rate 26.85 % (Table 3), which is higher than the national average of 21.34. Urban centers like Itanagar, Bomdi-la, Changlang etc. have seen a sharp population rise. Papum Pare district (Capital complex of Arunachal Pradesh falls in this district) experienced maximum decadal growth in the state with a rise in population with 67.31% figure. One of the main reasons for this growth is the entry of immigrants from different parts of the state. With the exodus of working population from rural areas, elderly and women are left to face the hardships in the villages with virtually no facilities. This growing trend is creating psychological, social and economic problems for elderly. All those who accompany the young ones to urban centers, find it difficult to adjust to their new surroundings and soon begin to feel nostalgic for their native places.

Rapid transition from simple community life in rural areas to the life of overburdened and fast life of cities is causing problems in social setup and affecting the social fabric of Arunachalees. Urban life has brought about a significant shift in decision-making process in favour of the younger generation that is more educated and has more exposure. Aloofness, poverty, ill health and neglect are some other factors that are gripping elderly in Arunachal.

Table-3
Population Growth Trends

Population	Decadal Growth rate %	Population density	Literacy rate 2001	Percentage of Urban population
10,97,968	26.85	13	54.74	20.41

Source: Statistical Abstract of Arunachal Pradesh, 2003.

Few relevant questions

Humans are being treated as resources, just like money, machine and any other material resource in this material world. In this material order where productivity dictates human behavior, as long as people are contributing in production, they are resources and valued. Once they cease to do that, they become liabilities. Is it proper to treat humans as resource? Is 'elderly' population an effete resource? Is it proper to view 'social phenomenon' from economics or market angles? Is tangible output the only parameter to evaluate a person's worth? These questions echo in today's Arunachal that need to be answered on ethical grounds.

Wonderful schemes that never saw the light of the day

Fast changing complexion of Arunachal's population is causing concern in the minds of leaders, policy makers and social workers, and often these concerns are expressed. However, when it comes to implementing schemes to tackle these problems, hardly any tangible interventions are initiated from the government as well as by the NGO sector. Some populist schemes mentioned below were initiated for senior citizens in the state:

1. *Old age pension scheme*: State sector scheme: Rs 150 per month to people between 60-65 years of age.
2. *National old age pension scheme*: Rs 75 P.M. to people above 65 years. State government to pay Rs 75 to make the total benefit Rs 150 per month.
3. *Scheme of assistance for voluntary organizations* to encourage them to provide old age homes, day care centers and non-institutional services for the aged are also launched. Organizations eligible for assistance are voluntary organizations, Panchayati raj institutions, Municipal bodies and charitable trusts. 95% assistance is provided from government while 5 % fund has to be arranged by the organization. These schemes are aimed at providing the following:
 - Mobile Medicare services for the aged for consultation and treatment
 - Day care centers to supplement activities of families in looking after the need of aged.
 - At least 50 persons in one center.
 - Old age homes—residential units for at least 25 aged persons.

These seemingly wonderful schemes failed due to lack of will and skill on the part of the government and remained buried in official files. Virtually no effect of these schemes is seen in Arunachal. No proper mechanism exists to identify the beneficiary groups. Bureaucracy fails to provide any solution to this socio-

economic problem of the elderly population. What is required is a philanthropic solution with a participative approach from the different stakeholders in the society.

Where does the solution lie?

To optimists, there is no problem, which does not have a solution. Problem of aged and elderly is a new phenomenon in Arunachal Pradesh, as this state is going through a transition phase. Rapid development has shaken some traditional systems and society is finding it difficult to overcome the inertia. However, this problem needs to be tackled and solutions are to be found sooner than later. Following interventions from government as well non-government sector provide the solution to the problem of elderly population:

1. Old age homes and better healthcare facilities are to be established with Government and NGO participation. Industrial houses should also be encouraged to discharge their social responsibilities. Jamshedpur (Tatanagar) model can be emulated to improve the plight of elderly and needy population of Arunachal Pradesh.
2. New and innovative social security schemes are needed in Arunachal. Arunachal Pradesh can boast of having some premier academic institutions in the state and also it has a galaxy of brilliant officers and intellectuals in its cadre. Brainstorming sessions can provide some viable solutions to the problems of elderly people with affordable investment. What is required is to lead the thinking in the right direction.

3. Arunachal being the biggest state of the North East Region of India (area-wise) suffers from the problem of lack of infrastructure. Given its limited resources, it may not be possible immediately to set up necessary infrastructural support in the areas of health, public distribution systems (PDS) etc. However, to some extent, this problem can be eased with mobile health centers and PDS.
4. As a part of long term strategy, PURA, a much talked about visionary scheme of our President, Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, provides solution to this problem. PURA or Providing Urban facilities in Rural Areas will not only check migration from rural areas and but will also check sagging value system in the society. This will also help strengthen our traditional family system that has sustained since time immemorial.

Indian value system rightly prescribes that, 'In a society, where elders are respected, people are blessed with all four qualities i.e. Longevity, Knowledge, Fame and Power'.

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