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DOES life end when you need a pair of dentures? Does life cease to be when your kids walk out on you and into the world? Does life really lose its meaning then?

"I don't think I want to experience old age... it's a curse," said 50-year-old Antara Nag. At 75, Anil Biswas suffers from poor eyesight and shaky hands. He tries to be of use to his family by offering to get the daily groceries, but his duty is often perceived as useless. So most of the time he keeps to himself, feeling cornered and ignored.

According to the WHO, there has been a phenomenal increase in the elderly populations of both developed and developing countries in the 20th century. Of 580 million elderly (60 years and above) in the world, around 350 million

You can take on life even after 60. What's needed is a little planning, some careful networking and the will to try out something new, says Ananya Sengupta

live in developing countries. The number of elderly worldwide by 2020 is expected to cross 1,000 million with over 700 million living in developing countries. In countries like India population ageing has evolved gradually due to decline in fertility and improved living conditions in addition to technological breakthrough in medicine.

Ageing brings about not just physical, but also psychological problems. At 60, women suffer from an "emptiness" syndrome, while men face "post-retirement blues". There is identity crisis, a psychological void and a constant feeling of being neglected by family members. This state of mind can only be changed by getting them to be productive. Aged individuals need to be reassured about their utility and it is easier if they are of service, however small, to others. According to Dr Indrani Chakravarty, director, Calcutta Metropolitan Institute of

Active ageing



PH: BHASKAR MALICK



Dr Indrani Chakravarty (left) the elderly being nurtured at CMIG

one can take on life even after 60," said. For an individual who has been active for most part of life, it is very difficult to come to terms with a situation involving little or no work. "The truth is there is no aversion to work, just lack of opportunity," said Dr Chakravarty.

It is important to understand that active ageing does not necessarily mean that there should be an economic reward. Many aged persons across the world involved in voluntary work that greatly benefits society. For the elderly, a social involvement is perhaps more important than an economic remuneration. The ability to interact with the society and the feeling of being wanted is what keeps them from ageing too fast psychologically.

Recent surveys have found that the potential of the elderly population of a country is being wasted - the retired working middleclass, with loads of experience, is left to languish in self pity as victims of indifference, at home and abroad. What can these people do to have a happier existence?

The Calcutta Metropolitan Institute of Gerontology (CMIG), has found out a unique way to solve this problem. With the help of Help Age, CMIG organised a survey in which it was suggested that each mentally retarded child can be cared by an elderly in their daily chores, a profession which has been welcomed by poor citizens who feel that if properly trained, they can excel in this field. There are voluntary organisations where the elderly are working as accountants, bookkeepers and supervisors, and there should be no reason why they cannot be a part of the organised sector.

Active ageing implies attainment of certain objectives on the part of the state such as economic security, sense of purpose and integration into the family. Main issues for consideration revolve around participation in decision making, self-esteem and economic security.

